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No hay Sólo un Idioma, No hay Sólo una Voz: A Revisionist History of Chicana/os and Latina/os in Punk

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Media Studies

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Abstract

Through a media historical analysis of Chicana/o and Latina/o participation in punk scenes in cities such as Los Angeles and Chicago, this dissertation decenters whiteness as the taken-for-granted subject position within punk and problematizes existing scholarship that assigns a unified and coherent political ideology to Latina/o punks. This work follows Fiona I.B. Ngô and Elizabeth A. Stinson's imperative to excavate punk's past and present in order to "rewrit[e] the idea of margin and center" within punk historiography and scholarship, and extends Mimi Thi Nguyen's arguments against the periodization of women of color feminisms in punk as "timely but also *temporary*" interventions during moments of crises to include Chicana/o and Latina/o involvement in punk. By tracking the development and evolution of punk scenes in predominantly Latina/o and working-class areas of Los Angeles and Chicago over the span of approximately forty years, I insist upon the continuous co-presence of Latina/os (as well as other people of color) in punk, and the importance of critically engaging questions of race, class, nation, and power in punk's past and present. I also argue against a singular notion of "Chicano Punk," in which all participants in predominately Chicana/o and Latina/o punk scenes are assumed to hold similar motivations, objectives, ideologies, and aesthetic sensibilities. Examining multiple scenes across several decades reveals instead a complex and sometimes contradictory history of Latina/o participation in American punk scenes, with widely varying politics and aspirations across decades and even within individual scenes. Rather than attempt to make a grand argument about nearly forty years of "Chicano Punk," it is more fruitful to look closely at several individual scenes in order to explore how discourses of race, as well as social, political, and economic factors shape Latina/os' relationships to punk at particular times and in particular places. Though the conclusions I draw are largely specific to the particular scenes under examination, my study demonstrates the need to reexamine punk's complicated relationship to race and points to several areas of inquiry through which a reexamination may be achieved.

Keywords

Critical Race Studies, Chicana/o Studies, Popular Culture, Popular Music, Punk

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Preface

These are two reasons why I have been reluctant in my own work to take punk as an object of study: I don't want to participate in its assimilation into something like capital (an "exotic" object traded in the academy), or a canon (not least because punk is such a sprawl), and I reject the idea that punk is not itself a scene for the rigorous production of knowledge. This is not to say that I believe good scholarship can't be produced about punk, or non-punks can't supply meaningful and insightful knowledge about punk, or that punks themselves make "better" researchers about punk. [...] Instead, this is to say that I am all too aware that punk is an unwieldy object of study. (Mimi Thi Nguyen, *Slander*, no. 8)

In this dissertation, I present a revisionist history of Chicana/o and Latina/o participation in American punk scenes in order to disrupt previous scholarship and historiography that takes straight, male, middle-class whiteness as the assumed subject position within punk culture, as well as studies that attribute a singular aesthetic and political ideology to all Chicana/o and Latina/o punks. Subjecting punk culture to academic discipline is not an unproblematic endeavor, though, and I wish to preface my study by addressing a number of issues that arise when examining punk through an academic lens. Much of my thinking about approaching punk from within the academy has been influenced by Mimi Thi Nguyen, quoted in the epigraph to this preface, creator of the *Race Riot* and *Slander* zines and Associate Professor of Asian American Studies and Gender and Women's Studies, and Golnar Nikpour, former coordinator of the long running punk zine, *Maximum Rocknroll*, current co-editor of *B|ta'arof*, a magazine dedicated to Iranian culture and history, and drummer of hardcore band In School, both of whom have been very outspoken in their trepidation about "punk studies."

For instance, in an interview with Osa Atoe (creator of *Shotgun Seamstress*, a zine dedicated to documenting the work of Black punks, and member of punk bands such as New Bloods, Firebrand, and Negation), Nikpour states, "as both a practicing historian and punk, I believe that most academic studies of punk suffer from being methodologically unsound, poorly researched, and limited in their archival scope" ("*Shotgun Seamstress*"). Beyond the shortcomings of punk studies from a methodological standpoint, she is also critical of the

way in which academia as an institution functions as a gatekeeper in contradistinction to the punk ideal of building non-hierarchical communities:

In the academy, all scholarly work is anonymously “peer reviewed” by other scholars in the field before being released as a book or in a scholarly journal. This doesn’t really happen in so-called “punk studies,” because the “peers” who would most easily see through the holes in this work are punk’s own historians and zinesters, who are largely unaffiliated with the academy. This makes “punk studies” a closed echo chamber that tacitly condones the trading in of “insider” experiences in the punk scene for steps up the rungs of the academic ladder. The academic notion of expertise (hierarchical, institution-centered) is utterly antithetical to the punk notion of expertise (democratic, DIY, auto-didactic). Legit experts are shut out of academic debates in punk studies. Punks are instead patronizingly treated as “raw material” that cannot speak back to the academy. (*ibid.*)

Additionally, she questions the practice of punk scholars who position themselves simultaneously as native informants *and* as objective observers, and who fail to recognize “that their experience may not be generalizable for all punks the world over” (*ibid.*).

Because I take seriously the concerns laid out by Nguyen and Nikpour, I wish to address some of these concerns before moving on to my study, beginning first with Nikpour’s critique of scholars who position themselves as native informants, a concern shared by Nguyen (*Slander, Punk* 16). Though I played in several punk bands as a teenager and young adult, I make no claims to be a native informant for the scenes I examine in this study, since my experiences in the Saginaw, MI alternative music scene in the late 1990s and early 2000s are not generalizable to the Los Angeles and Chicago scenes under investigation here. (Nguyen and Nikpour also point to a tendency for (generally male) scholars of punk to use pictures of themselves in the mosh pit as their author photo as a demonstration of their punk “authenticity”; I will not replicate this move, first and foremost since, to my knowledge, no such photo exists, as I generally preferred to stay out of the pit. And even if such a photo existed, I would probably be too embarrassed by my outfit to want to share it.) Likewise, having spent several weeks in Los Angeles attending shows and interviewing participants from the various scenes studied did not confer to me insider status, since I was there not as a

participant but as an observer. In fact, “observer” is likely the best word to describe my relationship to punk for the past decade, having not been an active participant in any scene during this time. This in itself challenges any claim I might make to insider status, since punk is a culture that, to a significant extent, values direct participation. At the same time, though, I do not make any claims to being a purely objective observer (if such a position is even possible). This project is motivated by a deep interest in punk, but also by a desire to participate in critical discussions—within both academia and punk—of punk’s relationship to race. Likewise, my interest in looking particularly at predominantly Chicana/o and Latina/o punk scenes is inseparable from a personal investment in the position of Chicana/os in the United States.

Nguyen’s and Nikpour’s concerns about gatekeeping, institutional power, and hierarchical notions of expertise are also important to address. Both Nguyen (*Slander*) and Nikpour (“Shotgun Seamstress”) take care to note that they do not believe insightful work about punk cannot originate from within academia, but Nikpour’s concern is with the lack of opportunity for punks to “speak back to the academy” (*ibid.*). She states, “*I do not at all believe that one has to be a true “insider” to write intelligently about punk*, but rather [...] I think that punk has been approached cavalierly by researchers who have so far gotten away with their shoddy scholarship because there is no one to stop them from writing whatever the hell they want” (*ibid.*, italics in original). Though the process of writing and defending a dissertation offers little room for those I write about to speak back to the narratives and arguments presented in this work, I attempt to carve out some space for participants to speak back by including full transcriptions of the interviews I conducted so that the interested reader can read my interpretations of the evidence against the actual words of participants. Likewise, while a dissertation is traditionally understood as a demonstration of an individual’s expertise in a particular subject, including full interview transcripts offers a space more in keeping with punk ideals of collaboration, creating a kind of oral history through which participants are able to speak for themselves.¹ Nguyen is also critical of the way in which “institutionalized

¹ As I discuss in Chapter Three, though, oral histories as accurate records of past events are constrained by the limits of memory, as well as the personal investments of those speaking in the way history is told. As such, my inclusion of these transcripts should not be read as an endorsement of the accuracy of every statement made.

histories [...] too often claim ‘mastery’ over the story, while other more open-ended, alternate investments are ignored, or banished to the footnotes” (*Punk* 27). She celebrates alternative historiographies, such as Atoe’s *Shotgun Seamstress*, for their “embrace of non-mastery, an acknowledgement that the whole story is ungraspable, and subject to constant reinscription” (*ibid.* 27). Though the narratives I create and the arguments I make are based upon several years of archival and ethnographic research, I take Nguyen’s point that the totality of punk history is “ungraspable, and subject to constant reinscription.” I address this concern through one of my main arguments in this study—an anti-thesis of sorts—that the history of Chicana/o and Latina/o participation in punk is too complex to be contained by the kind of broad generalizations of which Nguyen and Nikpour skeptical.

A final question to address is Nguyen’s and Nikpour’s concern with the way in which the academic study of punk risks subjecting punk to institutional disciplining. Nguyen states, “I am also suspicious of claims that academic study ‘legitimizes’ punk, somehow. Punk doesn’t need legitimacy, since legitimacy can so often mean disciplining an object, and its normalization; as an academic object of study, legitimacy implies passage through hierarchical fields of inquiry via evaluation, classification, and other administrative-bureaucratic measures” (*Slander*). Nikpour carries on this thread, arguing “the disciplining of punk is itself an act of violence that necessarily performs archival erasures, and [...] writing on punk necessarily reifies its object in ways that robs punk of its inherent instability” (*Punk* 17). Inevitably, my project engages in the kind of disciplining of which Nguyen and Nikpour are wary. However, I am hardly the first to subject punk to evaluation and classification; punk has been subject to academic scrutiny at least as early as Dick Hebdige’s 1979 study, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. Likewise, punk has been subject to processes of normalization almost since its inception. In the UK in particular, punk was very quickly incorporated into the dominant culture, as a number of bands signed to major labels, the Sex Pistols made national headlines as early as December, 1976 following a profanity-laden television appearance, and punk fashions were coopted by fashion designers almost instantly.

Instead, the transcripts should be read as the personal recollections of those interviewed, subject to disagreement and revision.

In the U.S. in the 1990s, Rancid, Green Day, and the Offspring, bands that emerged from California punk scenes, sold millions of albums, with Green Day even winning five Grammy Awards since 1995. This is not to suggest that Nguyen is incorrect to assert that punk “can and should resist institutionalization” (*Punk* 27); the continued existence of underground punk scenes approximately forty years on suggests otherwise. Rather, while I acknowledge that my project participates in the disciplining and normalization of punk, I mean simply to point out that these processes have already been underway for nearly forty years, often, as Nikpour suggests, in ways that erase the contributions of marginalized groups, such as women, queers, punks of color, and punks from the so-called Third World. My goal, then, is to speak back to the erasure of marginalized groups in punk historiography and scholarship. Even as I attempt to offer a corrective to unsatisfactory accounts of punk, though, I will inevitably engage in new forms of erasure since my discussion is necessarily limited by previous scholarship and historiography, who I was able to interview, and copies of which records and zines I could locate (and could afford to purchase on a graduate student budget). As such, my coverage of particular bands and scenes should not be read as an attempt at creating a new canon or presenting a conclusive historical narrative, but as an initial step in an ongoing conversation.

Additionally, despite the risks posed by subjecting both punk and Latina/o communities to academic scrutiny, insisting on discussion of the ways in which racial inequality impacts Chicana/os’ and Latina/os’ engagement with American popular culture, as well as the ways in which conservative and even regressive discourses of race filter into even supposedly progressive cultural formations such as punk strikes me as an urgent task within the present historical moment. Given the wave of draconian immigration bills proposed or passed in numerous states, attacks on ethnic studies, proposals to make English the official language of the United States, the record number of deportations under the Obama administration, and the tone of the current presidential race set by Republican front-runner Donald Trump’s attacks on Latina/o communities (and brown communities, more generally, which have been linked to at least one physical assault of a Latino man), it seems necessary to draw attention to the limits of discourses of colorblindness, for instance, which are prevalent even in punk scenes (“there should be one culture, punk culture”). On a more individual level, the responses I have received when telling people about this project demonstrate to me the

pressing need to interrogate popular conceptions of Chicana/o and Latina/o communities. For example, a description of this project has elicited such responses as, “Huh, I didn’t think Chicanos would be interested in punk” (why not?), and “Wow, I didn’t know there was punk in Mexico” (obviously there is, but you heard me say Mexican *Americans*, right?). Even within academia, the comments I have received make clear the need for continued discussion, such as the member of the Ethics Review Board who asked if my project would involve any “illegal aliens.” Thus, while taking seriously concerns raised by Nguyen, Nikpour, and others, I still press on with this project in order both to hold punk to task for its troubled relationship to race and to contribute to necessary discussions of the impact of continuing racial inequality on Chicana/o and Latina/o communities.

Chapter 1

1 Introduction

No hay sólo un idioma/no hay sólo una voz/ni una raza (More than one language/More than one voice/There is not just one race) (Los Crudos, “Hardcoregoismo”)

[T]here is no history of racial formation in the Americas that is not a history of popular music, and there is no history of inter-American popular music without a history of racial formation. (Josh Kun, *Audiotopia: Music, Race, and America*)

On May 17th, 2008, an exhibition entitled *Vexing: Female Voices from East L.A. Punk*, curated by Pilar Tompkins and Colin Gunckel, opened at the Claremont Museum of Art in Claremont, CA, a college town on the eastern border of Los Angeles County. As a press release for the exhibit states, “Taking its name from the all-ages music club The Vex, once housed within East Los Angeles’ Self Help Graphics and Art, Vexing is an historical investigation of the women who were at the forefront of [the East L.A. punk scene].” In a May 10th, 2008 *Los Angeles Times* review of the exhibit, Agustin Gurza writes that late-1970s punk bands from Los Angeles’s predominantly Chicana/o Eastside were shut out of clubs in Hollywood, an early center for punk in Los Angeles. Thus, he states, “the Vex was born. The club was started in 1980 as an alternative for those shut-out East L.A. bands, including Los Illegals with Willie Herrón, also known for his work with ASCO, the avant-garde Chicano art group. Herrón helped launch the club in a second-story space at the influential Self Help Graphics” (“Museum Showcases”). The Vex, Gurza contends, served as an “alternative cultural haven” for Chicanas and Chicanos until it was forced to end when an unruly crowd trashed the building during a show featuring hardcore band Black Flag.

In claiming that Eastside Chicana/o punk bands were shut out of Hollywood venues, Gurza sparked a heated debate about Los Angeles punk history. Most vocal was Brendan Mullen, founder of the Masque, an early Hollywood punk club, who read Gurza’s claim as an accusation of racism against the Hollywood scene and against himself. In response, Mullen composed a 5,000-word email entitled “Death to Racism & Punk Revisionism,” in which he accused Herrón of playing “the race card” to cover for Los Illegals’ supposed

shortcomings, and Gurza of being “a professional divider of people whose meal ticket is to keep on perping [sic] racial differences” (qtd. in Gurza “L.A. Punk History”). The question of racism in the early Los Angeles punk scene remains a subject of debate, as East L.A. bands’ claims of exclusion, repeated by academics, curators, and journalists, are met with resistance from “those [...] who were there” (Bag, “We Were There” 47). Definitive answers to questions about events that occurred nearly forty years ago are elusive, but attempts to draw attention to historical questions of race, gender, and power in punk scenes—and reactionary attempts to discredit those who raise such questions—signal an important disruption in punk historiography and scholarship.²

In a 2012 special issue of *Women & Performance* entitled *Punk Anteriors: Genealogy, Theory, Performance*, editors Fiona I.B. Ngô and Elizabeth A. Stinson suggest that punk historiography and scholarship too often omit critical inquiry into questions of race, gender, sexuality, and nation as they relate to punk’s nearly 40-year history. As such, they situate the articles and other texts contained within the issue as an attempt to redress these omissions through “a genealogical mapping of critical race and feminist thought within the punk movement and its scenes, music, ethics, and aesthetics” (165). They frame these interventions in punk scholarship and historiography through the notion of “punk anteriors”:

The process of anteriority, for us, focuses specifically on excavating and capturing punk’s blowback and debris, including past and present critical race and feminist artefacts and performances so often left unaddressed, despite their centrality to the making of punk, its politics, its scenes, and its forms of resistance. Echoing Tavia Nyong’o’s assertion that “Punk may be literally impossible to imagine without gender and sexual dissidence” (with the important addition of racialized dissent), we propose to re-tell punk stories to reflect these foundational disruptions. In reimagining what “comes before,” then, we understand punk [...] as being already about race, gender, sexuality, and power,

² “Punk” is a complex term that requires further elaboration. I provide a thorough discussion of how I employ the term on pages 7-9.

and as being produced by and for people of color, as a revision to statements that baldly make claims such as “hardcore was white music.” (Ngô and Stinson 165)

In the same issue, Mimi Thi Nguyen interrogates retrospectives of the riot grrrl movement of the 1990s that view women of color and conversations about race within the movement as only momentary disruptions or interventions in the history of an otherwise white subculture. Critical of the way in which such narratives contain women of color feminisms to a particular period within the evolution of riot grrrl, she writes:

Such a continuous history locating women of color feminisms as a historically bounded moment along a progressive teleology would deny these feminisms a *co-presence* in our contemporary political and intellectual life, and their arguments a[n] urgent relevance. Worse still, those practices of violence *with which we continue to live* are consigned to other times. (“Riot Grrrl” 190, italics in original)

This dissertation is a continuation of Ngô and Stinson’s imperative to excavate punk’s past and present in order to “rewrit[e] the idea of margin and center” (165) within punk historiography and scholarship. Through a close analysis of Chicana/o and Latina/o participation in punk scenes in American cities such as Los Angeles and Chicago, I strive to decenter whiteness (more specifically, straight, male, middle-class whiteness) as the taken-for-granted subject position within punk scenes. Following Nguyen, I also situate this project as a counter to the periodization of Chicana/o and Latina/o involvement in punk scenes characteristic of most academic studies and punk histories that consider the contributions of Chicana/os and Latina/os (a very small body of literature compared to punk historiography and scholarship more generally). By tracking the development and evolution of punk scenes in predominantly Latina/o and working-class areas of Los Angeles and Chicago over the span of punk’s existence in the United States, I insist upon the continuous co-presence of Chicana/os and Latina/os (as well as other people of color) in punk, and the importance of critically engaging questions of race, class, nation, and power in punk’s past and present.

Previous scholarship on Chicana/os and Latina/os in punk is mostly confined to two scenes: the initial East Los Angeles scene (roughly 1978-1983) and the Latino hardcore

scene of the 1990s. The vast majority of these works focus on the early East L.A. scene, and present a similar narrative: excluded from clubs on the Westside of Los Angeles, punks in East L.A. created their own scene at the Vex, a twice-monthly event held from March to November of 1980 at Self-Help Graphics and Art, an East L.A. community arts center. Drawing bands and fans from across the L.A. metropolitan area, the Vex is celebrated for bridging cultural divides between Chicana/o Eastsiders and white Westsiders and suburbanites. The few authors who consider the Latina/o hardcore scene of the 1990s tend to situate the scene as a response to a wave of racist nativism best exemplified by the campaign to pass California's Proposition 187, the "Save Our State" initiative, which sought to ban undocumented immigrants from accessing public services. Punk thus became a way for Latina/os to stake a claim to belonging and a place in political discourse. These stories are certainly compelling and not inaccurate—though, as I will discuss in Chapter Three, this version of East L.A. punk history is considered highly contentious by some—but, following Nguyen, I worry that these narratives contain Chicana/o and Latina/o participation in punk to moments of crisis, in which their participation is treated as a "timely but also *temporary*" intervention (Nguyen, "Riot Grrrl" 191, italics in original). By drawing threads through the initial East L.A. scene, the subsequent East L.A. scene of the early to late 1980s which focused largely around parties held in neighborhood backyards, the geographically dispersed Latina/o hardcore scene of the 1990s (with a strong presence in Chicago, in addition to Los Angeles), and a currently thriving scene based in South Los Angeles and surrounding areas, I provide a critical intervention in the academic study of punk through a focused study of punk's historically and continuingly troubled relationship to questions of race.

Throughout this dissertation, I also argue against a singular notion of "Chicano Punk," in which all participants in predominately Chicana/o and Latina/o punk scenes are assumed to hold similar motivations, objectives, ideologies, and aesthetic sensibilities.³ While

³ The title of this dissertation, *No hay Sólo un Idioma, No hay Sólo una Voz*, alludes to both my aim to decenter whiteness in punk historiography and scholarship and my arguments against a singular notion of "Chicano Punk." Taken from Los Crudos' "Hardcoregoismo" ("Hardcore Egotism"), a critique of the U.S. hardcore scene's disinterest in the global punk scene and bands who sing in languages other than English, the phrase translates to "more than one language, more than one voice" (the band's translation), or, more

much of the existing scholarship assigns a unified and coherent political ideology to Chicana/o and Latina/o punks,⁴ tracking multiple scenes across several decades reveals instead a complex and sometimes contradictory history of Chicana/o and Latina/o participation in American punk scenes, with widely varying politics and aspirations across decades and even within individual scenes. Rather than attempt to make a grand argument about nearly forty years of “Chicano Punk,” it is more fruitful, I think, to look closely at several individual scenes in order to explore how discourses of race, as well as social, political, and economic factors shape Chicana/os’ and Latina/os’ relationships to punk at particular times and in particular places. I take as a starting point the notion that discourses of race in the United States have historically treated Chicana/os and Latina/os as a foreign Other, existing outside of a popularly imagined U.S. national identity. This has in turn often led to cultural, economic, and political marginalization, especially for poor and working-class Chicana/os and Latina/os, as well as for immigrants, both documented and undocumented. My aim is to interrogate the ways in which discourses of race and subsequent marginalization contribute to limited recognition of Chicana/os and Latina/os in punk historiography and scholarship, determines their relationship to the recording industry, and inflects Chicana/o and Latina/o Do-It-Yourself (DIY) cultural production. Though the conclusions I draw are largely specific to the particular scenes under examination, my study demonstrates the need to reexamine punk’s complicated relationship to race and points to several areas of inquiry through which such a reexamination may be achieved.

literally, “there is not only one language, there is not only one voice.” I apply the phrase to my dissertation to stress both the importance of considering voices other than white ones in the study of punk, and of recognizing the diversity of Chicana/o and Latina/o voices in punk.

⁴ See for instance: Lipsitz, Zavella, and Johnson.

1.1 Definitions

Mexican, Mexican American, Chicana/o, Latina/o

Throughout this dissertation I employ a number of contested terms. In this introductory chapter, where I provide historical context for much of the discussion to come, I use the terms “Mexican” and “Mexican American” to distinguish between Mexican nationals and those of Mexican descent who were born in the United States or became naturalized citizens. Following Lilia Fernandez (19), I also sometimes use the term “Mexican origin” to refer to both those born in the United States and those born in Mexico. Throughout the remainder of the dissertation, I use the word “Chicana/o” as a blanket term primarily for U.S. citizens of Mexican descent, but sometimes also inclusive of those born in Mexico. This term is not neutral. It came into popular usage among Mexican Americans during the 1960s “as an expression of identity and pride” (Acuña, *Anything* 9), but not all Mexican Americans embrace the term equally. For some the term conjures negative connotations, while others may reject the leftist political orientation it implies. As Anthony Macías notes, “The politicized term *Chicano*, which had long connoted lower-class status, was appropriated in the 1940s by some pachucos to signify defiant difference, and, in the 1960s, by militant activists to signify political self-determination, anti-assimilationist consciousness, indigenous racial heritage, and socioeconomic community empowerment” (9).⁵ Thus, it should not be assumed that all those discussed in this dissertation self-identify as Chicana/o. However, I still use the term because 1) many of those interviewed for the project do identify with the term, and 2) this is the accepted term among those who study Mexican American communities from a critical perspective, as evidenced by Chicana/o Studies programs and the growing body of

⁵ Tomás Ybarra-Frausto provides an eloquent explanation of the term that illustrates its contentiousness: “The very word *Chicano*, with its undertow of rough vitality, became a cipher repudiating the whiteness of experience. If some deemed it a term of denigration and coarseness, many others gave it the authority of authenticity and self-referentiality. From the vantage of the stable and conservative Mexican American citizenry, the Chicano Movement itself transgressed the acceptable lines of demarcation and codes of decorum and politesse. Those who labeled themselves Chicanos were regarded as *malcriados* (ill bred), as malcontents who spoke too brashly, carried on too passionately, and persistently shattered the norms of acceptable behavior, especially in relations with dominant groups and institutions” (159).

literature published under same name. Rather than “Chicano,” which treats the masculine form as universal, I use the “Chicana/o” construction so as not to subsume the experiences of all Mexican Americans under those of Mexican American males.⁶ Finally, it is important to note that “Chicana/o” is not always exclusive to those of Mexican descent, especially with the growth of immigration to Los Angeles from Central American countries such as Guatemala and El Salvador; for instance, one of my respondents was born in Guatemala, but identifies with the term “Chicana” because of her experience growing up in close proximity to Mexican Americans (Martinez, interview). When referring to people of Latin American descent more broadly, I use the term “Latina/o,” but this term should not be read as a cohesive identity given the varied histories of Latin American countries, as well as the wide range of racial identities within Latin America.

A crucial component of my definitions of “Chicana/o” and “Latina/o” is that these terms are often understood as racial rather than ethnic designations. Despite the range of racial categories (and subsequent racial hierarchies) that exist in Latin America, in the United States Chicana/os and Latina/os are often flattened into an ambiguous racial category, understood as neither black nor white. Fernandez notes that “[t]he anachronistic construction of race in the United States as ‘black’ and ‘white’ has proved entirely inadequate in describing the history of Latinos/as as well as other ‘nonwhite,’ ‘nonblack’ people” (5). Often regarded simply as “other minorities,” Latina/os “are rarely differentiated beyond that, leaving their ‘minority’ status rather opaque” (*ibid.* 5). Mexican Americans were legally classified as white when the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ceded the northern half of Mexico to the United States in 1848. At the time only whites were eligible for citizenship, but, as Fernandez states, “[t]he social, political, and economic reality, however, reveal[s] that Mexican Americans struggled to claim the privileges of whiteness” (6). While numerous groups of European immigrants “were

⁶ This construction is also imperfect, though, as the slash between the feminine and masculine forms can be seen to reinforce a gender binary. The term is often written as “Chicanx” within more radical circles to reject binary gender and thus to be inclusive of queer and trans identities, but this usage has yet to gain currency in academia.

understood initially as distinct ‘ethnic’ groups but eventually were accepted as ‘white’,” Latina/os “have never as a whole consistently and resolutely been accepted as ‘white’ by European Americans” (*ibid.* 6). While many Latina/os strived to be accepted as white (and many still do), the 1980 Census, the first year in which people were allowed to use Latin American signifiers to identify as racially “other,” revealed that many others “concluded that ‘white’ was not the racial identity they had been assigned in the local social order nor one they wished to claim” (*ibid.* 7). Fernandez writes specifically of the Latina/o population of Chicago, where almost 55 percent of people of “Spanish origin” selected “other” race compared to 40 percent nationally (*ibid.* 6-7), but the drop in “white” people of Spanish origin from 93.3 percent in 1970 to only 57.7 percent in 1980 with the introduction of self-identification (Rodríguez 135) suggests that Fernandez’s claim may hold for many Latina/os in other areas as well.

Punk

“Punk” is also a complex term that resists attempts at an easy definition; as Mimi Thi Nguyen and Golnar Nikpour rightly contend, “punk is a moving target.” This is true on at least two levels. First, “punk” as a musical and cultural movement has now existed for roughly forty years, continuously evolving, making static definitions untenable. Thus, while it may be possible to isolate a particular moment in time and space in order to make generalizations about punk at that moment, such generalizations cannot be extended to punk in its entirety. Likewise, at any given moment in time, “punk” as an identity or ideology means many different things to many different people, negating any definitions that attribute to punk a singular or cohesive ideology. As Nikpour states, “Punk discourses largely present the punx as oppositional, idiosyncratic, anti-authority, etc. These things are so general as to mean very little practically speaking. This is why a Christian punk can feel that they are anti-status quo or true punk outsiders but many would say, ‘Christian Punk? What’s that?’” (*Punk* 9). As such, I suggest a more provisional definition of punk as an ever-evolving cultural formation—or, perhaps more accurately, a collection of overlapping cultural formations—incorporating music, sartorial style, literature (primarily in the form of zines), visual art (photography, comics, flyers, etc.), and various “oppositional”—though not necessarily radical, or even

progressive—ideologies. As this definition makes clear, punk is much more than a just musical genre; though I discuss punk in terms of music at times, my larger focus is on punk as culture.

Though my focus is on a handful of American punk scenes, a worthwhile definition must also acknowledge that punk is a global phenomenon, and has been from very early on. With few exceptions, academic studies of punk thus far have focused primarily on U.S. and British scenes, but, following Nikpour in her review of Stephen Duncombe and Maxwell Tremblay's *White Riot: Punk Rock and the Politics of Race*, I contend that situating punk as a specifically American/British phenomenon constitutes an act of historical erasure. Nikpour writes:

as early as the late-'70s, there were fertile punk scenes in any number of major global cities, most of which were not nearly as homogenous as the editors [of White Riot] assume. From NYC to London to Warsaw to Tokyo to São Paulo to Istanbul (yes, the first Turkish punk record is from 1977/8!) to Stockholm to Manila, punk as a phenomenon was global from its inception. ("White Riot," italics in original)

The global nature of punk becomes particularly important to my study during the 1990s, as bands from the scenes under examination began to take musical influence from Spanish and Latin American punk scenes, and to address Latin American politics in lyrics and stage conversation.

I also reject definitions that situate punk as a white cultural form, another common notion in academic studies of punk. In *Punk Rockers' Revolution: A Pedagogy of Race, Class, and Gender*, for instance, Curry Malott and Milagros Peña simultaneously acknowledge and erase the existence of punks of color (and women) with the statement, "Racial and ethnic minorities and women have also contributed to the creation and re-creation of the alternative cultural stances of punk rock, although their numbers have traditionally been small" (52). In the next sentence, they attribute to punk "white male heterosexual roots," further erasing the presence and contributions of punks of color, as well as women and queer punks, throughout punk's existence. It is thus somewhat ironic given the subtitle of

their book that race is examined only in terms of whiteness. Malott and Peña's equation of punk with whiteness (and, in particular, straight and male whiteness) is perhaps the most egregious, but far from the only, example of the narrow lens through which punk is examined in academia. Nikpour, however, extending her discussion of punk as global phenomenon, argues that punk's global reach

means that people of color—an admittedly flawed category when discussing folks in Asia or Latin America, who don't deal with hegemonic whiteness in the same way that POCs in the U.S. or Europe do—have always had a *formative* relationship to punk style, music, fashion, culture, history, et al. We are not simply a reactive mass waiting for white folks to show us the way. (“Shotgun Seamstress,” italics in original)

Nikpour's insistence that people of color “have always had a *formative* relationship to punk,” which she places in opposition to cultural imperialist claims “that punk travels ‘from the West’ to ‘the rest,’” is foundational to my own understanding of punk and animates my study. In turn, understanding the particular relationships of Chicana/os and Latina/os to punk requires a historical understanding of Chicana/os' and Latina/os' place within the social and political cultures of the United States.

1.2 A Brief History of Chicana/os and Latina/os in Los Angeles and Chicago

As stated in the opening paragraphs, I work in this dissertation from the assumption that Chicana/os and Latina/os, especially working-class and immigrant communities, have historically been regarded as a foreign Other in popular discourses of race in the United States. Such discourses in turn contribute to the longstanding social, political, and economic marginalization of Chicana/o and Latina/o communities, and Chicana/o and Latina/o engagement with punk must be understood within this context of marginalization. As such, in this section I provide a brief historical overview of Chicana/o and Latina/o communities in Los Angeles and Chicago in order to provide the necessary context for the chapters that follow. However, as Anthony Macías argues in his cultural history of Los Angeles Mexican American music makers between the mid 1930s

and late 1960s, “this story is not one of victimization in which Mexican Americans were entirely constrained by what the larger society would allow” (5). Instead, following Macías, I offer this history as a backdrop to explore how Chicana/os and Latina/os “enter[] the popular culture industries, and succeed[] [or not] at the intersections between the margins and the mainstream, between the minority and the majority” (5). Since my primary focus in this study is on Los Angeles-based punk scenes, I provide a more detailed history of Chicana/os and Latina/os in Los Angeles before moving to a brief history of the predominantly Chicana/o Chicago neighborhood of Pilsen.

Los Angeles

Rodolfo Acuña writes that Mexicans have resided in what is now known as Los Angeles since 1781, “when a dozen or so peasants of mixed blood—Indians, Africans, and Spaniards, mostly from the Mexican states of Sinaloa and Sonora—settled on land populated by the indigenous people of the area as part of Spanish colonial expansion” (*Anything* 23). Despite their nearly two-and-a-half century presence in Los Angeles, Acuña contends that Mexicans and Mexican Americans—and, more recently, other Latina/os, particularly Guatemalans and Salvadorans—confront a nativist racism that views Latina/os, whether foreign-born or not, as existing outside a U.S. national identity defined by whiteness (x-xi). I limit my discussion of the experiences of Mexicana/os, Chicana/os, and Latina/os in Los Angeles to the 20th and 21st centuries, but in *East Los Angeles: History of a Barrio*, Ricardo Romo provides a useful overview of tensions between the Mexican population of Los Angeles and waves of Anglo settlers during the 1800s. Beginning with increased Mexican migration to Los Angeles during World War I to fill demand for wartime labor, popular discourse has oscillated between viewing Mexicana/o, Chicana/o, and Latina/o Angelenos as a source of cheap labor and using these populations as handy scapegoats for economic decline and moral panics. Nativist and racist sentiment toward these populations has resulted at various times in mass deportations, real estate redlining, police harassment and violence, redrawing of voting districts to prevent Chicana/os and Latina/os from gaining political power, clearing of Chicana/o and Latina/o neighborhoods to build freeways and sports stadiums, placement of landfills, waster incinerators, and prisons in Chicana/o and Latina/o neighborhoods,

and a series of ballot initiatives designed to deny services to poor communities and immigrant populations, ban bilingual education, and dismantle affirmative action programs.

Immigration

Mexicans and Mexican Americans (a new category created by the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, which extended citizenship rights to Mexicans residing in territory now within the boundaries of the United States) maintained a small but consistent presence in Los Angeles throughout the 1800s. As Romo states, “The Mexican population (including all persons of ‘Mexican origin’) doubled over the period 1880-1900, but still comprised less than 15 percent of the total city population in 1900” (29). However, rapid industrialization and instability under the presidency of Porfirio Díaz and the outbreak of revolution in 1910 sparked “a wave of Mexican migration that began late in the 1890s and continued unabated until the outset of the Great Depression” (*ibid.* 31), and Los Angeles’ simultaneous “emergence as a regional metropolitan center” drew many of these migrants to the area. The years 1910-1930 saw particularly rapid growth of Los Angeles’ Mexican population; Romo notes that the Mexican population grew from 5,000 in 1910 to over 30,000 in 1920, and to over 90,000 by 1930 (61). Many migrants were drawn to Los Angeles during World War I as the war effort created great demand for unskilled labor (*ibid.* 49), and many more followed in the 1920s as instability and economic depression in Mexico continued even after the end of the Revolution (51).

These migrants were not always welcomed by white residents of Los Angeles, though. Romo writes that “[d]uring the period 1913-1918, a Brown Scare hysteria fully as great as that aimed at Communists and other radicals elsewhere, was directed at Mexicans living in Los Angeles” (90). This was motivated in part by the depression of 1913-1914, as Mexican migrants became scapegoats for job scarcity, and “as nativists raised the spectres of disease, illiteracy, and high welfare costs” (*ibid.* 91). Additionally, white Angelenos were alarmed by the presence of political refugees, such as Ricardo Flores Magón, leader of the Partido Liberal Mexicano (PLM), one of the primary organizations working to remove Díaz from power in the years leading up to the Revolution (*ibid.* 92).

With the onset of the Great Depression in 1929, nativists once again turned to Mexicans and Mexican Americans as convenient scapegoats, leading to the forced “repatriation” of between 500,000 and 600,000 people of Mexican origin living in the United States during the 1930s, with approximately 80,000 of those deported coming from Los Angeles alone (Acuña, *Anything* 45). Acuña notes that many of those deported were legally U.S. citizens, which suggests that nativists saw little distinction between foreign-born Mexicans and those of Mexican origin born in the United States. Acuña further notes that the deportation of U.S. citizens during the Depression had the side effect of diminishing Mexican Americans’ political power, since those who were citizens would have had the right to vote in elections (*ibid.* 45).

The 1940s and 1950s saw a similar chain of events. As in World War I before it, a labor shortage during World War II led to a renewed desire for Mexican labor. This spurred the creation of the Bracero Program, a joint program between the governments of the United States and Mexico in which vast numbers of Mexican laborers were given temporary visas to enter the United States to work in agriculture or on railroads. According to Acuña, “the World War II period offers a prime example of the contradictions in US immigration policy toward Mexicans and in the attitudes of many Euroamericans” (*Anything* 112). He argues that although “[h]ostility towards Mexicans was fierce” during this period, any such hostilities were trumped by the wartime demand for labor (*ibid.* 112). In total, around 220,000 Mexican workers were brought to the United States through the Bracero Program between 1942 and 1947 (Acuña, *Occupied* 262). Acuña notes, however, that the contradictions between anti-Mexican sentiment and desire for cheap Mexican labor continued after the end of the war, “as growers continued to use braceros and undocumented workers, even in the face of anti-Mexican hysteria” (*Anything* 113). Growing public outcry over illegal immigration in the 1950s led to the implementation of the Immigration and Naturalization Service’s (INS) Operation Wetback in 1954, “a large-scale effort to round up and remove ‘illegal aliens’ (over 1 million total) from the United States” (Fernandez 54). Lilia Fernandez argues that “Operation Wetback initiated a period of terror and harassment not only for Mexican ‘illegal aliens,’ but for anyone who law enforcement officials suspected might be ‘illegal’” (54-5), continuing for years after the initial 1954 campaign.

The pattern established in the first half of the 20th century of exploiting immigrant laborers from Mexico (and later elsewhere in Latin America) and then scapegoating the same migrants during periods of economic decline continued throughout the remainder of the century, and still defines much of the discourse surrounding Latina/o migration to the United States. Between 1960 and 1970, the Mexican origin population of Los Angeles more than doubled, thanks to increased immigration from Mexico and internal migration of Mexicans and Mexican Americans to Los Angeles from other parts of the United States (Acuña, *Anything* 114). This was followed in the 1970s by renewed anti-immigrant hysteria, intensified by the post-Vietnam War recession: INS apprehensions of undocumented immigrants increased from approximately 350,000 in 1971 to 870,000 in 1976, with Mexicans accounting for 90 percent of apprehensions (*ibid.* 114). Popular media spread fear of “invasion” and politicians pointed fingers at Mexican immigrants, particularly those who were undocumented, to explain economic downturn; in April 1976, for instance, President Gerald Ford stated, “The main problem is how to get rid of those 6 to 8 million aliens who are interfering with our economic prosperity” (qtd. in *ibid.* 115). In the 1980s, Mexican migrants to Los Angeles were joined by large numbers of Guatemalans and Salvadorans fleeing civil war and repressive, U.S.-backed regimes. The subsequent increase in Latina/o visibility in Los Angeles increased fear of a loss of control among white Angelenos, fear furthered stirred by proponents of Proposition 63, officially named “U.S. English,” which sought to make English the official language of the State of California; the proposition passed in 1986 (*ibid.* 115).

Fueled by an economic recession beginning in 1990, as well as the failure of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA) to curb illegal immigration, immigration became a matter of heated public debate in the 1990s (Chavez, *Covering Immigration* 134-5). As two studies by Leo Chavez demonstrate, anti-immigrant, and by extension anti-Latina/o, sentiment became prevalent in popular discourse during the early to mid 1990s. In a study of magazine covers addressing the issue of immigration from ten national magazines, he tallies eighteen such covers from 1992 through 1994 (*Covering Immigration* 136), with more than half of these alarmist in nature (15-6). As Chavez notes in *The Latino Threat Narrative*, a number of books taking a solidly anti-immigration stance were also published during the early to mid 1990s, such as Arthur

Schlesinger's *Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society* and Peter Brimelow's *Alien Nation: Common Sense About America's Immigration Disaster*, "playing on the public's fears of immigration" (33). Writings such as these positioned Mexican immigrants as an invading army, and warned of an imminent "reconquest" of the American Southwest and the Balkanization of the United States (*Latino Threat* 33-4). A *Time* article from April 1990 warned of the "browning of America" (qtd. in Chavez, *Covering Immigration* 137).

The immigration debate was particularly heated in California. Between 1994 and 1998, under the governorship of Pete Wilson, which Jorge Chapa describes as "virulently anti-Latino," the State of California passed three propositions targeted at both immigrant and native-born Latina/o communities, as well as other racialized communities: Propositions 187, 209, and 227 (383). Chapa explains:

Proposition 187 [1994] bar[red] undocumented immigrants from using all state services except emergency health care. It also empower[ed] public employees to police the use of these services and turn in suspected undocumented immigrants. In 1996, Proposition 209 ended all race-conscious affirmative action programs in California state institutions, particularly higher education. Latinos had been severely underrepresented at all levels of higher education; Prop. 209 removed any hope of improvement. Finally, in 1998, Proposition 227 ended bilingual education programs in California, the state with the greatest number and percent of children with limited English proficiency or with non-English-backgrounds. (383)

Chavez notes that although most of the provisions of Proposition 187 were struck down in court "on the grounds that regulation of immigration was a matter for the federal, not state, government" (*Covering Immigration* 174), the debate over the Proposition helped to fuel the national debate on immigration, leading to the 1996 passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, which denied undocumented immigrants access to virtually all federal assistance, and the Illegal Immigration Reform

and Immigrant Responsibility Act, which imposed more stringent regulations on apprehended undocumented immigrants (*ibid.* 192-3).

Alarmist discourse over immigration cooled slightly with the economic boom of the late 1990s (Chavez, *Latino Threat* 36), but intensified once again after the 9/11 attacks (38). Rightwing media discourse continued to stress the differences between past waves of European immigrants who quickly assimilated into American culture and supposedly unassimilable Latina/o immigrants (*ibid.* 39-43), and in December 2005, the U.S. House of Representatives passed bill HR 4437, which, among a number of other provisions, would have made it a felony to live in the United States as an undocumented immigrant (9). HR 4437 sparked massive protests in Latina/o communities nationwide, as well as in other immigrant and minority communities. Between March 25 and May 1, 2006, there were three demonstrations in Los Angeles that drew crowds approaching or surpassing 500,000 (*ibid.* 161, 169, 172), and on March 27, almost 40,000 students walked out of schools in Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Ventura counties (163). Ultimately, the bill was never signed into law, but Chavez argues that “the willingness of the House of Representatives to pass such measures sent a clear message to undocumented immigrants about their stigmatized status in the United States” (*ibid.* 9-10). The recession of the late 2000s added further fuel to the fire, and, following the example of Arizona’s SB 1070, a number of states passed draconian immigration bills. Most recently, Donald Trump has made immigration the centerpiece of his bid for the 2016 presidential election, promising that if—god forbid—he is elected, he will build a border wall running the length of the U.S.-Mexico border and deport every undocumented immigrant living in the United States.

Segregation and Discrimination

Prior to the 1910s, much of the Mexican origin population of Los Angeles was concentrated in an area commonly known as Sonoratown or El Pueblo, the site of the original Mexican settlement, on the northeastern edge of present-day Downtown and extending north into present Chinatown. However, between 1910 and 1930 a number of factors combined to push Mexican residents eastward, including: a rapid increase in

Mexican migration, taxing limited housing; the encroachment of industry and commerce on residential areas; development of a transit system that helped to disperse many middle-class residents to the suburbs; and rising racial tension that contributed to efforts to segregate housing, preventing Mexicans from moving into the north and west sections of Los Angeles (Romo 61-2). Thus, during these years, the existing Mexican origin population and new Mexican migrants increasingly settled in areas east of the Los Angeles River, such as Boyle Heights, Lincoln Heights, and Hollenbeck Park (*ibid.* 67). Initially, Mexicans in these areas lived alongside Italian, Russian, Polish, and Jewish communities (*ibid.* 65), but as these communities dispersed to the suburbs, Mexicans came to account for a greater percentage of the population in Eastside neighborhoods.

Racial segregation also worked to confine Mexicans and Mexican Americans, as well as Asians and African Americans, to particular areas of the city. In the 1920s, realtors, developers, and homeowners increasingly began to use racial covenants and occupancy clauses to keep minority communities out of white areas (HoSang 55). The California Real Estate Association (CREA) played a key role in sustaining racial segregation, going so far as to develop a “Code of Ethics” that stated that a “realtor should never be instrumental in introducing into a neighborhood a character of property or occupancy, members of any race or nationality, or any individual whose presence will clearly be detrimental to property values in the neighborhood” (*ibid.* 55-6). Even federal agencies participated in racial redlining. In the 1930s, the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) used “racial distinctions [as] a central determinant in appraising a neighborhood’s suitability for federally backed loans” (*ibid.* 56), giving multiracial areas like Boyle Heights and the Central Avenue corridor the lowest grades on its “Security Maps,” and directing most of its investments to “exclusively white neighborhoods.” Using the HOLC’s rating system to determine assistance to lenders and developers, the Federal Housing Authority (FHA), which succeeded the HOLC in 1934, “poured [assistance] into segregated white communities like the Los Angeles suburb of South Gate as it shunned integrated neighborhoods in South and East Los Angeles” (*ibid.* 56). In 1948, the Supreme Court ruled in *Shelley v. Kraemer* that court enforcement of racial covenants was in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment, but defiant realtors found ways

to maintain racial segregation (*ibid.* 57). For example, realtors encouraged the use of “neighborhood protective associations’ through which homeowners could regulate the sale of properties in their neighborhoods” (*ibid.* 57), and realty boards continued to unofficially enforce racial boundaries by rebuking or even expelling those who violated agreed upon boundaries. Thus, a 1949 study found that almost 75 percent of Mexican Americans in southern California were concentrated in three out of twenty-nine census tracts, with almost 50 percent residing in L.A.’s Eastside (Romo 169). It is important to note, though, that some may have chosen to live in these areas for a sense of community, even if segregation played a foundational role in concentrating the Mexican origin population on the Eastside. Class also played an important role, since, as Romo notes, homeowners and real estate agents were sometimes willing to make exceptions to racial covenants for those who had attained a suitable class status (85).

After racial covenants and redlining helped to concentrate the Mexican origin population in Eastside communities during the first half of the century, in the 1950s many Mexican Americans faced further displacement as their neighborhoods became fodder for “urban renewal.” For example, in the early 1950s, the largely Mexican American neighborhood of Chavez Ravine was selected as the site for the first integrated public housing project in Los Angeles (Acuña, *Anything* 38n2). These plans were curtailed by anti-communist hysteria, however (*ibid.* 38n2), and the land, already cleared of most of its former residents, was eventually used to build Dodger Stadium (20). Even more Mexican American Eastsiders were displaced by construction of Los Angeles’s freeway system. I quote Romo at length because his description of the razing of Eastside communities in service of connecting white suburban commuters to the business core provides a particularly eloquent demonstration of the city’s disregard for its Mexican American population, as well as a preview of the environmental racism that Eastsiders would face in coming decades. He states:

In the late 1950s the massive construction of freeways linking the Anglo suburban communities with the central business core began. High overpasses and expansive six-lane freeways crisscrossed the east side. Thousands of residents from Boyle Heights, Lincoln Heights, City Terrace, and surrounding neighborhoods were

relocated. The freeways divided the neighborhoods without consideration for the residents' loyalties to churches, schools, businesses, or family. Residents, especially the young and the aged, became increasingly isolated from other areas of town as the massive layers of grey concrete and asphalt eliminated the trolley lines and disrupted transit service. The daily trek of hundreds of thousands of autos left a gloomy grey cloud of smog hanging over the east side. Only on a rare day could the eastsiders catch a glimpse of the nearby mountains or downtown skyline. (Romo 170)

The slicing up of Los Angeles's Eastside in service of facilitating travel between business and suburban residential districts closely parallels the destructive force of construction of Robert Moses's Cross Bronx Expressway in the late 1950s and 1960s, which displaced thousands and devastated already marginalized inner-city communities, particularly in the South Bronx (see Berman).⁷ The destruction of Mexican American communities in Los Angeles thus puts them in the company of other poor and racialized communities deemed expendable in the face of "modernization."

Just as the cloud of smog settling over the Eastside was a byproduct of Los Angeles's growth into a sprawling metropolis, in the decades to come East Los Angeles would be singled out as a dumping ground for other byproducts of the increasingly crowded metropolis. For instance, Acuña notes that by the 1980s there were thousands of metal-plating companies located in close proximity to Eastside communities, and that a 1988 chemical fire in one of these plants, located in a residential area of Lincoln Heights, "threatened to explode 26,000 gallons of lethal chemicals (among them cyanide)" (*Anything* 70). Although thousands of residents were evacuated, the incident did not even make the front page of the *Los Angeles Times* and disappeared from the news cycle altogether within a matter of days. In the 1980s, a group of primarily Mexican American women organized as the Mothers of East Los Angeles to fight against environmental

⁷ The emergence of hip-hop out of the devastation of the South Bronx (see Chang) suggests an interesting corollary to the contemporary appearance of punk scenes in inner-city communities such as East Los Angeles, a connection deserving of further study.

racism directed toward their communities, such as a proposed oil pipeline that would travel through Boyle Heights and the construction in Vernon of a hazardous waste incinerator that would burn 22,500 tons of waste each year (*ibid.* 70). Their campaign against construction of the incinerator was eventually successful, thanks in part to mutual support from a group of African American activists from South Central who were also fighting against construction of an incinerator in their area (*ibid.* 71). The Mothers of East L.A. also played a prominent role in the fight against construction of a state prison on the border of Boyle Heights. Announced in 1985, construction of the state prison would bring the total number of prisons located in the Eastside up to six. As Acuña notes, “roughly 75 percent of the L.A. prison population was warehoused on the Eastside,” with expansion plans already in the works for the existing facilities (*ibid.* 65). Plans for the state prison finally came to a halt in 1992, but only through the continued struggle of community activists such as the Mothers of East L.A. (*ibid.* 71).

Mexican Americans have also confronted segregation and discrimination within the Los Angeles public school system. Until 1947, Mexican and Mexican American children were segregated into designated Mexican schools. This practice only ceased when U.S. District Court Judge Paul J. McCormick ruled in the case of *Méndez v. Westminster School District* that such segregation was unconstitutional (the ruling would later serve as precedent for the more well-known 1954 Supreme Court case of *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education*) (Acuña, *Anything* 21). In March of 1968, in a watershed moment for the nascent Chicano Movement, “nearly 10,000 Chicano students walked out of five Los Angeles high schools—Lincoln, Roosevelt, Garfield, Wilson, and Belmont” (Acuña, *Occupied* 312)—schools in which Chicana/os accounted for between 59% and 96% of the student body (311). Students orchestrated the walkouts (blowouts, as they were also called) to protest a range of issues that resulted in an inferior education for Chicana/os, including: expulsion or transfer of over half of Chicana/o high school students; overcrowded and dilapidated schools; a curriculum designed to push Chicana/o students into low-skilled jobs; racist teachers; lack of representation of Chicana/o culture and history in the curriculum; and an underrepresentation of Chicana/o teachers and administrators (*ibid.* 312). Acuña writes that police and sheriffs’ deputies “brutally suppress[ed] the walkout participants” (*ibid.* 312), and a grand jury indicted Sal Castro, a

Lincoln High teacher who worked closely with the students leading up to the walkouts, and several other activists on charges including conspiracy to commit misdemeanors.

Beginning in the late 1970s, gains won by Chicana/o and other activists began a decades-long process of erosion. The passage of Proposition 13 in 1978 “slashed city and county revenue by reducing property taxes” (Acuña, *Anything* 91), thereby reducing budgets for services such as hospitals and clinics, libraries, and the public school system (92). The following year, Proposition 1, the Robbins Amendment, instituted strict conditions upon which desegregation orders could be given to California school districts (HoSang 92). Authored by Alan Robbins, a San Fernando Valley Democrat, Proposition 1 ended mandatory busing within California’s public school districts, instead making such programs voluntary. Robbins recruited a number of Chicano leaders to spread the message that busing would threaten recently established bilingual education programs in schools with large Mexican and Mexican American populations (*ibid.* 108), while at the same time quietly stirring up racial fears among white voters in largely segregated San Fernando Valley neighborhoods (92). The measure quickly increased segregation of African American and Chicana/o and Latina/o students from white students, and, as HoSang notes, “[v]oluntary measures did almost nothing to alleviate these patterns of segregation, which in turn reinforced disparities in resources and educational quality” (128). In 1998, the passage of Proposition 227, disingenuously named “English for the Children,” initiated the dismantling of bilingual education programs in California public schools, programs that “had been won in the late 1960s and early 1970s by parents, activists, and advocates who were championing the needs of immigrant Latino and Asian American students left behind by a system that historically mandated English-only instruction” (*ibid.* 232). While Proposition 227 author Ron Unz’s ties to ultraconservative think tanks such as the Heritage Foundation and the Manhattan Institute call his motives into question, Unz adamantly denied any charges of nativism or xenophobia, instead arguing that bilingual education programs had a failure rate of 95% (a distortion of the data, according to his critics) (*ibid.* 234), and insisting that Latina/o parents and children were “the principal victims of bilingual education” (qtd. in *ibid.* 235). As Acuña writes, though, a return to the immersion method of teaching English, which he describes as a

“sink-or-swim” philosophy, “ha[s] long crippled the education of Latino students and [...] devalue[s] any language other than English” (*Anything* 293).

Historically, Mexican Americans in Los Angeles have also had a fraught relationship with police and the criminal justice system. One notable example of police and judicial prejudice against Mexican Americans is the 1942 Sleepy Lagoon trial, in which twenty-two members of the Mexican American “38th Street gang” were arrested and subject to a mass trial for the alleged murder of José Díaz, whose body was found in a swimming hole nicknamed the Sleepy Lagoon, a popular site for Mexican American youth barred from public pools (Romo 166). Romo notes that the mass trial was “unprecedented in U.S. judicial history” (166), and Acuña adds that the presiding judge allowed the prosecution to use racist language against the defendants, contributing to convictions for nearly all of them (*Anything* 112); the convictions were later overturned when “[t]he District Court of Appeals found the judge biased against the defendants” (Romo 167). The following year, a series of clashes between Mexican American youth and sailors and marines ultimately led to what is now known as the Zoot Suit Riots, in which hordes of marines and sailors descended upon Mexican American, as well as Black and Filipino zoot suiters (*ibid.* 167). These actions were cheered by Los Angeles police, politicians, and the press (Acuña, *Anything* 112), and the violence only subsided after negative international attention, including direct pressure from the Mexican government, compelled the State Department to force local Navy and Marine Corps officers to act since it was clear that local authorities would not intervene (Romo 167).

Referring to them as the “Gangs in Tan and Blue” (*Anything* 262), Acuña traces the violent histories of the Los Angeles Police Department and the Los Angeles Sheriff’s Department—who are responsible for patrolling unincorporated areas of Los Angeles County that fall outside the city lines, including the unincorporated area of East Los Angeles—between the 1950s and the uprising in 1992 following the acquittal of officers involved in the beating of Rodney King. Acuña contends that the LAPD has long had a reputation for brutality, “especially towards Blacks and Latinos” (*ibid.* 271) He notes that “the LAPD has historically been a political force in the city of Los Angeles, with the chief insulated from political control and equivalent in power to the mayor” (*ibid.* 271),

and that Chief William H. Parker, appointed in 1950, created a department that was “military-like” and arrogant, a legacy carried on by subsequent chiefs Tom Reddin, Ed Davis, and Daryl Gates, who was chief at the time of the Rodney King beating. He argues that the legacy passed down by Parker “made the Watts outbreaks and the Rodney King beating inevitable” (*ibid.* 271). Compared to the LAPD’s reputation for violence, “the Sheriff’s Department has kept a relatively low profile because it operates outside of the city limits and has thus escaped close scrutiny by the media, even though, Acuña states, “they deserve a similar reputation” to the LAPD (*ibid.* 264). He contends that the 1946 ruling of “justifiable homicide” by a sheriff’s deputy in the killing of thirteen-year-old Eugene Montenegro, who was shot while climbing out of a window, allegedly with knife in hand, “set a pattern for postwar treatment of Chicanos by sheriff’s deputies” (*ibid.* 264). A particularly notable example of the sheriff’s department’s violence against Chicana/os is the brutal repression of the 1970 Chicano Moratorium, in which approximately 30,000 people demonstrated against the Vietnam War (*ibid.* 265). Three demonstrators were killed, including journalist Rubén Salazar, who was hit in the head with a tear gas canister when a sheriff’s deputy fired into the bar where Salazar was standing. In the days leading up to the Moratorium, Salazar had been working on a series on police-community relations following the questionable shooting deaths of cousins Guillermo and Beltrán Sánchez by Los Angeles and San Leandro police officers, leading many in the community to suspect that Salazar’s death was not accidental (*ibid.* 262). Acuña provides a list of further incidents (*ibid.* 265-70), culminating in a 1992 Justice Department report rating the Sheriff’s Department as the second highest in the nation for complaints of violations of civil rights (264).

Pilsen

Chicana/o and Latina/o communities in Chicago have faced many of the same issues as those in Los Angeles, including waves of immigration and reaction, displacement through urban renewal, segregation, and unequal access to public services and resources. World War I labor shortages spurred the first wave of concentrated Mexican migration to Chicago, and during the Depression years these communities became vulnerable to deportation and repatriation (Fernandez 58). Despite this, a Mexican community survived

in the Near West Side, an area that had previously been home to new European immigrant communities. During World War II, Mexican *braceros*, Mexican Americans from Texas, and Puerto Ricans came to Chicago to fill the demand for wartime labor, with many settling in the Near West Side to take advantage of services established by the existing Mexican population (*ibid.* 59). As in Los Angeles, in the 1950s Mexican immigrants in Chicago became subject to deportation through Operation Wetback (*ibid.* 60). Exhausted by numerous waves of immigration, the Near West Side experienced increasing physical decay, and in the 1950s became a site of urban renewal (*ibid.* 91-2). Many Near West Side residents were displaced in particular by the construction of a University of Illinois campus in the early 1960s (*ibid.* 123-4). While many Puerto Ricans relocated to the Near North Side, much of the displaced Mexican population moved directly south into the Lower West Side, also known as Pilsen or Eighteenth Street (*ibid.* 129).

The 1970 census counted approximately twenty-four thousand people of Mexican origin in Pilsen, but researchers and community leaders believe the actual number to be closer to thirty-six thousand, close to 80 percent of the population of the area (Fernandez 222). Fernandez writes that the Mexican origin population of Pilsen experienced socioeconomic marginalization, with over 17 percent of Spanish-speaking families living below the poverty line, twice the average for Chicago as a whole, with low-wage manufacturing accounting for almost half of all employment in the area. The area was also crowded and deteriorating, with over 99 percent of housing stock built before 1940, and crumbling infrastructure neglected by the city (*ibid.* 222-3). Public schools in Pilsen also seriously suffered from disinvestment. Latina/o students accounted for over 80 percent of students in most public schools in the area, and the schools failed to meet the needs of Spanish-speaking students, instead shuffling a disproportionate number of students into EMH, or “educationally and mentally handicapped,” classes (*ibid.* 223). School buildings in the area were dilapidated and overcrowded, but rather than relocating minority students to less crowded schools with predominantly white student bodies, Superintendent Benjamin Willis attempted to relieve overcrowding by providing schools in minority areas with mobile trailers to use as additional classrooms, leading critics to refer to the trailers as “Willis wagons.” Overcrowding at Carter Harrison Technical High

School, the only school available to high school students from Pilsen, led to ninth and tenth graders from Pilsen being relocated to Froebel High School, a building that had been previously condemned for unsafe conditions (*ibid.* 223-4). The poor conditions faced by Mexican American students meant that most left school before earning their diplomas, with a reported graduation rate of only 30 percent (*ibid.* 224). Even those who did earn their diplomas faced an unemployment rate of 26 percent, only two percentage points better than for those who did not finish high school. Disadvantaged by the city's indifference, in the late 1960s and 1970s, Pilsen became the center of the Chicano Movement within Chicago (*ibid.* 225).

This overview makes clear that the history of Chicana/os and Latina/os in the United States has often been marked by social and economic marginalization, in tandem with exclusion from popular understandings of U.S national identity. As I will demonstrate in the chapters that follow, the experiences of Chicana/o and Latina/o punks are shaped in significant ways by these forms of exclusion and marginalization. A detailed examination of the impact of racial marginalization on punks of color marks a crucial turning point from much of the existing scholarship on punk, which is more often concerned with how white youth negotiated the loss of 1960s idealism during the 1970s and the turn toward neoliberalism during the Reagan '80s. I turn now to a review of the existing literature on punk music and culture.

1.3 Literature Review

Punk

Academic studies of punk started appearing very soon after the emergence of punk itself. Since Dick Hebdige's foundational text, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* was first published in 1979, countless scholars have attempted to make sense of punk through lenses ranging from subcultural and political-economic theory to behavioral scientific studies of deviance. Given the vast body of literature dedicated to punk, I confine my discussion here to those works most relevant to my own project, meaning primarily

studies of American punk scenes from media and cultural studies perspectives. A reading of this literature reveals at least two major trends, the first of which is the attempt to define punk and its significance as a form of political and artistic expression, and the second of which is the related attempt to define punk's relation to capital. A less prevalent theme, but one that is equally important, especially for the aims of my project, is the relationship of punk to questions of race.

Hebdige views punk first and foremost as a form of aesthetic resistance to a parent culture, but a resistance that he argues is ultimately only symbolic. Hebdige's theorization of subcultural resistance, along with similar work by other Birmingham scholars, has been foundational for many studies of punk since, but a number of scholars, such as Jude Davies, have criticized Hebdige for denying to punks the possibility of a self-consciousness that would enable them to move beyond symbolic resistance and work toward actual change. Davies suggests instead that parallels exist between punk and postmodern theory, both in punk's "problematizing of community," and in its "awareness of recuperation" (5). In treating punks as "producers of work within a genre" (5), rather than a more or less oppositional subculture, Davies thus refocuses punk's political significance from "its resistance to a dominant culture outside or against which it is conceived of as existing," onto its subversiveness within that culture, and the new possibilities for subjectivity this offers. Bradford Martin similarly rejects the notion of punk as a unified musical or sartorial style or political ideology, arguing instead that punk encompasses a variety of styles and political impulses. He does, however, suggest that post-punk (which he uses as a catch-all for all punk and punk offshoots to come after the first wave) "display[s] certain recurring patterns of oppositional attitude and discourse" (*ibid.* 144). He argues that post-punk enables "communities of fans to explore identities in opposition to mainstream social and political mores" (*ibid.* 144), while acknowledging that these communities are not always egalitarian, as they are often defined relationally against an "other". Likewise, Craig O'Hara, drawing from Charles Taylor's *Man Alone*, argues that punk is an attempt to find both personal freedom and a sense of community in the face of the alienation of modern life. He suggests that the definition of punk can vary to include at the same time a youth trend associated with certain fashions, an apolitical form of rebellion, or, ideally, "a formidable voice of opposition" (*ibid.* 41). In its ideal

form, O'Hara argues that punk is a quest for individuality within and against a conformist, capitalist, white supremacist, patriarchal society. Drawing from these authors, I argue that while punk is a cultural form that resists easy categorization, it can generally be defined as having an oppositional relationship to mainstream values. While I argue that this offers Chicana/os ways in which to question and challenge their relationship to mainstream American culture, as well as to the Mexican American community, like Martin I acknowledge that punk's malleability can also provide a route to reactionary politics and extreme forms of social conservatism. Contrary to scholars who assume a unified and progressive political ideology among Chicana/o and Latina/o punks, my study reveals a range of ideological stances, some progressive, others apolitical, and still others reactionary or regressive.

A political-economic approach to punk marks the second major trend in the literature, often centering on the opposition between corporate rock culture and punk's Do-It-Yourself (DIY) ethic. Drawing on Bourdieu's notion of fields, Alan O'Connor, in his study of punk record labels, argues that a DIY approach to the market gives punk a degree of autonomy from the market forces that rule the corporate music industry (see also Goshert). Stacey Thompson takes this argument further in his study of the political-economic history of punk, stating:

The entire field of punk can be understood as a set of problems that unfold from a single contradiction between aesthetics and economics, between punk, understood as a set of cultural productions and practices that comprise an aesthetic field, and capitalism and the commodity, an economic field and an economic form in which punks discover they must operate. (2)

For Thompson, then, DIY becomes the means through which punks seek an alternative form of production and exchange that is "more socialized and collectivized" and is not "dependent upon exploitation and profit for its existence" (179). In a study of the British post-punk label Rough Trade, David Hesmondhalgh likewise argues that the aspiration of many 1980s DIY labels was the democratization of the music industry. Although many of

these labels were eventually done in by “conflicts, inefficiencies and contradictions,” Hesmondhalgh nevertheless concludes:

a network of production, distribution and manufacturing was set up which allowed musicians from all over the UK access to the means of recording and selling their creative output. The musician-centredness of the post-punk independents was aimed at avoiding the kind of exploitative deals characteristic of the music industry as a whole, and to some degree these companies really did provide an alternative. (270)

The models established in the 1980s by Rough Trade and other independents (SST in the U.S., for instance) are of particular importance because they continue to inform the practices of DIY punk labels into the present.

More recently, Ryan Moore and Dewar MacLeod have attempted to contextualize punk and its relationship to the market in relation to changing social, economic, and political conditions in the United States, and in Southern California particularly, beginning in the 1970s and continuing into the present. Moore argues, for instance, that punk “emerged in a pivotal moment of transition in the global political economy, as the social democracy of Fordism gave way to a more unforgiving brand of unfettered capitalism” (37). He thus situates punk as a response to, and hardcore as symptomatic of, “the crisis of meaninglessness and purposelessness resulting from the condition of postmodernity” (5 *ibid.* 3). Challenging the reductiveness of Thompson’s attempt to contain punk within a dialectic between aesthetics and consumerism, Moore states that hardcore punks “used the do-it-yourself ethic to mobilize resources into one of the very few social movements to challenge the Reagan agenda from a radical, multi-issue perspective” (53). MacLeod, like Moore, draws a distinction between the early Hollywood punk scene, which he views as largely a response to the poor state of the music business, and the suburban hardcore scene, which he argues “reflected transformations in both the position of young people in American society and the landscape of Southern California” (3). Extending Moore’s argument, he contends that the transition of suburbs from “bedroom communities” to “full-scale, contained regions” contributed greatly to the crisis of meaninglessness

ushered in by the dawning of postmodernity. He argues that DIY “can be read as a modernist response to postmodern consumerism and fragmentation, an attempt to create some sense of reality, maybe even authenticity, certainly control over daily life and the future” (*ibid.* 100). While there is much to be gained from these authors, the subjects of Moore’s and MacLeod’s works can generally be characterized as white, middle-class, and male. The changing social, economic, and political relationships outlined by Moore and MacLeod likely had very different effects on the Chicana/o community than they did on white, male, suburban youth, and Chicana/o punks likely also had a very different relationship to the market. Thus, in my project I will attempt to examine how the engagement of Chicana/o punks with the market and with a DIY ethos differs from that of Moore’s and MacLeod’s subjects.

A third topic in the literature that is vital for my project is the question of punk’s relationship to racial politics, and within this subject, several interrelated themes emerge. In their collection, *White Riot: Punk Rock and the Politics of Race*, Stephen Duncombe and Maxwell Tremblay present many of these themes, including: the racial implications of white punks’ self-marginalization, which they connect to Norman Mailer’s *White Negro*; the thin line between postmodern flirtation with fascist imagery, and the emergence of neo-Nazi/white power factions within the punk scene; anti-racist politics and the movement for black/white racial solidarity, which, while well intentioned, often reproduces essentialisms, as well as a black/white dichotomy that excludes other groups (see also Gilroy); and the invisibility of racial minorities within punk, which is generally assumed to be a specifically white cultural form. This literature is somewhat unsatisfactory, though, as many authors focus mainly on white punks’ negotiation of their racial identities or the influence of “Black music” in punk—rather than the existence of actual people of color—trends which perpetuate rather than challenge the notion of punk as white.

In the chapter, “Coloring Between the Lines of Punk and Hardcore: From Absence to Black Punk Power,” David Ensminger usefully challenges the notion that punk was rock music stripped of any Black influence. Greg Shaw, founder of *Bomp* fanzine, wrote in 1977 that “there is no hint of any derivation from Black music” in punk (qtd. in

Ensminger 242), a notion repeated by Jon Savage, who states that punk music seemed to “eradicate almost every trace of pop’s black origins” (243). While such claims are often accepted at face value in punk historiography and scholarship, Ensminger provides ample evidence of punk bands from the late 1970s and early 1980s taking influence from blues, jazz, R&B/soul, reggae, and hip-hop, demonstrating that these claims are more likely punk mythologizing than historical fact. At the same time, Ensminger often treats as “influence” what others might describe as “appropriation”; for instance, while he makes much of the Black influence on Detroit proto-punks the MC5 and the Stooges (243-4), Katherine E. Wadkins argues that these bands actually appropriated essentialized notions of Black culture and masculinity to perform new versions of white masculinity (240-1). Ensminger also accepts uncritically a statement in which Articles of Faith’s Vic Bondi traces punk’s ideological lineage through African American “prison work chants [and] slave hollers” (245), and an incredibly ignorant and arrogant statement from the Sex Pistols’ Johnny Rotten, who cavalierly employs racial slurs in his equation of punk to the experiences of African Americans (244-5). Further, he also uncritically employs problematic terms such as “primitive” and “authenticity” in his comparison of punk to Black musical forms that risk essentializing Black subjectivity (he also includes a chapter on Latina/os in punk that similarly offers important interventions while essentializing Latina/o subjectivity, which I will discuss briefly).

Ensminger’s chapter also suffers from an overemphasis on the Black *influence on* punk, at the expense of discussion of Black *experiences within* punk, to the extent that his inclusion of Black voices almost feel tokenizing. Nikpour offers a similar critique of Duncombe and Tremblay’s *White Riot* in her review of the book, noting that, “Incredibly, it is not until the *sixth* chapter (over 200 pages in!) of this book about race and punk that we hear from any punks of color” (italics in original). While Tremblay does offer a valuable critique of discourses of colorblindness in punk, and the ways in which such discourses reinforce whiteness as a “neutral” subject position (9-12), the balance of the book leans toward discussions of white punks’ relationship to questions of race, whether negotiation of their own racial identities, slippage between flirtation with fascist/racist imagery/language and actual far right political alliances, or the virtues and limits of solidarity with marginalized groups. Thus, Nikpour argues, while “the authors do admit

that the ‘claim that punk is just a white riot’ is a ‘dubious’ one [...] they nonetheless replicate this logic over and over (and over and over) throughout the book” (“White Riot”). Though I think that productive conversations do arise in the book, I take Nikpour’s point that Duncombe and Tremblay’s timeline, which positions the 1990s as a decade of intervention in an otherwise white culture in the American context and treats punks outside of North America and Western Europe as belated copies, erases the presence and contributions of punks of color reaching back to punk’s very beginnings. My specific focus on the experiences of people of color in punk from its emergence in the mid 1970s and continuing through to the present thus offers a crucial intervention in the study of punk and its intersections with questions of race.

Two additional articles that specifically consider intersections of punk and race specifically within the initial Los Angeles scene are of particular relevance to my study. In “L.A.’s ‘White Minority’: Punk and the Contradiction of Self-Marginalization,” Daniel Traber suggests that many punks in Los Angeles in the late 1970s and early 1980s practiced a type of “downward” mobility by abandoning suburbia to embrace the lives of the largely racialized urban poor, whom he terms the “sub-urban.” He defines the sub-urban as “a very specific class position, one that must confront the utmost levels of poverty, hunger, inadequate housing, and the constant threat of physical danger and death” (*ibid.* 31). Through this move, he argues, L.A. punks essentialized sub-urban subjectivities in order to confer to themselves a sense of authenticity through their association to the sub-urban. In so doing, Traber concludes, “punk unwittingly repeats the *ideological* patterns of the dominant culture by privileging the importance of the self and self-interest, thus treating the Other as an object to be used for their own desires” (40, italics in original).

Fiona I.B. Ngô extends Traber’s argument in her article, “Punk in the Shadow of War,” tying Los Angeles punk in the late 1970s and early 1980s to “the region’s relation to US imperium” (203) through “the imperial logics that guided thought both at home and abroad, and in terms of the shifting economic grounds that transformed the landscapes of military industrial labor in Los Angeles,” as well as the arrival of Southeast Asian immigrants and refugees in the post-Vietnam era (204). Echoing Traber, Ngô states,

“while punks inhabited the same spaces as non-punk poor, people of color, immigrants, and refugees, who were not themselves imagined as resistant subjects, punks often narrated themselves as resistant *because* they inhabited those spaces in proximity to these communities of color” (212, italics in original). Ngô draws further connections between U.S. imperialism and the “Chinatown Punk Wars.” Following a November 8, 1978 riot during a Bags performance at Madame Wong’s, a Chinatown restaurant that also held punk shows, owner Esther Wong banned punk bands from her restaurant, in favor of tamer, more commercial New Wave bands (*ibid.* 220-2). In the eyes of punks this marked Madame Wong’s as less authentic than the Hong Kong Café, located across a courtyard from Madame Wong’s, which continued to host punk bands, and marked Esther Wong, “an immigrant woman of color” (*ibid.* 222), as “irrational and illiberal” and therefore deserving of the violence in her restaurant (221). Noting that Chinatown was also home to the city’s largest Vietnamese refugee population at the time (219), Ngô writes, L.A. punks’ “acts of violence and destruction in and of themselves do not speak simply of rebellion, but also the policing of other communities dispossessed by the economic restructuring of the area in the shadow of war” (224). She concludes, therefore, that L.A. punks’ “structure for resistance,” which “pathologized those marked as racial, national, and sexual others,” “predicts its own political limits and supports a contest amongst the most vulnerable segments of the population for fleeting access to the rights of the state” (*ibid.* 225). I draw from Traber’s and Ngô’s analysis of L.A. punks’ reproduction of dominant racial ideologies and imperial logics in my discussion of punk colorblindness in Chapter Three, and Traber’s notion of self-marginalization informs my discussion of DIY in Chapter Five.

Chicana/os and Latina/os in Punk

Scholarly interest in Chicana/o and Latina/o participation in punk was late to arrive compared to interest in punk more generally, but in the past ten years the number of scholarly works dedicated to the issue has increased rapidly. The authors of many of these works effectively argue that a Chicana/o presence in punk is politically significant on a number of levels, for instance, as a challenge to the underrepresentation of Chicanas/os in the mass media and in the public sphere, or to reductive or essentialist

notions of Chicana/o culture that perpetuate an idea of a singular or uniform Chicana/o subjectivity. However, while these authors insist upon the significance of Chicana/o participation in the punk scene, many also tend to reduce such participation to the early East L.A. scene, focusing exclusively on the Vex at Self-Help Graphics and a small cluster of bands, effectively suggesting that the East L.A. scene, and a Chicana/o presence in punk more generally, existed only momentarily. Many of these works also present an underdog narrative in which East L.A. bands overcame obstacles to build their own scene, which eventually facilitated a moment of cross-cultural exchange between the East and West sides of Los Angeles.⁸ This narrative is quite contentious among some participants in the early Los Angeles punk scene (the subject of Chapter Three) but has also been taken up outside of academia and re-presented in watered down terms that abandon critical examinations of the intersections of punk and race in favor of a flaccid multiculturalism.⁹

One of the earliest works to discuss musicians from the East L.A. punk scene is Steven Loza's *Barrio Rhythm: Mexican American Music in Los Angeles*, in which he profiles a number of Los Angeles-based Chicana/o bands and musicians, including Los Illegals and Teresa Covarrubias of the Brat. While his choice of subjects is quite narrow when it comes to punk, these profiles, drawn from ethnographic research conducted in the mid 1980s, offer a number of important insights, especially in relation to the difficulty of marketing punk bands primarily made up of Chicana/os (the subject of Chapter Four). What is perhaps most significant for the present moment is the way in which information from Loza's case studies informs later work on the East L.A. punk scene. Another widely cited text is David Reyes and Tom Waldman's historical work, *Land of a Thousand Dances: Chicano Rock 'n' Roll from Southern California*. In their chapter on East L.A. punk, Reyes and Waldman place the Vex at the center of the scene, and, like Loza before them, devote most of their time to Los Illegals and the Brat, offering further insight into

⁸ Josh Kun's essay in the *Vexing* catalogue, "A Space for the Possible," is a good example, but see also Reyes and Waldman, Habell-Pallán, (*Loca Motion*) and Gunckel ("Vex Marks").

⁹ See for instance Pell, the "LA Chicano Punk" exhibit in Scion's iQ Project Museum, and the "East LA Punk" section of the *American Sabor* website.

the dilemmas these bands faced trying to work within the mainstream music industry. While the Brat and Los Illegals earn the lion's share of attention, they also briefly discuss the Odd Squad and the Plugz—who they treat as an East L.A. band, despite lead singer Tito Larriva's insistence that the Plugz were a Hollywood band (Hernandez).

The useful insights into the East L.A. scene offered by Loza and Reyes and Waldman have made their texts foundational for scholars interested in the history of punk in East L.A. However, the limited scope of their works also contribute to the perpetuation of discussions of Chicana/os in punk that focus very narrowly on the early East L.A. scene. For instance, in the chapter, "That's My Blood Down There," from the book *Dangerous Crossroads*, George Lipsitz argues that Chicana/o participation in punk represents a kind of "strategic anti-essentialism" (84), through which young Chicana/os can "mak[e] visible aspects of their lives and culture that would otherwise be ignored" (85). Lipsitz thus claims to challenge essentialist notions of Chicana/o subjectivity by acknowledging the heterogeneity of the Chicana/o community—although, in addition to referring to a Chicana/o presence in punk as "unexpected" (90) and "an appropriation" (85), he also states that Chicana/o punks "temporarily become something they are not to affirm all the more powerfully who they are so they can then move on to become something new" (90), all of which suggests that his theory of "strategic anti-essentialism" itself reproduces an essentialized notion of Chicana/o subjectivity. Drawing much of his evidence for these claims directly from Loza, as well as supplementing it with new interviews with Teresa Covarrubias and Alice Bag, he, like Loza, centers his discussion primarily around Los Illegals and the Brat, although also discussing Covarrubias's later collaborations with Alice Bag.

More recently, in the chapter, "¿Soy Punkera, Y Que?", from the book *Loca Motion*, Michelle Habell-Pallán makes a compelling argument for the ways in which Chicana musicians like Teresa Covarrubias and Alice Bag use punk to challenge fixed notions of Chicana identity, as well traditional gender roles within their own communities. She also usefully states that the stories of Bag and Covarrubias "document the effects of the shrinking of the public sphere because of the economic privatization that plagued the 1980s and that continues to this day" (Habell-Pallán, *Loca Motion* 156; she also expands

on these ideas in “Vexed on the Eastside: Chicana Roots and Routes of L.A. Punk,” which appears in the catalogue for the 2008 exhibition, *Vexing: Female Voices From East L.A. Punk*). However, the story she tells of East L.A. punk is largely drawn directly from Reyes and Waldman (Loza and Lipsitz are cited, as well), so, once again, the Vex becomes the focal point of a scene made up of a small number of bands. This picture is repeated once again in Roberto Avant-Mier’s *Rock the Nation: Latin/o Identities and the Latin Rock Diaspora* when he gives an account of the East L.A. scene that draws heavily from both Loza and Reyes and Waldman. Jimmy Alvarado describes this kind of repetition within scholarly accounts of East L.A. punk as a “wind tunnel” in which “one guy [sic] writes it, another guy cites it, another guy comes along citing the guy who’s citing the other thing, and so on and so on and so on” (Interview).

A number of authors also make connections between the East L.A. punk scene and contemporary art movements, especially to the East L.A. conceptual art collective Asco, which often overlapped with the punk scene. Two such essays appear in the exhibition catalogue for *Asco: Elite of the Obscure*, an exhibition initially held at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 2011. In “The Vex and Unpopular Cultures,” C. Ondine Chavoya focuses on the music of Los Illegals as a continuation of Asco’s subversive artistic practices (348), and situates the Vex as a site not only for musical performance, but as “a locus for all kinds of cultural and aesthetic activities” (350). Habell-Pallán also draws connections between Asco and punk in “The Style Council: Asco, Music, and ‘Punk Chola’ Aesthetics, 1980-84,” suggesting that the subversive visual styles of both Asco and East L.A. punk can be connected back to the oppositional aesthetics of the pachuca/o of the 1940s and their contemporary counterpart, the chola/o, through a “continuum of signifying practices of marginalized youth in Chicano communities” (339). Ties to Asco are also explored in two essays in the *Vexing* catalogue by the show’s co-curators, Pilar Tompkins and Colin Gunckel. Tompkins suggests that artistic practices employed by members of Asco and of the East L.A. punk scene can be considered in terms of art historian Nicolas Bourriaud’s notion of “relational aesthetics,” in which artistic practices become actual “ways of living and models of action within the existing real” (qtd. in Tompkins 9). In “Vex Marks the Spot: The Intersection of Art and Punk in East Los Angeles,” Gunckel also considers the East L.A. punk scene’s overlap with

Asco, as well as the wider Los Angeles art scene, arguing that the fluidity of exchange between punks and artists “demonstrates the extent to which Chicano cultural producers worked within and contributed to larger institutional shifts and art world trends in Los Angeles” (17).

In “*Vexing* Questions: Rethinking the History of East LA Punk,” Gunckel extends the ideas put forth in “Vex Marks the Spot” through a consideration of heated debates sparked by the *Vexing* exhibition. He states that the debates reveal a “continuing dissatisfaction with the way [the history of East L.A. punk] has been written—with the frameworks that have structured its writing and the kinds of exclusions that have been perpetuated as a result” (*ibid.* 127). Gunckel argues that the scholarship on punk in East L.A. falls short in that, “while it might engage in productive textual analysis or theorization, [it] often adopts a dichotomous historical perspective that situates the Eastside scene’s creation as a necessary response to exclusion and discrimination, overlooking its complexity and its relationship to the rest of the city and a broader punk scene” (*ibid.* 128). Drawing from Will Straw’s and Holly Kruse’s conceptualizations of music scenes, Gunckel suggests that the East L.A. scene might more usefully be considered through three alternative frameworks, namely, “the broader LA music scene, the transformation of Chicano art, and related structural and aesthetic changes in the Los Angeles art world” (*ibid.* 129).

Analyzing the scene through these frameworks allows Gunckel to provide a more complex reading of the scene than much of the previous scholarship, although, as he points out, these frameworks are not without their own limitations. As he says, “what I have mapped out here and elsewhere perhaps applies most readily to bands that sustained an ongoing relationship with artists like Asco, those with an accessible visual or musical archive (these two factors are not unrelated), and those that consequently continue to receive scholarly attention” (*ibid.* 148). In other words, Gunckel’s account of the scene, like previous scholarship, tends to focus around bands like the Brat, Los Illegals, and the Odd Squad more so than Thee Undertakers and the Stains, and all but excludes the slew of other bands active in the scene. Gunckel’s discussion of the limitations of his framework remains invaluable, though, because it calls attention to the degree to which

connections to Asco, an art collective that has since achieved considerable domestic and international recognition, may contribute to the recognizability and scholarly interest in particular bands over others.

“*Vexing Questions*” appeared in a section of the Fall 2012 issue of *Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies* entitled “Dossier: Chicana/o Punk in East Los Angeles” alongside two more journalistic pieces that problematize the almost exclusive focus on the Vex at Self-Help Graphics and bands like Los Illegals and the Brat in previous writings on the the scene. Originally written for *New West* magazine in 1981 but published for the first time in *Aztlan*, Dan Vargas’s “No Cover,” a journalistic profile of “the four major bands” of the early East L.A. punk scene, helps to expand the conversation of punk in East L.A. by discussing not only Los Illegals and the Brat, but also Thee Undertakers and the Stains. Emphasizing the variety of musical styles, visual aesthetics, temperaments, and political ideologies of the bands, Vargas states, “each of the four bands has a very different outlook and way of thought, just like factions of the community itself” (202). Along with his admonishment of those whose “idea of East LA’s music is norteño and its artwork [...] exclusively out of a spray can” (183), Vargas’s statement challenges narratives that collapse the widely divergent styles and politics of the four bands into a single aesthetic or unified ideology, and actively refuses any attempt to essentialize Chicana/o subjectivity.

Like Vargas, Jimmy Alvarado challenges the accepted narrative of punk in East L.A. through an expanded discussion of the scene in his article, “Backyard Brats and Eastside Punks: A History of East LA’s Punk Scene.” In his discussion of the early East L.A. scene, Alvarado takes Vargas one further: while not neglecting Los Illegals and the Brat, he gives top priority to Thee Undertakers and the Stains, bands that have received significantly less attention in accounts of punk in East L.A., especially within academia. Emphasizing the importance of the Vex at Self-Help Graphics, Alvarado also calls attention to the ways in which the East L.A. scene was already taking shape prior to the opening of the Vex, as well as to the role of later Vex locations in creating networks between punks from different parts of Los Angeles and beyond. Further, Alvarado moves the conversation beyond the so-called Vex scene through a discussion of the East L.A.

backyard punk scene that began to take shape in the early 1980s and lasted for the remainder of the decade, a scene in which he was an active participant. He contends that when many of the members of his scene outgrew the backyards, a new generation of bands came in to fill the void, and that this cycle continues into the present (*ibid.* 178). Alvarado's article, which draws from years of research he has conducted for his forthcoming documentary, *Eastside Punks*, thus stands in stark contrast with accounts of punk in East L.A. that take into account only the brief existence of the Vex at Self-Help Graphics.

Habell-Pallán also responds to the fallout over the *Vexing* exhibition in “‘Death to Racism and Punk Revisionism’: Alice Bag’s Vexing Voice and the Unspeakable Influence of Canción Ranchera on Hollywood Punk.” In particular, she addresses an email that Brendan Mullen, founder of the influential Hollywood punk club the Masque, sent in response to a review of the *Vexing* exhibition, in which Alice Bag (Alicia Armendariz Velasquez), lead singer of early Hollywood punk band the Bags and an East L.A. native, repeats the idea that the Vex was founded in response to exclusion from Hollywood/Westside venues. In his email, titled “Death to Racism and Punk Revisionism,” Mullen takes umbrage at the idea that racial exclusion may have occurred in the Hollywood punk scene, instead suggesting, as Habell-Pallán states, that those who “dare to mention the presence of racialized difference” are the real racists (*ibid.* 263). She connects Mullen’s insistence on a colorblind remembrance of the Hollywood scene to Ralina Joseph’s notion of “post-identity,” in which “merely referencing race or gender, much less racialized or gendered discrimination or racialized or gendered ‘pride,’ is dismissed or attacked as outmoded, irrelevant, or even ‘racist’ or ‘sexist’” (qtd. in Habell-Pallán, “Death to Racism” 264). Joseph further suggests that these dismissals work to silence critiques of structural inequalities, in turn allowing such inequalities to continue unhindered. Habell-Pallán suggests that the Hollywood scene’s interest in “creative originality or uniqueness, supported by a discourse of individualism” over recognition of racial or ethnic difference (*ibid.* 261), as well as Mullen’s investment in “post-identity” politics, help to explain “why it has been difficult to narratively ‘speak’ the influence of Chicanas in the making of the scene” (249). She then goes on to suggest that Bag’s vocal style, considered by many as a blueprint for the emerging hardcore scene, may have been

indirectly influenced by the *estilo bravío* (“wild style”) of female singers of *canciones rancheras* (“country songs”) who Bag was exposed to as a child through her parents, both immigrants from Mexico. Most important for my purposes is Habell-Pallán’s critique of “post-identity” politics in relation to debates over the *Vexing* exhibition, which I expand on in Chapter Three.

As this literature demonstrates, the initial East Los Angeles scene and its relationship to the Hollywood scene has been a vibrant topic of discussion. Academic works that consider Chicana/o and Latina/o participation in punk outside of the early East L.A. and Hollywood scenes, however, are far fewer. One work that looks beyond East L.A. is the chapter, “When La Raza and Punk Rock Collude and Collide: Hispanics in Punk and Hardcore,” in Ensminger’s *Visual Vitriol*. In the chapter, Ensminger simultaneously perpetuates familiar narratives of the East L.A. scene while also expanding the conversation of Chicana/os and Latina/os in punk. Ensminger’s discussion of the East L.A. scene draws from Lipsitz, as well as other authors who repeat an underdog narrative, such as Kun and Gurza. He also uncritically incorporates a problematic appraisal of the scene from *Hardcore California*, in which a zine writer named Shreader describes the scene as “strange and untimely” (Ensminger misattributes the quote to Craig Lee, a founding member of the Bags, who wrote a portion of the text in *Hardcore California*, but not that which Ensminger quotes) (220). But Ensminger also challenges the limited understanding of Chicana/o involvement in punk by offering a more-or-less comprehensive list of prominent punk bands of the late 1970s and early 1980s that featured Latina/o members (215-16), as well as through a more detailed discussion of the participation of Chicana/os in the punk scenes in Austin, San Antonio, and Houston, Texas (221-23). Ensminger’s research also suggests that Chicana/o punks understood their own identities and the racial dynamics of the punk scene in vastly different ways, something that is glossed over in many other accounts of Chicana/os in punk, thus seemingly challenging essentialized notions of Chicana/o identity.

At the same time, however, by a substantial margin the longest single section of the chapter is concerned with gang violence in the punk scene. While much attention is paid to the Venice, CA hardcore punk band Suicidal Tendencies, a band that featured Mexican

American, as well as white and African American members, many of the bands discussed in this section were comprised of primarily white members and had largely white followings. That Ensminger devotes so much page space to the question of punk gangs in a chapter purportedly about the presence of Latina/os in punk betrays a stereotyped and essentialized understanding of Latina/o communities by drawing an association between gang violence within the punk scene and the presence of Latina/os in the same scene. Thus, while Ensminger claims to challenge essentialized notions of Chicana/o identity—and occasionally succeeds—his argument is too firmly rooted in essentialisms to fully succeed in what he sets out to do.

Three additional works cover Chicana/o and Latina/o involvement with punk beyond the early East L.A./Hollywood scenes—though discussion of these scenes does appear in all of these texts. In the chapter “‘Teeth-Gritting Harmony’: Punk, Hip-Hop, and Sonic Spatial Politics,” Gaye Theresa Johnson considers the ways in which Chicana/o and Latina/o punks in both the early East L.A./Hollywood scenes and in the Latina/o hardcore scene of the 1990s use punk as a way to claim space within the context of “deindustrialization, worsening poverty and racism, and the xenophobia that appeared poised to permanently destroy the futures of Black and Brown communities during the 1980s and 1990s” (126). Noting a gap in punk historiography and scholarship when it comes to people of color, she argues:

The narratives offered by Black and Chicano punk musicians and audiences transform the historiography of punk, offering a unique optic through which to understand alternative modes of self-representation and cultural expression. They provide us with alternative understandings of social and discursive space and reveal the sources of collective power that have generated new racial, sexual, and gender identities among marginalized youth. (*ibid.* 127)

Johnson’s insights into the “critical crossroads of punk, poverty, racism, and racial identity” (126) are invaluable to my own attempt to examine these intersections. At the same time, though, Johnson, like many others, reproduces a narrative of the East L.A. scene that suffers from oversimplification and lack of historical context. In “Beyond the

Screams: Latino Punkeros Contest Nativist Discourses,” Patricia Zavella offers similar arguments as Johnson. Drawing from Benedict Anderson’s notion of “imagined communities,” she states, “Latino punk lyrics, musical performances, and representations [...] when they are public become interpretive sites that foster community formation” (*ibid.* 28). Zavella focuses her discussion on Los Crudos and the Latina/o hardcore scene of the 1990s, and her work offers critical insights into the importance of community in this scene, as opposed to the emphasis on individualism in American punk scenes more broadly. Finally, Kenneth Partridge’s entry on punk in *Latin Music: Musicians, Genres, and Themes*, an encyclopedia of Latin music, offers a concise overview of the East L.A./Hollywood scenes, 1990s Latina/o hardcore, and other bands with Chicana/o and Latina/o members that had loose associations to punk, such as Rage Against the Machine and At the Drive-In. Again, though, Partridge recycles an oversimplified narrative of the East L.A. scene that is desperately lacking in historical context, as well as citations.

My review of the existing literature on punk and the place of Chicana/os and Latina/os in punk scenes reveals several gaps in the scholarship that I attend to throughout the dissertation. First, there is an urgent need to consider the presence—not just influence—of people of color in American punk scenes across punk’s history. The overemphasis on whiteness in many previous studies of punk contributes to the erasure of punks of color, and my study offers a corrective to this erasure (although my focus on Chicana/os and Latina/os allows for only a partial picture of people of color in punk; similar studies are still needed for other groups). My study also offers a much-needed expansion of the small but growing body of scholarship devoted to Chicana/os and Latina/os in punk, which has presented a productive but limited discussion clustered around a small set of musicians and artists from two scenes. Thus, whereas previous research presents only snapshots of predominantly Chicana/o and Latina/o punk scenes, I provide a long view, making links between several scenes across nearly forty years. Doing so allows for a closer consideration of issues that receive limited attention elsewhere, such as the impact of discourses of race on punk historiography and the attempts of Chicana/o punk bands to navigate the recording industry, as well as the particular ways that Chicana/o and Latina/o punks engage with DIY practices.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

The primary theoretical underpinning of this dissertation is Michael Omi and Howard Winant's theory of racial formation. They define racial formation as "the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed" (Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation* 2nd ed. 55). Their notion of racial formation is premised on an understanding of race as an unstable and constantly changing "complex of social meanings" (*ibid.* 55). Omi and Winant suggest that racial formation involves a series of racial projects that do the ideological work of linking structural approaches to racial dynamics to representations of race (*ibid.* 56). They argue that the concept of racial projects can be used to analyze racial formation at the macro-level of "racial policy-making, state activity, and collective action," at the micro-level of everyday experience, and "across historical time" (*ibid.* 58).

Omi and Winant propose this theory as a way of studying race that diverges from previous paradigms, such as those of ethnicity, class, or nation. Of particular importance to my project, they argue that ethnicity theory is premised on a flawed analogy between racial minorities, such as African Americans and Latina/os, and white European ethnic groups, which disregards social and structural barriers that prevent the former groups from being as readily assimilated as the latter (*Racial Formation* 2nd ed. 20). They state, therefore, that many people belonging to racial minority groups "rejected *ethnic* identity in favor of a more radical *racial* identity which demanded group rights and recognition" (*ibid.* 20, italics in original). Further, they argue that around 1970, the ethnicity paradigm became aligned with a neoconservative agenda that considered the acknowledgment of group rights through "affirmative" antidiscrimination policies to be antidemocratic, and argued therefore that states should guarantee equality only on an individual level. As such, in my project I will consider the second-class treatment of Chicana/os and Latina/os as a matter of racial, rather than ethnic, inequality, both as an acknowledgment of the ways in which Chicana/os and Latina/os have been historically viewed as racially distinct from whites, and as a rejection of a neoconservative agenda that would seek to obscure the immense differences between racial and ethnic inequality. The work of Omi and Winant is especially important to my project because it points to the need to identify the

particular racial projects at work in a given historical moment in order to confront racism and the exclusion of certain groups from the national imaginary. Further, they stress the importance of contextualizing racial projects at a given time through an understanding of the evolution of past racial formations.

Leo R. Chavez offers one useful way of theorizing the racial projects currently working to shape discourses about Latina/os in the United States. He argues that much popular discourse about Latina/os is shaped by what he calls the Latino Threat Narrative. In this narrative it is taken for granted that Latina/os, unlike other immigrant groups who eventually assimilate into the nation, are “unwilling or incapable of integrating, of becoming part of the national community,” and thus pose a threat to American culture (*Latino Threat* 2). Importantly, he claims that this narrative is directed not only against new immigrants, but against Latina/os more broadly, as the narrative holds that even subsequent generations of Latina/os resist assimilation. He argues that the Latino Threat Narrative is closely linked to “the contested terrain of citizenship in a world where national borders are increasingly permeable” (*ibid.* 4), citing the work of reactionary writers like Samuel Huntington, as well as the media spectacle of the Minuteman Project. Chavez’s work will thus provide me with a useful framework for exploring how racialized understandings of Chicana/os and Latina/os contribute to their exclusion from cultural history and political life.

1.5 Methodology

In order to examine Chicana/o and Latina/o involvement in American punk scenes from a media historical perspective, I rely upon two primary methods of research. First, much of the evidence from which I build my arguments comes from open-ended interviews I conducted with participants in the various scenes under examination. Second, to corroborate and supplement the information provided by my interviewees, I also draw from a variety of primary and secondary historical documents, including audio recordings, show flyers, articles and interviews, and other ephemera, as well as oral histories, retrospective interviews, various online sources, and the growing body of scholarship devoted to Chicana/o and Latina/o participation in punk scenes. I will now discuss each method in greater detail, including the problems and limitations encountered

in each, and then turn to a discussion of the historiographical concerns in constructing a narrative from the evidence accumulated.

Between July 2012 and September 2013, I conducted approximately twenty interviews with participants in the four scenes under examination in this study. The majority of those whom I interviewed were/are musicians who performed or perform with bands connected to the scenes in question, but my interviewees also included an artist/writer, a promoter, and the executive director of *Razorcake*, a major punk fanzine. Many of the musicians interviewed also participated or participate in their scenes in multiple ways, whether by designing flyer art, photographing shows, making zines, running record or tape labels, or booking shows. The majority of my interviews took place in person during a research trip to Los Angeles in August 2013, but I also conducted four interviews by email and two by phone (I was also able to conduct in-person follow-up interviews to one email and one phone interview while in Los Angeles). I prepared a unique and tailored set of questions to provide a loose structure for each interview, but the interviews were largely conversational, with each respondent's answers guiding the actual course of the interview. There were, however, several general themes that I attempted to address in each interview, for example: the meaning and significance of terms such as "punk" and "DIY" to each respondent; the importance of Chicana/o and Latina/o identity and politics for bands and scenes; the significance of singing in Spanish. While I hoped to interview at least five or more participants from each of the four scenes under study in order to incorporate a variety of perspectives on each, I was ultimately unable to do so for every scene, whether this was because I was unable to locate additional contacts, or because those I contacted could not or did not wish to be interviewed. I was only able to interview four people attached to the initial East Los Angeles scene, two from the 1980s East L.A. backyard scene, and one from the 1990s Latina/o hardcore scene. The current South L.A. scene was the only scene for which I was able to interview more than five people. Inevitably, this complicates my study, making the study particularly dependent on historical documents for those scenes where I was unable to interview a representative range of participants, and requiring several significant historiographical decisions.

To supplement the information gathered through my interviews—and, especially, to address the gaps left by my inability to gather a representative sample of interviewees for particular scenes—I also draw extensively from a variety of historical documents and artifacts. The primary source material from which I draw includes: audio recordings and accompanying artwork and liner notes; contemporary newspaper, magazine, and fanzine articles and interviews; concert announcements and flyers; video recordings of live performances; music videos (a very small pool for the scenes I investigate); and, for newer bands, websites, blogs, and Facebook accounts. Much of my research took place online, trolling YouTube, blogs, Facebook pages, etc. for any traces of bands and scenes under examination, and combing through databases to find reproductions of magazine and newspaper articles. I made frequent use of online stores to purchase audio recordings and zines directly from bands, labels, writers, and publishers, and used sites such as eBay and Discogs to track down copies of out-of-print zines and records. Additionally, in February 2012 I conducted archival research in the California Ethnic and Multicultural Archives at the University of California, Santa Barbara, which holds the Carrillo (Sean) Collection, the Gamboa (Diane) Collection, and the Self-Help Graphics & Art Archives, and in May of 2015, I visited Chicago's Harold Washington Library Center, which holds a complete run of the long-running punk fanzine, *Maximum Rocknroll*, as well as many issues of the important Los Angeles zine, *Flipside*. I also consulted a range of secondary sources, including: multiple book-length histories and oral histories of punk and punk scenes; retrospective interviews and oral histories published in punk fanzines such as *Maximum Rocknroll* and *Razorcake*; video and audio documentaries and podcasts; multiple exhibition catalogs; and the small but growing body of scholarship dedicated to Chicana/o and Latina/o participation in American punk scenes.

As mentioned above, my inability to interview a representative sampling of participants in each of the four scenes that comprise this study, along with the scarcity of historical documents and artifacts for particular scenes, meant that I had to make certain choices about to how best to approach my analysis of each scene with significant historiographical ramifications. For instance, the scholarship on Chicana/os and Latina/os in punk tends to concentrate mostly on the initial East Los Angeles scene, and specifically on two bands from that scene, Los Illegals and the Brat. I expand the

conversation to also include two more influential but seldom discussed bands, Thee Undertakers and the Stains, utilizing information from interviews with the bands published in *Razorcake* and two recent articles in *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies*, as well as my own interview with a member of Thee Undertakers. However, because there is still significantly more information available about the Brat and Los Illegals than the Stains and Thee Undertakers, my analysis still skews toward the bands already most frequently discussed; likewise, because there is so little information available about any bands from the scene beyond the four listed above, and because I was not able to reach members of any of the bands, my analysis excludes all of these bands. The East L.A. backyard scene of the 1980s presents its own historiographical challenges in that most of the readily accessible information about the scene comes through one person, Jimmy Alvarado. Himself a participant in the scene, Alvarado has written two articles specifically about the scene for *Razorcake*, as well as discussing it within a longer article on punk in East L.A. published in *Aztlán*. He is also one of only two people from the scene I was able to interview. Relying so heavily upon the memory and opinions of one person—and a person with a vested interest in drawing attention to the scene he was a part of—obviously presents a dilemma, and so arguments I make about the scene are more tentative than for other scenes where information from a variety of sources is more readily available. The 1990s Latina/o hardcore scene presented a particular challenge to my study, which otherwise focuses mainly on punk in Los Angeles. Although a number of bands in the scene, which was geographically dispersed and thus bound more by ideology than locality, were located in Los Angeles, information about the bands from Los Angeles is scarce, and I was only able to interview one participant from the scene (although he was a member of several different bands). As such, my analysis of this scene shifts focus from Los Angeles to the predominantly Chicana/o and Latina/o Pilsen and Little Village areas of Southwest Chicago and, in particular, to Los Crudos, a highly influential band in the scene, about which there is significantly more information available. Finally, my analysis of the current South Los Angeles scene is complicated precisely by the fact that this scene is still continually changing and evolving. Bands that existed when I conducted my interviews have since broken up and new bands have formed, venues have closed and new ones opened, and the scene continues to attract more

and more outside attention. Thus, the narrative of the scene I present in this project is likely to be out of date by the time of publication, and arguments I make about the scene may be subject to revision as new information becomes available.

1.6 Overview of Chapters

In Chapter Two, “‘Chicano Punk’: A History in Four Parts,” I present an extended historical overview of Chicana/o and Latina/o participation in Los Angeles and occasionally Chicago punk scenes, in order to argue that existing accounts of Chicana/o and Latina/o involvement in punk, both popular and academic, present a narrative that is both too narrow and too neat. Focusing primarily on the initial East L.A. scene, the majority of these accounts present an underdog tale in which East L.A. Chicana/o punks, excluded from Westside clubs, created the Vex, a performance series held in an East L.A. arts center, which in turn enabled an unprecedented degree of exchange between the East and West sides of Los Angeles. Though compelling, the emergence of this tale as the dominant narrative of Chicana/os in punk obscures the range and complexity of Chicana/o involvement in the early Los Angeles punk scene, and in subsequent scenes in the decades that followed. Following Mimi Thi Nguyen’s critique of riot grrrl historiography, I argue that the nearly exclusive focus on the early East L.A. scene risks containing a Chicana/o and Latina/o presence in punk to a single moment of intervention. A more expansive accounting of Latina/os in punk simultaneously complicates the dominant narrative (and singular notions of “Chicano Punk”), and decenters both the white, middle-class male as the assumed subject within punk and Hollywood/suburbia as the primary loci of punk in L.A.

In the following chapter, “See No Color, Hear No Color, Speak No Color: Colorblindness in Los Angeles Punk Historiography,” I consider the historiographical implications of debates about the existence of racism in the early Los Angeles punk scene, as well as the degree to which these debates are at times shaped by discourses of colorblindness. As an underdog story of East L.A. punk became cemented in academic texts and museum exhibitions in the 2000s, participants in the initial Hollywood scene began to speak out against a narrative that they felt unfairly accused members of their scene of practicing racial discrimination. In defending their scene (and their own legacies) against these

supposedly unwarranted accusations, Hollywood punks sometimes employ rhetorical strategies that mirror a neoliberal discourse of colorblindness and reactionary understandings of historical revisionism. Thus, while the initial Hollywood scene is touted as an egalitarian moment that moved beyond the social and racial hierarchies of the larger society, in their desire to control its history Hollywood punks unintentionally lapse into language that serves to perpetuate rather than to challenge racial inequality by dismissing the experiences of those who suggest that exclusion took place. Building from arguments presented by Michelle Habell-Pallán (“Death to Revisionism”), I argue that Hollywood punks’ defense of their scene works toward the continued exclusion of certain stories and voices from L.A. punk history and demonstrates the pervasiveness and insidiousness of colorblindness as a racial common sense.

In the next two chapters I explore the ways in which race impacts the production and circulation of music created by Chicana/o and Latina/o punks. To this end, I consider two streams: first, in Chapter Four, “The Racial Limits of Genre Discourse: Chicana/o Punks in the Recording Industry,” the attempts of early East Los Angeles bands to work within the mainstream music industry; and second, in Chapter Five, “‘Making Do’: Chicana/o and Latina/o DIY Cultural Production,” bands from East and South Los Angeles and Chicago that employ Do-It-Yourself approaches to music-making. Following the work of Keith Negus and Deborah Pacini Hernandez, in Chapter Four I argue that the experiences of early East Los Angeles Chicana/o punk bands working within the major label system were shaped by discourses of race that influence both understandings of genre and the structure of the industry. More specifically, I contend that East L.A. bands were constrained by racially bound understandings of genre that treat Latina/o musics as “foreign.” Further, I argue that the assumptions of music industry personnel about who Latina/o musicians are, as well as who their “natural” audience is, likewise contribute to the creation and maintenance of societal fragmentation along ethnic and racial lines. The examples of Los Illegals and the Brat are particularly illuminating. While these bands wished to challenge stereotyped notions about Chicana/o communities, by constraining these bands within rigid definitions of “Latin” music and by only marketing them to Chicana/o and Latina/o communities, the effect of the racialized assumptions of

producers and managers was instead to contribute to the continuation of discourses of Chicana/os and Latina/os as perpetually foreign.

In Chapter Five I turn from the experiences of early East L.A. bands working inside the mainstream music industry to the subsequent 1980s East L.A. backyard scene, the Latina/o hardcore scene of the 1990s, and the current South L.A. scene to examine how racial and economic marginalization of Latina/o communities influence the ways in which punk bands from predominantly Latina/o and working-class neighborhoods employ Do-It-Yourself, or DIY, approaches to cultural production. While a DIY approach to music-making is generally positioned as an ideological opposition to the mainstream music industry, the ways in which many Latina/o bands employ practices that might be considered DIY suggest that they do so as much out of necessity as by choice. Scholars such as Alan O'Connor suggest that the decision to play music with no commercial value makes DIY cultural production a necessity, whether this decision is ideologically motivated or not. I argue, on the other hand, that the question of necessity is complicated by factors such as race and class: while for white middle-class punks, the decision to play non-commercial music necessitates DIY methods, for others from racially- and economically-marginalized communities, a DIY approach is often mandated by limited access to material resources. Drawing from the work of Michel de Certeau and Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, I therefore argue that for predominantly Chicana/o and Latina/o punk scenes, DIY may be as much a “making do” with limited resources as a willful refusal of the mainstream music industry.

Finally, in the concluding chapter I pull together the threads running through the preceding chapters to argue that the history of Chicana/o and Latina/o participation in American punk scenes has often been marked by various forms of exclusion and marginalization. Chief among these is the marginalization in or exclusion from punk historiography and scholarship. However, attention has recently been drawn to East Los Angeles punk scenes through two corporately-sponsored documentary projects: the “LA Chicano Punk” exhibit in Scion’s iQ Project Museum, which focuses on the initial East L.A. scene, and Angela Boatwright’s *East Los* documentary, a part of the Vans shoe company’s #LIVINGOFFTHEWALL series, which focuses on the current East L.A.

backyard scene. While on the surface it may seem like a positive step that greater recognition is being brought to these predominantly Chicana/o and Latina/o punk scenes, I argue that both projects ultimately operate within discourses of race that work to maintain rather than to challenge the existing racial status quo. Further, with the financial means to become the most visible sources of information about these scenes, these projects, which are generally uncritical and lacking in historical context, obscure the work of previous scholars and historians who provide more critical and nuanced presentations of Chicana/o and Latina/o punk history. This again reinforces the need for a thorough and sustained study of Chicana/o and Latina/o punk scenes, tracing the presence of brown punks from punk's emergence in the United States through to the present. I now offer such a history in Chapter Two.

Chapter 2

2 “Chicano Punk”: A History in Four Parts

Chicano and Latino punks have been there since the beginning in Los Angeles, but the lyrical content wasn't always focused on those communities' experiences. The Brat did a great song called “The Wolf.” It's in English, but it's talking about immigration... The Plugz did “La Bamba” with altered lyrics in the 1970s. There was Huasipungo. Dogma Mundista... If you put all of those pieces together, you can create a narrative or a lineage. (Martín Sorrondeguy, “Martin Sorrondeguy on Los Crudos' Reissues and Latino Punk History”)

If your idea of East LA's music is norteño and its artwork is exclusively out of a spray can and you are quite comfortable with that opinion, you will only be one of the millions who think and feel like you do and whose minds probably aren't going to be changed by one pinche article written by me or anyone else for that matter. (Dan Vargas, “No Cover”)

Drawing from evidence provided through an extended historical overview of Chicana/o and Latina/o participation in Los Angeles (and occasionally Chicago) punk scenes, I argue in this chapter that existing accounts of Chicana/o and Latina/o involvement in punk, both popular and academic, present a narrative that is both too narrow and too neat. These accounts generally take the form of an underdog tale in which a small group of East L.A. Chicana/o punk groups, excluded from Westside clubs, created the Vex, a performance series held in an East L.A. arts center that enabled an unprecedented East/West exchange by drawing Westside crowds into the heart of East Los Angeles. As compelling as this narrative may be, its position as the dominant narrative of Chicana/os in punk obscures the range and complexity of Chicana/o involvement in the early Los Angeles punk scene, and in subsequent scenes in the decades that followed. Following Mimi Thi Nguyen in her critique of riot grrrl historiography, I argue that the almost exclusive focus on the early East L.A. scene risks containing Chicana/o and Latina/o involvement in punk to a single moment of intervention in which punk facilitated a multicultural utopia, and in so doing obscures punk's continually troubled relationship to race. A more expansive accounting simultaneously complicates the dominant narrative of Chicana/o and Latina/o participation in Los Angeles punk scenes (and singular notions of “Chicano Punk”), and decenters both the white, middle-class male as the assumed

subject within punk and Hollywood/suburbia as the primary loci of punk in the Los Angeles metropolitan area.

To read many accounts of punk in the United States, both popular and academic,¹⁰ one may get the impression that Chicana/o or Latina/o contributions to U.S. punk history peaked in East Los Angeles, California between March and November of 1980, the brief existence of the Vex at Self-Help Graphics and Art. A closer examination of the historical record, however, reveals that Chicana/o and Latina/o participation in punk stretches back further, continues much longer, and is generally much wider than such accounts allow. As David Ensminger suggests, many notable bands throughout the history of punk have featured Chicana/o and Latina/o members, dating as far back as the first lineup of the proto-punk band the New York Dolls (215), which included Colombian-born drummer, Billy Murcia. Michelle Habel-Pallán traces this lineage back even further, noting that Dave Marsh introduced the term “punk rock” “into the lexicon of the rock discourse” in 1971 in reference to Question Mark & the Mysterians, a 1960s rock band from Saginaw, MI, whose members were all Chicano (*Loca Motion* 151). To limit a Chicana/o presence in punk to this narrow time period and single, isolated location is also to dismiss the existence of other Southern California bands such as the Zeros, a band formed by four teenage Chicanos in Chula Vista, CA in 1976, and the Reactors, a San Bernardino, CA band formed in 1978, or to inaccurately identify bands such as the Plugz and the Bags with the East L.A. scene, despite the insistence of members of these bands that they belonged to the early Hollywood scene, not to the East L.A. scene. There has often been a notable presence in punk scenes in areas with large Chicana/o and Latina/o populations (for instance, early in Houston and Austin, TX), and the growth and spread of Chicana/o and Latina/o populations over the past several decades has extended the reach of Chicana/o and Latina/o participation in punk scenes (even into Canada, with

¹⁰ For popular examples, see: Spitz and Mullen, Kun (“Vex Populi”), Pell, the PBS documentary, *Chicano Rock!*, the “East L.A. Punk” feature of the *American Sabor* exhibition, and the Scion iQ Project Museum’s “LA Chicano Punk” exhibit. For scholarly examples, see: Lipsitz, Gunckel (“Vex Marks”), Kun (“Space”), and Reyes and Waldman.

bands like Pura Manía in Vancouver, BC, Desgraciados in Calgary, AB, and Illegal in Montreal, QC).

While several pages could be dedicated simply to listing punk bands that have featured Chicana/o and Latina/o members, that is not my purpose in this chapter. Rather, the purpose is threefold: first, to establish a timeline—albeit a necessarily incomplete one—of the particular scenes under analysis; to challenge particular notions about Chicana/o and Latina/o participation in Southern California punk scenes—namely, that participation was limited mostly to the initial East Los Angeles scene and that a singular set of politics or aesthetics can be ascribed to bands with Chicana/o or Latina/o members; and finally through the two preceding goals to decenter Los Angeles punk history, as well as whiteness as taken for granted in discussions of punk. In this study, I focus on four scenes: 1) the East Los Angeles punk scene of the late 1970s and early 1980s, which was comprised of bands such as the Brat, Thee Undertakers, the Stains, Los Illegals, as well as numerous others, and for which, at least briefly, the Vex at Self-Help Graphics served as a focal point; 2) the East Los Angeles backyard scene of the early to late 1980s, a younger scene focused largely around parties held in neighborhood backyards due to a lack of punk venues; 3) the Latina/o hardcore scene of the 1990s, which included a geographically dispersed network of bands, including a number from Los Angeles, responding to legislation aimed at Latina/o communities and a related rise in anti-Latina/o sentiment in the United States; and 4) the currently thriving scene based largely out of South Los Angeles, which gained traction through local cassette label Silenzio Statico, and is now recognized throughout the international punk community. By focusing on the particular scenes I have chosen, I do not intend to dismiss the contributions of other Chicana/os and Latina/os to the history of punk, nor do I wish to suggest that there were/are not other scenes with a strong Chicana/o or Latina/o presence. Rather, I have chosen these scenes for study in order to continue the discussion of Chicana/o and Latina/o punks in Los Angeles—although with a necessary sidestep into the Pilsen/Little Village scene in Chicago. These scenes represent four particularly visible and coherent moments of scenes largely organized by, and in some cases for, Chicana/os and Latina/os, with a degree of continuity between each, and tracing the lineage of these scenes provides a fuller picture of Chicana/o and Latina/o participation in the history of

punk in Los Angeles. Los Angeles is a particularly fruitful site for examination because its early scenes have been very influential in the larger American punk scene, and because it is one of the primary population centers for Chicana/os and Latina/os in the United States.

2.1 Defining “Scene”

Richard Peterson and Andy Bennett observe that the term “scene” has been used in journalistic and everyday contexts since at least the 1940s to describe a range of musical communities and associated lifestyles (1-2). Increasingly, though, the term is also “used by academic researchers to designate the contexts in which clusters of producers, musicians, and fans collectively share their common musical tastes and collectively distinguish themselves from others” (*ibid.* 1). Will Straw has made several important contributions to the pursuit of a theory of scenes, beginning with a 1991 article in which he distinguishes between “musical communities” and “musical scenes.” Communities, he argues, are defined by relatively stable bodies or participants “whose involvement in music takes the form of an ongoing exploration of one or more musical idioms said to be rooted within a geographically specific historical heritage,” whereas scenes are “cultural space[s] in which a range of musical practices coexist, interacting with each other within a variety of processes of differentiation, and according to widely varying trajectories of change and cross-fertilization” (*ibid.* 373). Thus, while both communities and scenes exist within a given geographical space, compared to communities, participants in musical scenes are more attentive to “processes of historical change occurring within a larger international musical culture” (*ibid.* 373), often forming “affective alliances” (a term he borrows from Larry Grossberg) with participants in scenes based in different localities (374).

Straw posits his definition of scene as a point of departure from that offered by Barry Shank in a conference paper delivered in 1988, which perhaps aligned more closely with what Straw refers to as communities. Shank develops his notion of scenes in his study of musical cultures and practices in Austin, TX from the 1960s to the early 1990s, where he argues that “[t]he constitutive feature of local scenes of live musical performance is their evident display of semiotic disruption, their potentially dangerous overproduction and

exchange of musicalized signs of identity and community” (122). In other words, musical scenes are built upon the exchange of signs (“more than can be understood”) between participating musicians, and between the musicians and their audiences, creating “momentary transformations within dominant cultural meanings” (*ibid.* 122). Shank further develops his theory of scenes through questions of identity and desire rooted in psychoanalysis, particularly the work of Jacques Lacan. At the same time, however, he also often uses the term in ways that are less theoretical and more descriptive, resembling more closely the journalistic or everyday usages referred to by Peterson and Bennett. In particular, at times he uses “Austin music scene” as an all-encompassing descriptor of the various communities built around live musical performance that make up his study, whereas at other times he refers to more specific, often genre-based and temporally-bound communities such as the punk scene or the progressive country scene. Whether referring to the Austin scene as a whole, or to the various smaller scenes that exist or have existed within it, his usage of “scene” encompasses not only musicians, but also audiences, critics, radio DJs, promoters, and the physical spaces in which community-building occurs, such as performance venues and record stores, in this sense resembling Howard Becker’s notion of “art worlds.”

My own usage of “scene” draws from the work of Straw and Shank, along with other scholars such as Peterson and Bennett, Keith Kahn-Harris, and Mark J.V. Olson, but I am concerned less with advancing a universal theory of scenes as I am with generating more precise descriptions of the various scenes that make up my study. To this end, following the example of Kahn-Harris¹¹ in his study of Brazilian death metal band Sepultura, my usage of the term is shaped by both academic theorizations and more everyday uses of the concept, with special attention paid to the ways in which punks themselves use the term. Scene is often used by punks to refer to musical communities that coalesce within particular localities, as well as around particular genres, lifestyles, political ideologies, etc. Punks commonly refer to local scenes, such as the D.C. scene, the New York scene, or the Los Angeles scene, but also to increasingly localized scenes within these cities,

¹¹ Originally published under the name Keith Harris.

such as the Hollywood and East L.A. scenes in Los Angeles, or the Pilsen scene in Chicago. At the same time, the term is often used to refer to regional scenes within the U.S., such as the Northern California, Southern California, East Coast, or Midwest scenes, to national scenes (U.S., U.K., Finnish, Malaysian, etc.), to regional scenes on a continental level (Scandinavian, Southeast Asian, Latin American, etc.), and also to an all-encompassing “international” or “global” scene. Scene is also often used to distinguish between communities or networks formed around sub-genres of punk, such as hardcore, pop-punk, garage, etc., or to describe communities bound by political ideologies or identity categories, like the anarcho-punk, straight edge, or riot grrrl scenes.

When scene is used to describe such a broad range of activity, trying to locate a single, static definition of the term seems like a fool’s errand. Instead, I suggest a more malleable understanding of scenes, built upon some general observations but able to bend to incorporate multiple types of musical communities. Following Shank, I understand musical scenes as collections of musicians, audiences, critics, artists, zine makers, photographers, promoters, DJs, record store proprietors, etc. who share some common interest or purpose. While scenes may form within a particular locality, such as the first wave East L.A. scene, the East L.A. backyard punk scene, and the South L.A. scene, they may also be dispersed across geographic space, as in the Latino hardcore scene of the 1990s. Though three of the four scenes I investigate are based in a specific locality, I also take Straw’s point that participants in local scenes often interact and form affective alliances with participants in scenes in other localities (Peterson and Bennett use the term “translocal scenes” to describe such interaction (8)). It is also necessary to recognize that the physical boundaries of locally situated scenes are often permeable; as Olson argues, “the place of the scene itself does not necessarily correlate with the boundaries of its geographical referent, for the reach of its effects does not respect geographic borders” (275). These points will provide a general framework as I attempt to describe the four scenes in question in ways that account for the specificities of each.

2.2 The East Los Angeles First Wave: 1978-1985

In the late 1970s, inspired by proto-punk acts such as the Stooges and the New York Dolls, first-wave punk groups like the Ramones and the Sex Pistols, and glam acts such

as David Bowie and T.Rex, a number of new musical groups began to take form in East Los Angeles. Among the earliest were the Stains, Thee Undertakers, the Brat, and Los Illegals. These groups were followed soon after by bands like the Clichés, the Odd Squad, the Girl Scoutz, the Warriors, Violent Children, the Snappers, the Rentz, and Why Nut (Alvarado, “Backyard Brats” 166). Because of a lack of more traditional venues catering to rock music in East L.A. at the time, many of these bands started by playing such venues as backyard parties,¹² car shows hosted by local lowrider clubs, and rented halls. The scene eventually found a temporary focal point with the Vex at Self-Help Graphics and Art. Initially created as a series of twice-monthly shows held from March to November of 1980, the Vex later existed as a series of stand-alone clubs, moving from location to location until finally closing in 1983. My analysis of the scene focuses primarily on what East L.A. journalist Dan Vargas calls “the four major bands” out of the early East L.A. scene, the Stains, Thee Undertakers, the Brat, and Los Illegals, largely out of necessity, as these were the bands to leave the most material traces. However, it is important to acknowledge the existence of the other East L.A. bands mentioned above in order to give a more complete picture of the scene.

According to much of what has been written about punk in East Los Angeles in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the epicenter of the East L.A. punk scene was the Vex at Self-Help Graphics. As I will discuss shortly, some such as Jimmy Alvarado, East L.A. punk historian and participant in the 1980s East L.A. backyard scene, call this notion into question, but the Vex at Self-Help Graphics did play an important role in providing some coherence to the scene, and in bringing Westside and suburban bands and audiences into East L.A. The founding of the Vex is likewise a highly contentious subject: while many cite exclusion of Eastside bands from Westside venues as the reason for the creation of the Vex, some from the initial Hollywood punk scene object to this idea because they believe it paints their scene as racist (I will discuss this debate in detail in Chapter Three); additionally, as Jimmy Alvarado says, “The minute details regarding the exact origins of

¹² Backyard parties were already a staple performance space for East L.A. rock bands, but the general preference at the time was for heavy metal in the vein of bands like Led Zeppelin and Deep Purple.

the Vex and the level of involvement of its various participants remain subject to much debate even among those directly involved at the club's inception" ("Backyard Brats" 166). While I dare not attempt to offer a definitive answer to this debate, evidence does seem to support Alvarado's claim that "the club appears to have initially been a collaborative effort between [Willie] Herrón and Joe 'Vex' Suquette" (*ibid.* 166). With the permission of director Sister Karen Bocalero, in March of 1980 Herrón, lead singer of Los Illegals, and Suquette initiated a series of events under the "Vex" name in the second-floor hall of Self-Help Graphics and Arts (*ibid.* 166), an East Los Angeles arts organization located at the corner of Brooklyn (now Cesar Chavez Avenue) and Gage (Kun, "Space" 21).¹³ Suquette states that his interest in the Vex was to expose the East L.A. community to different styles of music than what they were used to hearing, and Herrón says that his purpose was to promote local acts (Alvarado, "Backyard Brats" 166). The first Vex show provided a fertile meeting ground not only for musicians, but also for artists and writers, and Teresa Covarrubias of the Brat suggests that this spirit of community continued throughout the Vex's existence at Self-Help Graphics. She states:

[I]t wasn't just the music, there were poets and artists there. It was like this one big community and it just felt like this pivotal point to me [...] It was a really positive, really empowering experience just to be around all those people with like minds that were absolutely my peers. They looked like me, they even lived in the same neighborhood as me, were on the same wavelength" (*ibid.* 167).

The Vex has also been celebrated as creating a bridge between the predominantly Chicana/o Eastside scene and the whiter Westside scene (a narrative I will examine more closely in Chapter Three). Sean Carrillo, for instance, states:

Now Latino bands were playing Hollywood clubs while Hollywood bands were playing East L.A., and everywhere the musicians went the fans followed. The punk scene had done the impossible. It had accomplished what few cultural

¹³ This building previously housed the Catholic Youth Organization, which itself hosted many performances by East L.A. rock 'n' roll and R&B bands during the 1950s and 1960s (Goldman M6).

movements before it had been able to do: it attracted people from all over town to see Latino bands, and it brought musicians from all over the city to a location deep in the heart of East L.A. (42)

In October of 1980, Herrón withdrew from the Vex project, as his performance and recording schedule made it difficult to remain involved (Herrón and Velo “Los Illegals” 45), and Suquette continued to hold the event at Self-Help Graphics until November 22, 1980, when an unruly crowd caused significant property damage and destroyed a number of works of art held in the building (Alvarado, “Sick, Pt. I” 59).

While the importance of the Vex at Self-Help Graphics to the East L.A. scene cannot be underestimated, it is also important to recognize that this first iteration of the Vex was not the starting point of the Eastside scene, nor was it the only venue on the Eastside to host punk shows. A conversation between Jimmy Alvarado and Tracy Garcia of Thee Undertakers is revealing in this regard:

Alvarado: You mentioned to me once that the Vex was just a club and East L.A. was a scene, and there was a differentiation between the two.

Garcia: Well, because the Vex *was* just a club. The scene was any place you could play.¹⁴ When Joe Suquette had Hot Rod Productions [a promotional business], he got us all these weird little shows, but it was always based at these halls where they would have quinceañeras and all this stuff. But when Joe got The Vex at Self Help, everybody goes, “Oh, that’s the scene.” Wait a minute. We’ve been playing since ’77/78 and we didn’t do the Vex until ’80. We were all over the place. We did this before the Vex. (Reyes, Naranjo, and Garcia, “Thee Undertakers” 36, italics in original)

In addition to car shows, backyard parties, and rented halls, punk shows were also happening in a number of other Eastside locations. For instance, Garcia recalls playing several shows at Rudy’s Pasta House in Montebello (*ibid.* 47), a venue that Stuart

¹⁴ Compared to the theoretical definitions of “scene” offered by the various scholars discussed above, this statement indicates a different perception of what constitutes a scene among participants.

Goldman says typically “alternate[d] between disco, MOR groups like Tierra, Johnny Martinez and His Salsa Machine, and ‘special’ entertainments [exotic dancers]” (M6). As Colin Gunckel notes, Richard Duardo of Fatima Records also “began hosting regular gigs at his Hecho en Aztlán print studio in Highland Park” in 1979 (“Vexing Questions” 135). Jesus Velo of Los Illegals credits Duardo’s shows as the inspiration for the Vex; he states: “Richard Duardo was the real catalyst; his shows really inspired the Vex to get going. This in turn solidified the ELA groups and they were eventually able to get into places like the Whisky. ... We owe him a debt of gratitude” (qtd. in Gunckel, “Vexing Questions” 135).

In addition to these other venues that existed prior to and concurrent with the Vex at Self-Help Graphics and Art, it is also necessary to acknowledge that after its initial run at Self-Help Graphics, Suquette transformed the Vex into an actual club, with several locations between 1981 and 1984. According to Suquette, the first location of Club Vex opened in February of 1981, at the corner of Brooklyn and Mott in Boyle Heights (Interview). Suquette says the Vex existed in this location for eight or nine months, until an East L.A. teen was killed in a drive-by shooting across the street from the Vex during a show (the incident would inspire the Stains’ “Gang Related Death”). Following this location, he moved the Vex to another on Oak and Washington in Downtown L.A., but says that he had to move out after a year because he did not have a strong lease, at which point he moved to a final location on Soto and Huntington Drive in El Sereno (Interview), which hosted its final shows on September 2nd and 3rd, 1983 (Alvarado, “Backyard Brats” 170). While some, such as Rudy Medina of the Brat (Covarrubias and Medina 67), felt that the later Vex locations lacked the sense of community that existed at the Vex at Self-Help Graphics, Alvarado argues that “the stated intention of integrating and intermingling does seem to have reached full fruition at the [Brooklyn and Mott] location” (“Backyard Brats” 169). While Suquette notes that many notable bands, such as Bad Religion, the Adolescents, T.S.O.L., Black Flag, the Circle Jerks, and Social Distortion played the Brooklyn and Mott location, he insists that he always tried to mix East L.A. bands with bands from other parts of the Los Angeles area, as well as with touring bands. He states, “My whole thing was to work with the bands from here [...] I always gave the bands from the area help, because they needed help, they needed recognition” (Interview).

Tracy Garcia, for instance, recalls opening for D.O.A., a hardcore band from Vancouver, Canada, and being complimented by the singer afterwards; he states, “Whoa, a Canadian band telling an East LA band they’re great? Hey, loved it” (qtd. in Alvarado, “Backyard Brats” 170). After a thirty-year absence, Suquette opened a new Vex location in August of 2013, again in El Sereno, although at the time of writing this location also appears to be closed.

Members of the Stains, from the Boyle Heights neighborhood of Los Angeles, first formed a rock group in 1974, but upon hearing the Ramones’ first album in 1976, they quickly adapted to the emerging punk sound (Alvarado, “Backyard Brats” 160). By 1978, the group achieved a stable line-up when founding members Jesus “Jesse Fixx” Amezquita (bass) and Robert Becerra (guitar) recruited Jerry “Atric” Castellanos on vocals and Tony Romero on drums. By 1980, Amezquita, Castellanos, and Romero had all left the band, leaving Becerra to form a new lineup, which featured Gilbert Berumen on drums, Ceasar Viscarra on bass, and Rudy Navarro on vocals (*ibid.* 161). Alvarado describes their metal-tinged brand of hardcore as “a visceral style rife with heavy riffage, wild guitar leads, and lyrics obsessed with life’s dark edges,” and adds that they “cultivated an air of unhinged volatility that added menace to their mystique” (*ibid.* 160). In an article written in 1980, but not published until 2012, Dan Vargas expands on this volatility, which he describes as a form of “violent apathy” (202), by relating his first encounters with the band, the first of which involved a female member of their entourage attacking the wife of Robert Soto of the Brat seemingly unprovoked, and the second, members of the Stains spray-painting their logo onto a mural done by Sean Carrillo on the wall of the Atomic Café, as well as on the car of Rudy Medina of the Brat (199-200). Alvarado notes that early in their existence the band’s “aggressive sound [and] confrontational nature,” as well as their “flirtations with fascist imagery,” sometimes alienated them from an East L.A. rock scene still dominated by bands influenced by the likes of Led Zeppelin and Deep Purple, and therefore unprepared for hardcore punk. This in turn prompted the Stains to find gigs in Westside clubs (*ibid.* 161). In just one of many examples of the Stains’ antagonistic approach, Amezquita recounts writing songs specifically designed to taunt their audience, stating, “We used to have a song called

‘When White Boys Get Mad,’ and the chorus was, ‘nothing happens.’ We used to do it to bait them” (qtd. in Alvarado, “Backyard Brats” 161).

The Stains played occasional shows with each of the other three “major” bands from East Los Angeles, but members of the group did not think of themselves as belonging to the same circle as those bands (Alvarado, “Sick, Pt. I” 55). Berumen suggests that the divide between the Stains and other East L.A. bands was at least partly musical; he states, “those bands just had a more new wave kind of vibe, you know? More pop. The Stains were ugly” (*ibid.* 55). Amezcuita puts this even more bluntly, stating, “The East L.A. punks, supposedly, to me were a bunch of ‘no huevos’ bands”—as Alvarado says, “a verbal pun on ‘new wave,’ essentially meaning ‘no balls’” (*ibid.* 53). The band also distanced themselves from Chicano politics and a Chicano identity; Amezcuita states, “I hate people trying to categorize me and say ‘You are Chicano.’ First of all, I don’t even like the word ‘Chicano.’ I’m Mexican,” adding, “We never really assumed the Chicano identity. None of my songs were about being Chicano. My songs were about being human” (*ibid.* 55). He suggests that many of his songs dealt with personal feelings of frustration and alienation, although others, such as “Germany” and “Young Nazis,” were influenced by his interest in history (*ibid.* 45), later adding that his interest in fascist thought and imagery was largely shaped by growing up in a Falangist household, a thread of Spanish fascism (49). Rudy Navarro, vocalist for the second iteration of the band, explains that his song, “Get Revenge,” was written in response to having his motorcycle stolen, and “Quit the Human Race” was a screed against a “normal” life—marriage, children, eventual resentment, etc. (*ibid.* 44-5). As this suggests, the Stains’ lyrical themes tend to reflect feelings of alienation and frustration typical of early punk groups and not necessarily specific to a Chicana/o or East L.A. experience. A notable exception is the song “Gang-Related Death,” the words to which Navarro wrote in response to witnessing the drive-by shooting outside of the Brooklyn and Mott location of the Vex (*ibid.* 59).

While the Stains’ hardcore sound and nihilistic behavior may have initially alienated them from Eastside audiences and other East L.A. bands, the band managed to establish connections with prominent groups from outside of East L.A. For instance, they formed

relationships with Westside bands like the Germs, the Plugz, and X (Alvarado, “Sick, Pt. I” 48), and had already played Westside venues like the Masque and the Whisky-A-Go-Go before the Vex opened in East L.A. (57). The band also made a connection with Jello Biafra of the Dead Kennedys when they played San Francisco in 1980 (Alvarado, “Sick, Pt. II” 37). Navarro recalls that Biafra approached him after the Stains’ set to shake his hand. Biafra was impressed by the way that Navarro, who played the gig in khaki pants, white t-shirt, and bandana—attire associated with cholos, or “tough guys,” a look later popularized by Los Angeles hardcore/thrash metal band Suicidal Tendencies—had scared the local punks into standing at the back of the room during the Stains’ set because the punks thought the Stains “were the cholos who kick[ed] their asses every weekend” (*ibid.* 37). Following this meeting, Biafra invited the band to open for the Dead Kennedys in Los Angeles at the Whisky, paying the band \$250 for their set (*ibid.* 39). Perhaps most importantly, the Stains also formed a close friendship with the influential hardcore punk band Black Flag from Hermosa Beach, playing many shows together around the Los Angeles area, and going on tour with them and other bands from SST Records, a label founded by Black Flag guitarist, Greg Ginn. The Stains recorded their sole album for SST in 1981—using the \$250 from Biafra to pay for the studio time. However, the album was not released until 1983, by which time the band had already broken up (there is some dispute over why the album was held back, but I will discuss this in greater detail in Chapter Four). The band has since reunited on a number of occasions, with a number of different lineups, and continues to perform occasional gigs into the present.

Thee Undertakers initially formed in 1977, with the lineup solidifying in 1978 (Reyes, Naranjo, and Garcia, “Worming” 43). The band consisted of Art Reyes on vocals, Tracy “Skull” Garcia on bass, Anthony “Tony Fingers” Naranjo on guitar, and Mike Chaidez on drums. Thee Undertakers played a hard and fast style of punk that bordered on the hardcore sound of the Stains and emerging suburban bands like Black Flag, although without the same level of intensity or the metallic edge of the Stains. Alvarado notes that Thee Undertakers “developed a visual style in line [with] the band’s name to complement their music, donning black suits instead of punk’s stereotypical leather-based accoutrements” (“Backyard Brats” 163). Vargas states that their lyrics were “not really centered on the East LA area,” but rather addressed “situations of youth all over” (202).

As Vargas's statement suggests, like the Stains, Thee Undertakers did not foreground Chicano politics in their lyrics, although many of their songs did contain political themes. As Reyes states, "I never wanted to be labeled as having one way of thinking. There are a lot of things out there. You have to have a spectrum of things, of ideas. I know people want to close you down to just one idea that you want to push, and it's not about that" (Reyes, Naranjo, and Garcia, "Thee Undertakers" 39). Speaking of their brief involvement with the Revolutionary Communist Party, Garcia says, "The Illegals didn't like that because they were into the Brown Power thing, and we were into the People Power thing. We were a Hispanic band, but we weren't just for Hispanic people. We were for everybody" (*ibid.* 51). This interest in "People Power" is present in a number of songs that critique the ruling elite, such as "Behind Closed Doors" ("Well they stuff their faces/With cakes and grapes/And leave us no crumbs, look who's the bum/They say help the poor the people they lure/Well behind closed doors, no one ever knows") and "Recession" ("With the people crying in the streets/And the children begging on their knees/Unemployed minority, fighting for democracy/Overcrowded communities, the solution is WWII"). However, as Vargas says, the group also touched on themes that were more universal for a young audience, as in the song, "Acne," written by Chaidez, in which he complains of not being able to meet women because of his acne problem.

Like the Stains, Garcia notes that prior to the opening of the Vex, the band played many of their earlier shows outside of the East Los Angeles area because they felt that East L.A. audiences did not understand their sound (Interview). The group made a fortuitous connection when Jon Doe and Exene Cervenka of X attended a backyard party in the City Terrace neighborhood of East L.A. where both Thee Undertakers and the Brat performed (this show is also infamous because an overenthusiastic attendee fired several shots from a handgun into the air) (Reyes, Naranjo, and Garcia, "Worming" 43). Doe and Cervenka were impressed enough to ask each band to open for them for one night of a two-night stint at the Whisky-a-Go-Go, the Brat the first night and Thee Undertakers the second. Again like the Stains, Thee Undertakers recorded one album that only came out after the group had disbanded, although in their case it took significantly longer before the album was finally released. The band recorded the album in 1981 for Roadhouse Records, a record store in Montebello (now closed), but Roadhouse failed to release it by the time

the band broke up in 1982. Garcia suggests that financial issues at Roadhouse, as well as personal issues between Roadhouse and members of the band contributed to the delay in releasing the record. In 2001, twenty years after its recording, the album was finally released as *Crucify Me* by the Glendale, CA-based punk reissue label Grand Theft Audio, and in 2005, Artifix Records released a 7" called *L.A. Muerte*, with two demo tracks from 1982 (minus Reyes, and with Garcia on vocals and Mike Solis on second guitar) and two live tracks recorded at the Hong Kong Café in 1980. Members continued on in various projects over the years, and the band reunited in 2001 to play several songs at a screening of Martin Sorrondeguy's documentary film, *Mas Alla de los Gritos/Beyond the Screams*, held at Self-Help Graphics (Reyes, Naranjo, and Garcia "Thee Undertakers" 41), and they still occasionally reform to play gigs (although Chaidez has since been replaced on drums by George Hernandez).

Formed in 1979, the core of the Brat was made up of vocalist Teresa Covarrubias and guitarist Rudy Medina, who originally met at a concert at the Starwood featuring the Jam, the Weirdos, and the Zeros (Covarrubias and Medina, "The Brat" 60). Medina had been in a group called the Blades that had recently disbanded, and was looking for a singer to start a new band, and Covarrubias was a poet who had always wanted to sing in a band. Although it would change over the course of the Brat's existence, a stable lineup in the early 1980s also included Sidney Medina (Rudy Medina's nephew) on guitar, and brothers Robert and Luis "Lou" Soto on drums and bass, respectively (Vargas 198). Vargas notes that the Soto brothers were actually born in Merida, Mexico, and were "still green card-carrying Mexicans" at the time his article was originally written (199). Compared to the Stains and Thee Undertakers, the Brat's musical style was generally more melodic and less aggressive. They were often described as new wave, rather than punk, and were sometimes referred to as "the Mexican Blondie," a comparison likely based on each group having a female singer and more pop-oriented sound compared to other groups in their respective scenes. Despite the new wave label, the songs on the group's lone EP, *Attitudes*, released on Fatima Records in 1980, present a variety of sounds: the opening track, "Swift Moves," begins with a reggae rhythm, before transitioning to power-pop for the chorus, "Leave Me Alone" and the title track balance fast drums and aggressive guitar playing with Covarrubias's melodic vocal line, and

“High School” borders on hardcore, with its fast tempo and Covarrubias’s shouted vocals.

Like the Stains and Thee Undertakers, the Brat did not foreground Chicana/o politics in their lyrics, and they did not wish to be reduced to being a Chicana/o or East L.A. band. As Covarrubias explained to Vargas, “I’d rather be accepted as being a good band instead of a band because we’re Latin [...] I think that the music should always come first. That way people could look at us and say that it’s good music and it would be regardless that we were from East L.A.” (199). However, while members of the Stains resist the Chicano tag altogether, the Brat simply wished to avoid being stereotyped or pigeonholed while still embracing a Chicana/o identity on a more personal level. In response to criticism that the band had no concern for the Chicana/o community, Covarrubias tells an interviewer from *Lowrider* magazine, “The Chicano human experience is very broad and I’m taping [sic] on the situations that are most clear to me; the ones I’ve experienced. [...] I hope others can relate them to their own situations and that they contemplate on the message” (75). The songs on the *Attitudes* EP generally deal with the frustrations of being a teenager, such as on the title track, where Covarrubias sings, “Everything I say goes wrong/Everything I do goes wrong/Say it’s your attitude.” Likewise, on “High School” Covarrubias shouts, “Catholic high school’s just a game/Driving kids like me insane,” and later, “Didn’t learn a god damn thing/Didn’t buy that fuckin’ ring.” However, the group also had a number of songs with more directly political themes, influenced by the political climate of the time. As Covarrubias says, “During the ‘80s [...] there was that whole Iran-Contra thing going on. Reagan was in office [...] So that informed a lot of the songs we wrote” (Covarrubias and Medina, “The Brat” 61). These themes were expressed in songs like “Pledge of Allegiance” and “Soldier,” which were never released, as well as on “The Wolf,” which appeared on the 1983 compilation album on Zyanya Records, *Los Angelinos: The Eastside Renaissance*. On “The Wolf,” Covarrubias speaks out against social inequality and the deadly consequences of U.S. foreign policy. In one verse she sings, “The country runs right through us/And it doesn’t even blink an eye/Living off the poor man’s labour/Sucking all our spirits dry/We say this Democracy/Is laced with Hypocrisy/It’s true!”, and in another, “Your claw of Justice/Knows no boundary lines/Tell me O’ Wolf of slaughter/How many peasants died?/With this one

Democracy's/Atrocious foreign policy." Significantly, one of only several female performers in the early East L.A. scene, Covarrubias also tackles gender politics in songs such as "Misogyny," which was also never released on record, although the lyrics were printed in the Brat's interview with *Lowrider*. The song begins with the verse, "A woman is a precious thing/far beyond the wedding ring/But you kept her under thumb/creating the light-haired & dumb," and concluding with, "Blatant is misogyny/scattered in our history/But if on you the gods have smiled/I'd like to see you bear a child" (*ibid.* 76).

As stated above, in 1980 the band released the *Attitudes* EP for Fatima Records, a label run by Tito Larriva of the Plugz, along with Yolanda Comparran Ferrer and Richard Duardo. After securing a spot at the first Vex show by auditioning for Willie Herrón and Jesus Velo of Los Illegals, Covarrubias and Rudy Medina recall that this show was where they first met Larriva, who produced the *Attitudes* EP, and Duardo, who did the artwork, (that night they also met Harry Gamboa, Jr. and Gronk, members of ASCO, an East L.A. art collective, with which Covarrubias would become involved) (Covarrubias and Medina, "The Brat" 61). Taking advantage of their connection to X, the group also had Exene Cervenka write the lyric sheet for the EP. Following the EP, Medina says that the band planned to record a single for Fatima, with the song "Romance" performed in English on one side and Spanish on the other, but the single was never released (*ibid.* 64). Medina does not specify if recording the song in Spanish was the group's idea, or a capitulation to outside expectations of what a Chicana/o or East L.A. group should sound like, but this tension would define their experience of trying to record for a major label. Instead of releasing the "Romance" single, the band signed a development deal with Capitol Records, but nothing materialized from this venture either, as various producers tried to push the band toward a more stereotypically "Latin" sound, a direction that ran contrary to the wishes of the group (*ibid.* 64), a subject I will discuss in greater detail in Chapter Four. The Brat officially disbanded in 1985, although Covarrubias, Rudy Medina, and Sid Medina continued on for several years as Act of Faith with a new rhythm section, after which Rudy Medina was involved in a number of other projects, including some with Tracy Garcia of Thee Undertakers, and Covarrubias was involved in several projects with Alice Bag, including Las Tres, Goddess 13, and Stay At Home Bomb (which also included Angie Garcia, wife of Tracy) (*ibid.* 64, 66). Like Thee

Undertakers, the Brat reunited for a number of shows in the 2000s, but is currently inactive.

Willie Herrón and Jesus Velo note that although an early iteration of the band began rehearsing in 1978, Los Illegals was not fully formed until 1979, when they began writing original songs and Velo joined the band on bass (Interview). The core lineup of the group during the early 1980s was Willie Herrón on vocals and keyboards, Jesus “Xiuy” Velo on bass, Tony and Manuel Valdez on guitars, and Bill Reyes on drums, although an earlier lineup also included Eddie Ayala on vocals, along with a different drummer, both of whom went on to form the Odd Squad (Alvarado, “Los Illegals” 38), and a later lineup included Sandra Hahn on keyboards (Loza 214). Herrón says that prior to the addition of Velo on bass, he had played a Hammond C3 organ in order to fill in the low-end, but after Velo joined he switched over to a Farfisa and Vox Jaguar (Interview), the same brands of organs used by Frank Rodriguez of ? and the Mysterians, Augie Meyer of the Sir Douglas Quintet, and Domingo “Sam” Samudio of Sam the Sham and the Pharaohs, bands that brought a Tex-Mex sound into 1960s rock ‘n’ roll. With their organ-driven sound, Los Illegals played a style of music that straddled the line between punk and new wave, although the band did not necessarily identify with those labels. Further, unlike other early East L.A. groups, the music of Los Illegals was explicitly rooted in a Chicano consciousness. Herrón states, “We made our ethnicity the platform for our music [...] and we could’ve picked any genre of music. We were just from that era and we produced the music in the way we did, and we just consciously felt that we were blending different styles and not trying to sound like a style that preexisted” (Herrón and Velo, “Los Illegals” 41).

The group foregrounded Chicana/o identity and politics through their lyrical themes, the use of both English and Spanish in their lyrics, and even in the blend of English and Spanish in the group’s name. As Herrón recalls, “We started off with ‘The’ Illegals. We didn’t have ‘Los’ until we started to do some gigs and the ‘The’ still seemed too English. Since ‘illegal’ was already English, we just figured, ‘Well, now, let’s screw the English language up by putting ‘Los,’ and even Rodney Bingenheimer [a radio host at Los Angeles station KROQ who featured music by many local punk bands on his show]

couldn't pronounce it right" (Herrón and Velo, "Los Illegals" 41). Los Illegals' political platform was largely an extension of Herrón's involvement with Asco, a 1970s and '80s East Los Angeles conceptual art collective (Interview). Founded in the early 1970s by Herrón, Harry Gamboa, Jr., Gronk, and Patssi Valdez, the members of Asco (Spanish for "nausea") experimented with a variety of artistic practices, including street theater, photography, and muralism, to comment on the condition of the East L.A. Chicana/o community. Much like the larger Chicana/o Movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, the members of Asco initially responded to "[t]he disparity between the overrepresentation of Chicanos in the war in Southeast Asia and their underrepresentation in the arena of politics and media culture" (Chavoya and Gonzalez 40). At the same time, though, as Colin Gunckel writes,

Rather than participating in the construction of a cohesive Chicano identity or adopting a conventional vocabulary of social protest, the group adapted lessons from the avant-garde (including Surrealism) to their own context. [...] Through their collective effort, they crafted a powerful visual expression of the absurdity, violence, and utter unreality of the life they experienced as residents of East L.A. in the early 1970s. ("Asco's Collaboration" 153)

Herrón suggests that Los Illegals was, at least for him, a "lateral transition" from the work he had done with Asco, with music becoming another medium through which to explore similar ideas (Interview).¹⁵

Los Illegals' lyrical themes confronted such issues as illegal immigration, deportation, and gang violence. For instance, the song "A-95"—a reference to a short-term work permit issued by Customs and Border Protection (formerly by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS))—begins with an INS raid ("It's immigration/We know you're in there/Open up, If you don't/We'll kick the door in"), then moves to a chorus adapted from Emma Lazarus's poem inscribed on the Statue of Liberty ("We are the

¹⁵ Herrón left Asco in the late 1970s, but the group continued on until the late 1980s with a shifting membership that included other figures from the East L.A. punk scene such as Teresa Covarrubias of the Brat, artist and writer Sean Carrillo, and photographer Diane Gamboa.

tired/We are the poor,” etc.), then speaks—in Spanish—of immigrants fleeing to the U.S. to escape violence in their native country (“My daughter, my dad, killed/They’ll kill us all/I come because I don’t want to die” (my translation)). “El Lay” covers similar territory, speaking from the perspective of an undocumented worker who is captured by the INS while washing dishes in a restaurant (“I was being deported, for washing dishes in El Lay”). The chorus of the song places the economic benefits of illegal immigration against the poor treatment of undocumented immigrants at the hands of *la Migra* (the INS), stating, “We come to work, we pay our taxes/Migra comes and then they kick us on our asses.” “We Don’t Need a Tan” again emphasizes the tax revenue generated through immigrant labor, contrasting this to conservative politicians who use undocumented workers as a scapegoat during times of financial instability—“the federal tax man/says, to leave us alone/those politicians want us/they want us all to go home.” The song also critiques Los Angeles’s history of racial segregation and razing of poor communities in the name of renewal (“We’ve got our own sector/where they keep us away/rip out our houses/just to build a freeway”), as well as harmful media stereotypes of Chicana/os (“the media burns us/they rip out our pride/they stereotype us/like in Boulevard Nights”). Like the Stains’ “Gang Related Death,” Los Illegals’ “Not Another Homicide” presents a story of a drive-by shooting with the lyrics, “Gun fire Gun fire/they’ve hit someone in the crowd/A car screeches past me/It’s the guys/and they’ve got the windows rolled down.” However, while “Gang Related Death” offers only an implicit critique of gang violence through its matter-of-fact reporting of the incident, Los Illegals offer a more direct statement with the verse, “Stop this senseless killing/Don’t ask, where you from?/We’re all supposed to be here/Why can’t we try to live as one.” Beyond the direct plea for an end to violence, the line, “Don’t ask, where you from?”, critiques the territoriality of gang culture, and the final line suggests a call for racial solidarity.

Of the first wave of punk bands from East Los Angeles, Los Illegals were the most commercially successful. The band signed to A&M Records and released “El Lay” as their first single in 1982, with the song sung in English on the A-side and in Spanish on the B-side. In 1983, the group followed up with the album *Internal Exile*, which was co-produced by the band and Mick Ronson, guitarist for David Bowie in the first half of the 1970s. Velo notes that 60,000 copies of the album were pressed in total (Herrón and

Velo, “Los Illegals” 37). In a personal interview with Herrón and Velo, Velo reports that the band recorded a second album, *Burning Youth*, with producer Wally Brill, but he suggests that the label was unhappy with the new directions the band was taking, and instead wanted them to maintain a sound similar to the first album. So, rather than continue reworking the album as the label desired, the band printed their own copies on cassette and distributed them during a tour of Mexico. Velo states:

The powers-that-be, except the owners, were having a hard time with it. They wanted us to finish it, and finish it, and redo it again. At this point we did a tour of Mexico, made a shitload of copies of it, Willie designed a cover for it, and we distributed it for free as a piece of rebellion against the corporate powers at that time. And so it went out all across, to Mexico City, down to Yucatan, wherever people sent their tapes, that’s where it went, and that’s what we did with this thing. (Interview)

The album was never officially released by A&M. Herrón notes that the group also recorded demos with Juan Gabriel as producer for an album to be released by A&M’s new Latin division, AyM Discos, headed by José Quintana (Interview). However, he suggests that Gabriel and Quintana’s image of the band did not fit with their image of themselves, and this project was also never released. *Internal Exile* was therefore the group’s final release on A&M. Their only other official release was a collaborative album with alternative rock band Concrete Blonde, released in 1997 on Ark 21 Records. Members of the group have remained active into the present, though, working on various projects including Vex AD, “a music ‘academy’ designed to mentor local musicians and help them to succeed in the greater music scene” (Herrón and Velo, “Los Illegals” 37), as well as “Spine of Califas,” a collaborative show with the Taco Shop Poets, a Chicana/o writers’ collective founded in the 1990s (McGee).

Profiles of the four major bands from the first wave East L.A. scene demonstrate a range of aesthetics and political philosophies that challenge any attempt to impose a singular outlook or motivation upon the scene. Though a number of scholars have tried to define the scene by its oppositional Chicana/o politics, of the four major bands this is actually

only true of Los Illegals. The Brat and Thee Undertakers did sometimes exhibit oppositional politics, but the political themes addressed by each band had more in common with politically-oriented bands from the larger punk scene than they did with those addressed by Los Illegals. In fact, members of the Brat, the Stains and Thee Undertakers expressed ambivalence about being labeled as Chicana/o bands because they felt that having that label applied to them would cause them to be stereotyped or pigeonholed in ways that might distract from the quality of their music. This may appear to suggest a lack of shared interest or purpose on the part of the bands, and therefore to call into question the appropriateness of the designation “scene.” However, while the groups may not have been united by shared political commitments in the way that some scholars suggest they were, these groups, along with others that came later, as well as writers like Carrillo and Vargas, artists such as Diane Gamboa, and a small audience of East L.A. residents were united by a shared interest in new forms of expression, even if they did not always align ideologically.

2.3 The East Los Angeles Backyard Scene: 1981-1990

Although most published accounts of punk in East Los Angeles end with the closing of the Vex—and in most cases, the closing of the Vex at Self-Help Graphics—and the disintegration of the first generation of bands from the area, the actual history of punk in East L.A. does not end with the collapse of this initial scene. Alvarado states, “As the Vex and its related community of bands moved into the fringes of LA’s greater underground scene and then disappeared, the beginnings of another scene began to take shape as early as 1981” (“Backyard Brats” 170). An active participant in the scene that began to emerge as the initial East L.A. scene faded out, Alvarado notes that participants in the backyard scene were generally younger than participants in the first wave of East L.A. punk. The titles of Alvarado’s articles—“Teenage Alcoholics” and “Backyard Brats”—imply that participants were generally teenagers, which Billy Branch, another participant in the scene, confirms, noting that there may have been a limited number of participants over eighteen, but that most were teens. Many of the new bands also tended to be influenced more by the suburban hardcore sound coming to prominence at the time—as well as by early East L.A. bands like the Stains and Thee Undertakers—than

by the artiness of bands from the early Hollywood scene, although as I will demonstrate shortly, there was a broad range of sounds coming out of the scene.

Challenging misconceptions that the east side of Los Angeles County is made up solely of Chicana/os and Latina/os, Alvarado says the scene that emerged in the neighborhoods of East L.A. in the 1980s was ethnically diverse, though looking through the list of names in his “East L.A. Punk Rock Family Tree” still suggests a strong Chicana/o and Latina/o presence in the scene. Historically situating the scene, Alvarado writes, “These youth were growing up under the Reagan Revolution, in an era when the militancy and promise of 1960s racial politics and the Chicano movement had been replaced with the bleak economic reality of existing in a poor, largely ignored part of one of the richest cities in the world” (“Backyard Brats” 171), and he adds that this scene emerged during a moment of moral panic regarding punk, courtesy of media exposés and negative representations on popular television dramas such as *Quincy, M.E.* and *CHiPs*. Thus, he states, “the resulting music was more primitive in structure, faster in delivery, and less artistically nuanced than the music produced by bands from the preceding wave” (*ibid.* 171). With the closure of the Vex in 1983, as well as other nearby venues such as Stage One, these younger bands performed most of their shows in the only venues available to them, namely, neighborhood backyards (*ibid.* 172). These makeshift venues were often named for their location, as in Bird and Cornwell, or First and Velasco, after the person whose house it was, such as Beastie’s Pad, Boo-Boo’s House, Joe’s Pit, and Flipper’s Pad, or, in the case of the Dustbowl, for the cloud of dirt that was turned up once the slam pit started (“Teenage Alcoholics” 46).

To provide a detailed discussion of the bands to come out of the East L.A. backyard scene in the 1980s is perhaps an impossible task since, compared to the first generation of East L.A. punk bands, very little has been written about these bands, and very few material traces of their existence remain. Alvarado states, “Without access to record labels and recording studios, bands traded ‘demo’ cassette tapes recorded in bedrooms using boom boxes, karaoke machines, and other inventive recording methods. Instead of radio and periodical ads, gigs were announced by word of mouth and flyers” (“Backyard Brats” 172). As this statement suggests, the material products of the scene were very

ephemeral. Likewise, prior to 2001, written traces of these bands were confined almost entirely to the pages of local fanzines such as *Pure Filth*, which was largely devoted to covering the local scene, and *Ink Disease*, which was more national in scope but contained occasional features on local groups, as well as other shorter-lived zines like *Multiplication of the Typical Joe*, *Outcry*, *Local Anesthetic*, and *Thrasher's Digest* (Alvarado, "Teenage Alcoholics" 46), copies of which are now very difficult to locate. In 2001, however, Alvarado composed a brief history of the scene—which he stresses is neither definitive, nor complete—for *Razorcake* magazine, which includes brief descriptions of many of the bands from the scene. He followed this in 2003 with the aforementioned "Family Tree," in which he provides line-ups for, and attempts to trace the connections between bands from the scene.

Rather than simply reproducing Alvarado's descriptions of the bands here, I encourage the interested reader to consult his articles directly.¹⁶ However, I will now attempt to demonstrate the range of musical styles, lyrical themes, and political inclinations of bands from the scene. Bands such as Moral Decay, Conscientious Objector (C.O.), Crankshaft, Bloodcum, Copulation, Malignance, the Rejected, and Riot in Progress were influenced by the suburban hardcore sound ("Teenage Alcoholics" 47-8). While Peace Pill started out playing in the hardcore vein, Alvarado notes that their sound eventually transitioned to resemble the rock-influenced sound of Social Distortion (*ibid.* 48). He says that Insurrected State/No Church on Sunday played a style of hardcore more influenced by the British anarcho-punk band Crass and Mexican hardcore bands like Atoxxxico and Solucion Mortal than by Southern California hardcore bands.¹⁷ FCDN Tormentor (Fuckin' Catastrophic Destructive Noise) was an early black metal band, although

¹⁶ Although issues #3 and #12 of *Razorcake* are out of print, free PDF downloads of both issues are available on *Razorcake's* Website.

¹⁷ The influence of Mexican hardcore bands might suggest that some degree of exchange existed between Chicana/o participants in the East L.A. scene and bands from Mexico, possibly through patterns of immigration and familial connections (one recent migrant to Los Angeles around the time was Cesar Vasquez, former member of Solucion Mortal and eventual founding member of L.A.-based Dogma Mundista). Such exchange between Chicana/o and Latina/o punks and Mexican/Latin American scenes is more easily observable with the 1990s Latino hardcore scene and the current South L.A. scene.

Alvarado notes that the subgenre had not yet been named as such (*ibid.* 47). Chainsaw Blues/The Fingers played a more garage rock-influenced style of punk, inspired by Billy Childish. Emerging at the tail end of the 1980s backyard scene, Fish Head mixed Bauhaus-style death rock with blues and hardcore.

Lyrical themes and political orientations likewise varied considerably. For instance, whereas bands such as the Fuckin' Assholes tended toward the juvenile with lyrics like "You're just a caca head" (*ibid.* 47), Armistice adopted the anti-war stance of so-called "peace punk" bands like Crass and Crucifix (*ibid.* 46). Likewise, while Hawaii's Hardcore ideologically aligned themselves with the Straight Edge movement, they rarely addressed this in their lyrics; as Alvarado states, "Song subjects ranged from biographies of horny old movie stars to hating peace punks to loving Madonna" (*ibid.* 47). Finally, the Rejected brought a firmly rightwing perspective to the scene by identifying as Young Republicans and singing about bombing Iran (*ibid.* 48). Importantly, explicit Chicana/o politics were rare during this period, which is likely related both to the teenaged make-up of the scene and to Alvarado's observation that many of the gains made by the Chicanao Movement (as well as the Civil Rights and Women's Movements) of the 1960s and 1970s were undone during the late 1970s and early 1980s. After all, this scene existed in the shadow of California's Proposition 13, passed in 1978, which slashed property taxes and gutted budgets for public services, contributing to the "bleak economic reality of existing in a poor, largely ignored part of one of the richest cities in the world" of which Alvarado speaks ("Backyard Brats" 171).

As Alvarado notes, in the first years of the 1990s, bands that had been primarily focused on the backyard scene began branching out, playing in a number of local or nearby venues that had started booking punk bands ("Backyard Brats" 174). These venues included U-Gene's in Santa Fe Springs, skate parks such as Lipslide in City Terrace and Transitions in Monterey Park/East L.A., and El Tropicico in Boyle Heights, a bar that primarily served Mexican immigrants, but started booking punk shows on weekends (*ibid.* 175). During the same period of time, backyard bands began to perform at Al's Bar, a venue located in the Arts District, just west of the Los Angeles River. Although some bands had played occasional shows on the Westside, Al's Bar became a regular

spot, and, as Alvarado states, “It soon became to the late ‘80s East LA punk bands what the Vex was to the earlier groups—a place where different factions of the city’s underground music and art scenes could find each other and intermingle” (*ibid.* 175). Alvarado notes that around this time many scene members started to experience a reawakening of a Chicana/o consciousness, often informed by indigenous roots (*ibid.* 177), perhaps attributable to coming of age and subsequently an increased political/cultural awareness, as well as increasing anti-immigrant/Latina/o sentiment in the early 1990s. Bands at the time started to experiment with new sounds influenced by “Mexican sonos, cumbia, salsa, reggae, hip hop, classic rock, and local heroes Los Lobos” (*ibid.* 178). Out of these experiments a new set of bands developed, including bands like Aztlán Underground, Blues Experiment, Ollin, Ozomatli, Quetzal, Quinto Sol, and Yeska, and this new wave came to be called the “Chicano Groove” scene.¹⁸

However, in the same way that an East L.A. scene did not end with the disintegration of the first wave of bands, the backyard scene did not end as the first generation of backyard bands morphed into the Chicano Groove scene. Some members of the first generation started new bands like Loli and the Chones, Media Blitz, Tezacrifico, and Tumors, while a new generation of punks started bands like Crucial Justice, the Naggs, Social Conflict, Teenage Rage, and Union 13 (Alvarado, “Backyard Brats” 178). Whereas very few bands from the first generation released their music through labels, several bands from the ‘90s scene managed to release music through labels from outside of East L.A. Loli and the Chones, for instance, released two albums and two singles, one each with Rip Off Records and Repent Records, San Francisco-area garage-punk labels. Between 1997 and 2000, Union 13 released three albums with Epitaph Records, a punk label founded by Brett Gurewitz of Bad Religion, which also released a string of gold and platinum records by Rancid, NOFX, and the Offspring during the 1990s. Alvarado notes that a backyard scene still exists in East L.A., since subsequent waves of bands continue to emerge as previous generations fade (Interview). As Herrón states, “Today, there’s still a very

¹⁸ For further discussion of the Chicano Groove scene, see Doss (“Choosing Chicano”) and Viesca (“*Straight Out*” and “The Battle”).

strong Chicano punk scene and there's still huge ass backyard parties with mobs and mobs of Chicano punkers" (qtd. in Alvarado, "Backyard Brats" 178). In 2014, the Vans shoe company released a documentary film about the current backyard scene called *East Los*, directed by Angela Boatwright.

Like the initial East L.A. scene, a close examination of the East L.A. backyard scene of the 1980s demonstrates a broad range of musical styles and political ideologies that resist easy generalizations. Many bands from the backyard scene embraced leftist politics, but some took far more conservative stances, while many others were largely apolitical; few, if any, foreground Chicana/o politics in their music. An important difference between the backyard scene and the initial East L.A. scene is that, while the early bands sought recording contracts and a degree of commercial success, backyard bands generally did not see commercial success as a desirable or even possible end goal. For most of the 1980s the scene was also more self-contained than the first wave had been, with bands only seldom playing outside of East L.A. Initially this may have been because participants were too young and inexperienced to book gigs at clubs outside of the neighborhoods, but Alvarado notes that for a number of years in the later half of the 1980s, the scene had become cohesive enough that many people would choose to play local shows and see local bands over traveling to Westside venues to see larger touring bands. As noted above, the early 1990s marked a transition to the Chicano Groove scene as many East L.A. bands did begin to play outside of the area, and as they began to develop a more pronounced Chicana/o consciousness. At the same time, several 1990s East L.A. bands like Empirismo, Tezacrifico, Kontraataque, and Subsistencia came to be associated with a national network of expressly political, devoutly DIY Chicana/o and Latina/o hardcore bands responding to a political climate that was increasingly hostile toward Latina/o communities.

2.4 Latina/o Hardcore in the 1990s

The 1990s were turbulent times for Chicana/o and Latina/o communities in California, as well as throughout the rest of the United States, with rising anti-immigrant/Latina/o sentiment typified by a number of anti-immigrant ballot initiatives in California and Governor Pete Wilson's attacks on undocumented immigrants. Out of this context, a new

Latina/o punk “scene” emerged, although this scene was not bound to one geographical location, but rather was made up of a loose network of hardcore bands with lyrics that directly addressed the plight of Chicana/os and Latina/os in the United States—and often U.S. foreign policy in Latin America, as well—usually shouted in Spanish. Among the earliest bands to form were Los Crudos in Chicago, IL, Huasipungo in New York, NY, Revolucion X, whose members were split between the border towns of El Paso, TX and Ciudad Juarez in Mexico, and Empirismo and Dogma Mundista in Los Angeles. While these bands were not always aware of each other when they first formed, during the early 1990s they began to form connections across regions as they learned of other bands pursuing similar musical styles and political objectives. Over the course of the 1990s the number of bands that were associated with this network grew, with bands like Arma Contra Arma, Leyes Criminales/Tras de Nada, and Youth Against Fascism (also often referred to simply as Youth Against) forming in Chicago, No Less and SBitch in El Paso, Life’s Halt, Kontraataque, Subsistencia, Tragatelo, and Tezacrifico in Los Angeles, and Logical Nonsense in Santa Fe, NM, all cities with significant Latina/o populations. However, it is important to note that this list is not exhaustive; likewise, the degree to which members of each of these bands identify themselves with the “scene”—which I am loosely referring to as the 1990s Latina/o hardcore scene—may vary. I include these bands on the list because of their inclusion in Los Crudos lead singer Martín Sorrondeguy’s 1999 documentary film, *Mas alla de los Gritos/Beyond the Screams: A U.S. Latino/Chicano Hardcore Punk Documentary*, as well as because of constellations of record labels and band members, but to group these bands together into a singular scene is perhaps, to a certain degree, artificial. It is also important to note that these bands did not only play with other Latina/o bands, and many of them could also be said to belong to local scenes that were not predominantly Latina/o, or did not universally share their political orientations.

Possibly the most influential of the initial bands that comprised the 1990s Latina/o hardcore scene was Los Crudos (literally “raw,” but also used more colloquially to mean “hung over”). The band formed in 1991 in the Pilsen neighborhood of Chicago, an area of Southwest Chicago originally populated by Central and Eastern European immigrants, but with an increasing Latina/o population beginning in the 1950s, primarily Mexican-

American (Hague and Curran 1). Sorrondeguy, who was active in the Chicago punk scene in various ways, approached members of Fuck the Bureaucracy, the only hardcore band in Pilsen at the time, with the idea of forming a politically-oriented band with lyrics in Spanish (Los Crudos). In the liner notes to the compilation album, *Discography*, Sorrondeguy explains the impetus for creating the band and the circumstances that inform their politics; he states:

While most [bands of the era] were caught up in the grunge/rock en espanol hype/hysteria some of us were more impacted by what was becoming too common around us, INS raids, dirty politics, assimilation, gentrification, racism, xenophobia, gang infestation, and violence, these were some of the blows against Pilsen a community of immigrants, and from within this urban pocket in Chicago the time for us had come, so we turned up the amps and made sure our screams were being heard. (2)

In *Mas alla de los Gritos*, Sorrondeguy, whose family immigrated to the United States from Uruguay when he was a child, notes the importance of discovering Latin American punk music, which often addressed local issues like government repression and civil war, in shaping his desire to pursue political discussion through punk. He also explains his rationale for singing in Spanish, stating, “We made a conscious decision to sing in Spanish. Because all our lives we’d been told ‘You can’t do this,’ or ‘You shouldn’t do this,’ and we said, ‘Fuck it, we’re gonna do it,’ and we did.” Sorrondeguy and José Casas expand on this in a 1992 interview with Esneider (of Huasipungo) and Jane Guskin for *Maximum Rocknroll (MRR)*, suggesting that singing in Spanish was a way to reconnect with family and culture after losing fluency in the language through English-only education. In a later *MRR* interview with Sean Sullivan, Sorrondeguy further elaborates that singing in Spanish was meant as a way to communicate with young people in the neighborhood, as well as to expose punks from other areas to ideas they might not encounter otherwise—and the band often handed out lyric sheets with English translations at their shows to aid in this dialogue.

Although Los Crudos was from Chicago and my primary interest in this study is in punk scenes in the greater Los Angeles area, I will dedicate a considerable amount of space to the band for two primary reasons. The first is that Los Crudos was a very foundational band in the Latina/o hardcore scene of the 1990s. Their politics and use of Spanish, as well as their approach to DIY, helped to provide a blueprint for bands that came after them—although this is not to suggest that later bands merely lived in Los Crudos’s shadow, or to diminish the importance of other early bands like Huasipungo. The other reason, which is more of a practical concern, is that information about many other bands from this scene is more difficult to obtain. While a CD compiling their complete discography (reissued in 2015 as *Doble LP Discografía by Maximum Rocknroll*) helped to keep Los Crudos’s music in circulation, and multiple interviews with Sorrondeguy are easily obtained through the Internet, information about many of the other bands is largely confined to independently produced and long out-of-print records and fanzines. I do draw information about Los Angeles bands connected to the scene from the few records and published interviews I was able to locate, as well as from the one interview I was able to conduct with a member of L.A.-based bands, but the relative levels of information available mean that my discussion here will necessarily skew toward Los Crudos.

In their lyrics, Los Crudos cover a broad range of topics related to the experiences of Latina/o communities in the United States, as well as the impact of U.S. foreign policy in Latin America. The song, “Crudo Soy” (“I’m Hung Over”), provides a mission statement in which the band lays out their various complaints, which range from critiques of the dominant political/economic system (“I’m hung over on this system/It’s the same old bullshit” (*Discography*)),¹⁹ to violence within Latina/o communities (“I am angry at the youth/that murder our own people”), to the sense of shame that leads some to wish to assimilate, and the subsequent loss of culture (“I am frustrated with the parents/that don’t teach our native language/and raise their children with shame of being Latino/they think they are so American”). Returning to the issue of language, “Lengua Armada” (“Armed

¹⁹ Unless otherwise noted, all songs by Los Crudos, as well as songs by other bands discussed later in this section, have been translated from Spanish, with all translations taken from the liner notes or lyric inserts accompanying each band’s recordings.

Tongues”) is also like a manifesto, suggesting a rationale for writing explicitly political songs, and doing so in Spanish; Sorrondeguy sings, “Our tongues are armed with words that leave impressions/words that put out the fire of racism, fascism, and hate/Tongues that spit the truth/Armed tongues are enemies to this system/Giving voice to the voiceless and vision to the blind” (*Doble*). In one of their most popular songs, “Asesinos” (“Assassins,” or “Murderers”), Los Crudos decry murderous political and military regimes, suggesting that George H.W. Bush’s foreign policy places him in the company of Adolf Hitler, General Augusto Pinochet, and Jean-Claude “Baby Doc” Duvalier, with the lyric, “Bush (asesino)/Pinochet (asesino)/Hitler (asesino)/Baby Doc (asesino)/Asesinos!” (*Discography*). “Illegal, Y Que?” (“Illegal, So What?”) addresses the plight of undocumented immigrants who leave their home countries in order to escape violence and oppression, only to confront discourses that demonize immigrant communities, through the words, “They say we steal their jobs and we take over their neighborhoods/We just want to live in peace, why the anger?” (*Doble*). In “Dejanos en Paz” (“Leave Us in Peace”), Sorrondeguy calls for an end to American intervention in Latin America, singing, “Destroying our unions, collectives and movements/So that capitalism may prosper/You’re [sic] fake democracy and austerity measures/Leaves us poorer and more helpless” (*Viviendo Asperamente*), and later, “Enough! Enough! Our blood, our land is not up for grabs/or to be sold, or stolen/Leave us in peace!”

Further, Los Crudos also confront issues of racism and ethnocentrism within punk communities with the songs, “HardcorEgoismo” and “That’s Right We’re that Spic Band.” George B. Sanchez notes that early in their existence, Los Crudos were often seen as a novelty in the greater Chicago punk community because they were the only band singing in Spanish at the time. With “HardcorEgoismo” (“Hardcore Egotism”), Los Crudos responded to the kind of tunnel vision that would lead white punks in Chicago, as well as in the larger American hardcore scene, to tokenize the band, or view them as a novelty. As Sanchez argues, the song “criticized North American punks for myopic world views and the notion that punk, at least in the United States, is a phenomenon of white anger and suburban angst.” In the song, Sorrondeguy sings, “More than one language/More than one voice/There is not just one race/No single nation/Selfish American scene/won’t support a global scene” (*Doble*), and later, “If a band sings in

French, Japanese, or Portuguese/It's ignored/But any shit in English/The world swallows" (Ensneider of Huasipungo expresses similar sentiment in a 1992 interview in *Maximum Rocknroll*). Likewise, "That's Right We're that Spic Band," the band's only song in English, was written as a defiant rebuttal to white punks referring to Los Crudos as "that spic band." The song, which is only forty seconds long, begins with Sorrondeguy screaming, "That's right, motherfucker, we're that spic band," followed by the single verse, "You say you call yourself a punk?/Bullshit!/You're just a closet fucking Nazi/You are bullshit!/You do not understand us/Bullshit!/You just fucking fear us/Bullshit!," and ends by returning to the phrase, "We're that spic band!" (*Doble*). In a clip from the band's final show in Pilsen, included in *Mas alla de los Gritos*, Sorrondeguy recounts to a rapt audience the situation that led him to write the song and explains that it was written in English because he "want[ed] all the Gringos to understand what we're saying." Spencer Ackerman writes that the song "was especially powerful live, where mobs of white kids would furiously mosh and jump all over each other to yell out 'Bullshit!'—simultaneously showing solidarity with Los Crudos and, at least implicitly and for that brief moment, pledging themselves to be part of the solution instead of the problem."

Los Crudos were staunchly committed to a Do-It-Yourself (DIY) ethic, which informed the ways in which they circulated their music and the types of shows they performed. As Sanchez observes, within Pilsen, an area lacking in venues for punk bands, the band "played where ever they could—community art spaces like Casa Aztlán and Calles y Sueños, church basements, and people's homes." In the liner notes to *Discography*, Sorrondeguy notes that their first show was at a venue called 6 Feet Under, an illegal club in the basement of a neighborhood building that hosted parties and occasionally had bands play (2). When the band began to play outside of Chicago, they booked their own tours and avoided bars and clubs, instead continuing to play places like community centers, basements, or punk-run spaces like ABC No Rio in New York or 924 Gilman Street in Berkeley, CA (*ibid.* 3). The band also released their music through Sorrondeguy's own label, Lengua Armada Discos, with artwork and packaging printed and assembled by the band themselves (Perry). Packaging for their records typically included lyric sheets with both the original Spanish and English translations, and,

following in the tradition of anarcho- or peace punk bands, the lyric sheets or booklets often included essays about the topics covered in their songs or other causes they wished to draw attention to. For instance, in 1994 they released a split 7" with the band Manumission, with all proceeds going to the Western Shoshone Defense Project. The record included a sixteen-page booklet with information about the project and the U.S. government's history of violating treaties with Native American tribes. Importantly, the band's approach to DIY was very much centered around notions of community, although they did not only apply these notions to the punk community, but also to the local communities in which they lived. As Casas states, "I'm not as caught up into the punk community, or the idea of a punk community, as far as I am with the reality of the community I'm in. And so the community for me is the Mexican American, Latino community in Chicago, and in the U.S." (*Mas alla*). Sorrondeguy further elaborates, saying, "For us, being punk didn't mean letting go of these ties that we have to our parents, or to our family, or to where we're from, or to our language. It didn't mean breaking away from that, it meant working with them to try to get somewhere, to get to a new level" (*ibid.*). Thinking of punk as a means to connect with, rather than to distance oneself from one's parent culture (to borrow a term from subcultural theory) represents a significant departure from common assumptions about hardcore as a phenomenon through which suburban youth signal their rejection of their upbringings.

Like Los Crudos, Los Angeles hardcore bands such as Kontraataque, Tezacrifico, Subsistencia, and Tragatelo often addressed issues affecting Chicana/o and Latina/o communities through their lyrics and embraced a DIY approach to music making and community-building. Kontraataque (Counter Attack), for instance, rail against anti-Latina/o sentiment in songs such as "Respeto" and "Gobernador Nazi." In "Respeto" ("Respect"), vocalist Lalo decries the various racist epithets used to demean Chicana/o and Latina/o communities, singing, "I'm not your 'alien'/[...]I'm not your 'wetback'/I'm not your 'spick'/I'm not your 'illegal'/Nor your 'piece of shit'/Give me the respect that I deserve!" (*Soldado*). In an explanation of the song "Gobernador Nazi" ("Nazi Governor"), the band notes the song is directed at the legacy of former California Governor Pete Wilson ("Don Pedro," as the band calls him) and his anti-Latino rhetoric; the song includes the lines, "Decades of blame toward minorities/Lies after lies, history

repeats itself/From one fascist to another/The power is passed on/They conspire in secret/“Those goddamn Latinos will take our jobs...” (*ibid.*). Tragatelo took up the issue of forced assimilation that members of Los Crudos discussed in the *Maximum Rocknroll* article cited above (and, in fact, Sorrondeguy played drums for Tragatelo after a move to L.A.). In the liner notes to their self-titled LP, the band explains the logic behind their name:

The word “tragatelo” is an aggressive way of saying “swallow it” or “shove it” in Spanish. “Swallow what?”, you may ask. The bullshit (his)stories they inject in our brains when we go through their school systems. Making us feel shame for our backgrounds, cultures, traditions, that we don’t belong, creating hate amongst our communities, that America is one country called the USA, so on and so on. We’re not swallowing it.

Likewise, in a *Maximum Rocknroll* interview with Mike Amezcua,²⁰ Raul, one of the vocalists of Tezacrifico (Lalo, also of Kontraataque, being the other), says that the band’s objective was to educate their audience²¹ about Latina/o culture, but in a way that privileged indigenous ways of thought, which he defines as circular, over the linearity of Western thought. Indigeneity was also a central concern of Subsistencia, who incorporated indigenous instrumentation into their sound.

The emphasis on community demonstrated by Los Crudos was also common throughout the Latina/o hardcore scene of the 1990s, including for L.A. bands. Speaking not only of Los Crudos, but also of the larger scene, Sorrondeguy states, “The music and the lyrics are powerful, but where I feel the strength of the movement comes from is this kind of collective effort where we’re channeling all our energies into the communities we come

²⁰ Amezcua was the founder of El Grito Records, a label based in Los Angeles that released music by Kontraataque, Tezacrifico, Fronterrorismo (a Los Angeles Latina/o hardcore band formed in the early 2000s), and a compilation EP with songs by Los Crudos, Huasipungo, and Youth Against.

²¹ Raul does not specify the racial/ethnic composition of a typical audience at a Tezacrifico performance, but references to backyard performances elsewhere in the interview suggest a predominantly Chicana/o and Latina/o audience.

from” (*Mas alla*). Ignacio Lopez, a member of a number of Los Angeles bands including Kontraataque, Subsistencia, and Tezacrifico, affirms Sorrondeguy’s statement, observing that grassroots movements such as the DIY punk scene have contributed greatly to positive changes in the neighborhood where he grew up, on the border of Boyle Heights and East Los Angeles, a neighborhood previously plagued by gangs. He states:

Boyle Heights, East Los Angeles is going through a big change. [...] the community is really taking back their community, and doing a lot of positive work in it. And it has to do with things like the punk scene from before, where issues needed to be brought out. And not by a politician, not by a teacher, not by an elected official, or anything, but by the community, as well. And [punk] was a great tool to do that. (Lopez, Interview)

Lopez suggests that the DIY character of the scene and the use of Spanish were important factors in addressing the message to local communities. He notes that performing DIY shows that occurred outside of bars and clubs both allowed for shows to be all-ages and enabled bands to communicate directly with their communities by keeping the shows in neighborhood backyards or similar venues. Both Lopez (Interview) and Sorrondeguy (*Mas alla*) note that shows during this period often turned into extended conversations between band and audience. Lopez states, “those shows were a place where [kids] could actually dialogue with each other, where a lot of times it wasn’t about the music, it was just about people being able to dialogue, and the bands were just a reason for everybody to come meet.” He also regards singing in Spanish as a way to communicate directly with local communities about issues directly relevant to their lives, observing that the type of Spanish used by bands in the Los Angeles scene was unique in that it was shaped by the experience of growing up in the United States, speaking both English and Spanish. He states, “It was a little anomaly that only a group of people would understand it, and it was just a way of saying, ‘I’m speaking to you,’ like, ‘If you understand me, then you grew up with the same frustrations and issues that I did’” (Lopez, Interview).

As this history demonstrates, the Latina/o hardcore scene of the 1990s was a very different type of scene from the others I have discussed thus far. Rather than forming

around a particular locality, the scene was linked across multiple geographical regions—though it is important to note that these bands also belonged to local scenes in their hometowns. An especially important point of distinction between the hardcore scene of the 1990s and the others in my study is that the bands involved in this scene were united first and foremost through common cultural and political interests, in particular, through a shared interest in raising awareness of issues facing Chicana/o and Latina/o communities in the 1990s, reflecting a changing political climate at the time. While Los Illegals foregrounded Chicana/o identity and politics in their music over a decade before the emergence of bands such as Los Crudos and Huasipungo, the 1990s were the first time when a scene—Sorrondéguy also sometimes refers to it as a movement—formed specifically around these questions. The music coming out of this scene was often a direct response to the political climate of the time, but, as Mariam Bastani²² suggests in the liner notes to *Maximum Rocknroll*'s reissue of Los Crudos' discography, this scene also emerged within the context of increased discussion of identity politics during the 1990s, with the appearance of movements such as riot grrrl and queercore. In responding to some punks' perception that punk was "too political" in the 1990s, Sorrondéguy supports Bastani's contention:

[C]oming out of the mid to late-'80s punk scene—it was a fucking disaster. All of the old-school people left, and what they left behind were the dregs: the most violent factions, the height of American skinhead culture. I would never have come out of the closet at that time.²³

[The 1990s were] the first time for a lot of these communities—like feminists in punk, queers in punk, Latinos in punk—where there was finally space and time for these issues. We didn't talk about vegetarianism. ... We talked about

²² Bastani was a member of the late-2000s Chicago hardcore band Condénada and currently sings for San Jose, CA band Permanent Ruin, and she is also a former coordinator of *Maximum Rocknroll*.

²³ Sorrondéguy publicly came out as gay while with Los Crudos, and later went on to front notable queercore band Limp Wrist.

immigration, something that was very real to us. (qtd. in Lefebvre, “Los Crudos’ Reissues”)²⁴

Thus, while the first wave East L.A. scene and the East L.A. backyard scene that followed it were both populated by large numbers of Chicana/os, the Latina/o hardcore scene of the 1990s, through its emphasis on Latina/o identity and politics, is perhaps the first scene that could be accurately described as “Latina/o punk” in a meaningful way. These were not just punks who happened to be Latina/o, but punks who made Latina/o issues the central concern within their music (which is not to say that bands from this scene never covered issues that were not specifically Latina/o; many did).

2.5 The South Los Angeles Scene: 2008-Present

As the following discussion reveals, attempting to apply the “Latina/o punk” label to the current scene based in and around South Los Angeles is a more complex question. To locate a precise starting point of a punk scene in South Los Angeles²⁵—an area with a predominantly African American population for most of the second half of the 20th century, but that has gradually shifted to a majority Latina/o population beginning in the 1990s (Pastor)—is a difficult task. While my focus here is on a porous group of people who previously worked under the umbrella of the Silenzio Statico collective, which emerged around 2008, this collective did not simply appear fully formed, but rather developed out of an existing South L.A. backyard scene. For instance, Tony Abarca, guitarist and vocalist of *Generacion Suicida* and *Ekolalia*, and a former member of *Rayos X*, recalls attending backyard shows as early as 2005 (“Lakra”). Austin Delgadillo, member of bands including *Tuberculosis*, *Drapetomania*, *Sadicos*, *Mata Mata*, and

²⁴ While Sorrondeguy stresses that there was room for the first time for Latina/o punks to engage with issues that were of immediate importance to their communities, the Los Crudos song, “That’s Right, We’re That Spic Band” demonstrates that this was not always without pushback from white punks, as do statements from members of *Huasipungo* who note that *Ensenider* was sometimes accused of being “nationalist” for his choice to sing in Spanish (*Huasipungo*).

²⁵ The area now called South Los Angeles was previously named South Central, but in 2003 the City of Los Angeles changed the name in an attempt to counteract negative media portrayals of the area that primarily associated it with poverty and crime (Ong et al. 2).

Blazing Eye, and co-founder of the Silenzio Statico label, cites Aborto Social as a foundational band for the scene, tracing their existence back to 2004 (Interview). Further, the South L.A. band Hit Me Back was releasing music on Brooklyn, NY-based label, 625 Thrashcore, as early as 2003. Given this, it is perhaps safe to say that there is a long history of punk in South Los Angeles, extending back to at least the early 2000s, and possibly longer. Despite this longer history, I focus on the period from roughly 2008 to the present, and on bands that have, or had, some connection to the Silenzio Statico label, largely as a question of practicality: information about the scene as it has existed (and continues to exist) over the past five to seven years is more readily available than information about previous incarnations, thanks in part to the documentary efforts of the Silenzio Statico label and the now-defunct *Fronteras Desarmadas* video zine, as well as features on the scene and interviews with bands in zines such as *Nuts!*, *Maximum Rocknroll*, and *Razorcake*. At the same time, since this scene continues to change and grow as I write, much of the information presented here may be out of date by the time of publication (bands may have broken up or bands that were formerly broken up may have reformed, venues may have been shut down or gone dormant, etc.).

A range of projects were produced under the name of the Silenzio Statico collective, including a cassette label, a record store, a radio show, and a zine and video zine. The Silenzio Statico label was founded in 2008 by Delgadillo and Abe Social²⁶, both members of Tuberculosis at the time, with the intention of documenting and releasing music by bands coming out of the South L.A. backyard scene (Delgadillo, Interview). Beginning with Asko's "Me Das Asko" in 2008, the label has now released over twenty tapes by bands from Los Angeles and the surrounding areas. *Fronteras Desarmadas* ("Disarmed Borders") began as a series of five print zines initially produced by Tony Abarca, Kimberly "Kiwi" Martinez, also a member of Generacion Suicida, and Frank, a member of several area bands, with help from the larger collective for later issues (Silenzio Statico). Following the print zine, Abarca and Martinez created two episodes of

²⁶ While everyone I interviewed for this study consented to the use of their full names, in other cases I will use first names or chosen names to identify members of the scene, either because I am unable to locate their full names, or because they have elsewhere expressed the desire to not be identified by their full names.

a video zine under the same name, featuring live footage of area bands, interviews with band members, and segments on the various projects of members of the collective. In 2009, members of the collective created the *Solo Se Oye Punk* radio show, which played a selection of local and international “raw” punk (Silenzio Statico). Coordinated by Scarlet, later of the band Destruye y Huye, approximately ten pre-recorded, two-hour episodes aired on Raise the Fist, a radio station that broadcast in South L.A. After the show ended, several cassette compilations with music from the show were released through the Silenzio Statico label. Founded in 2009, “Musica Para La Destruccion is a D.I.Y. punk, collectively run and operated record store” (Silenzio Statico). Specializing in “radical, anti-racist, fascist, homophobic; punk/H.C./metal records, CDs, cassettes, books, etc.,” the stated goal of the store is “to make punk accessible to the youth of the neighborhood” (*ibid.*). While the Silenzio Statico label and the Musica Para La Destruccion record store still exist, the collective no longer appears to exist in the same form as the scene has grown and expanded its physical boundaries, and as relationships between participants have changed. For instance, in 2013 Delgadillo and others opened a venue in a former warehouse on the edge of the Arts District in Downtown Los Angeles,²⁷ which serves as a recording studio for bands releasing music through the Silenzio Statico label, as well as a screen printing studio, a record store, and a venue for live music, all of which operate under the name of the venue. The scene has also grown to include bands from beyond Los Angeles County, such as Pesadilla Distopika from San Bernardino, and Tozcos and Damages from Santa Ana, and a number of bands have toured various parts of the United States, Mexico, and even Europe.

Like the Latina/o hardcore scene of the 1990s, many bands from the South L.A. scene sing in Spanish, although motivations for doing so vary. For Mark Ocegueda of Pesadilla Distopika and Ausencia, singing in Spanish is a way to express his cultural identity and to communicate directly with Latina/o communities (Interview). Angeles “Angee” Zavala of Destruye y Huye cites similar motivations, noting that it is a way to bring culture back

²⁷ Due to its precarious nature, Delgadillo requested that I withhold the name of the venue in order to avoid the potential of drawing unwanted attention.

into the music, and that it enables her family to know exactly what she sings about (Interview). Both Ocegueda's and Zavala's motivations for singing in Spanish thus appear to closely align with those of members of the 1990s hardcore scene. Tony Abarca, on the other hand, offers a more practical rationale, saying that he believes his voice sounds better in Spanish than in English (Interview). Politically, the South L.A. scene is less cohesive than the 1990s hardcore scene. For instance, while both Ocegueda and Zavala cite bands from the 1990s hardcore scene as influential in their decisions to write lyrics with strong political messages, Abarca stresses that *Generacion Suicida*'s songs are not meant to have political messages and that he does not wish to force his politics onto others. Although issues such as police brutality and immigration are common themes for bands in the scene, Ocegueda notes that some bands also sing about more everyday concerns, such as boredom, alienation, and romance. When I suggested that these topics could also have political dimensions, Ocegueda agreed, suggesting that the everyday experiences of members of the scene are colored by things like geography and socio-economic standing. He states:

[I]t's more indirect because it reflects what they're doing every single day, and they're not saying it explicitly. 'Cause if you're just bored and that's what your song is about, it reflects what living in a certain part of the city is like where you can't really go out and do something in the way that other people can do, or maybe you don't have recreational opportunities that people that come from more privileged backgrounds do, or things like that. Or you just don't have the money for it. (Ocegueda, Interview)

While politics are clearly not absent from the music coming out of the scene, Delgadillo, who attended shows by bands such as *Kontraataque* in his teens, notes that the kind of dialogue that often occurred between bands and audiences during live performances in the 1990s seldom takes place in the current South L.A. scene, suggesting that this approach to consciousness-raising would likely not be well-received by audiences (Interview). This may be attributable in part to a turn away from politics in punk following the "too political" 1990s, as well as to the more party-like atmosphere I observed at shows in South L.A.

I now profile several bands in order to provide a sampling of the range of activities, musical styles, and lyrical themes of bands from the scene, but it is important to acknowledge from the outset that my selections are not meant to indicate that these bands are more significant—by whatever measure—than others from the scene, but are instead determined by who I was able to interview, which bands have been profiled in fanzines, and whose recordings I have been able to procure. Although women are present in a number of the bands associated with the Silenzio Statico collective, Destruye y Huye, formed in 2010, are one of the only to be composed entirely of women, a decision that Zavala suggests was intentional (Interview). Made up of Zavala on vocals, Kat on drums, Martha on bass, and Scarlet on guitar, the members of the band come from South L.A. and Huntington Park, a city just beyond the eastern border of South L.A. Members of the band cite early Los Angeles punk bands The Brat and the Bags, both fronted by Chicanas, as musical influences (Silenzio Statico), along with 1980s Spanish hardcore and dark punk bands such as Páralisis Permanente, Siniestro Total, Último Resorte, and MG-15, and the hugely influential British hardcore band, Discharge (Destruye y Huye). The band released a self-titled cassette in 2012 through the Silenzio Statico label, and a seven-inch single through Mark Ocegueda's Verdugo Discos label in 2014 (I discuss the rationale and implications of continuing to release music on cassette and vinyl versus digital formats in Chapter Five).

The group's lyrics are generally politically charged and cover a range of subjects, most centered in some way around marginalized or oppressed communities (Zavala, Interview). For instance, in "Policías Matan" ("Police Kill"), Zavala offers a critique of police harassment of and brutality against communities of color. "Trabajo de Perro" ("Dog's Work") and "Desesperación" ("Desperation") both address the plight of economically marginalized communities of color, critiquing a list of forces that contribute to the marginalization of these communities, including economic exploitation and the prison-industrial complex. In "Falsa Esperanza" ("False Hope"), Zavala deflates the notion of the American Dream, especially as it relates to immigrant communities. Violence against women is a theme that appears in both "Fuck Ted Bundy" and "Ni Una Mas." The former deals with feeling unsafe as a woman walking alone, and it was inspired by the members of the band watching the 2002 film about the serial killer, Ted

Bundy, who targeted young women (Interview). The latter addresses femicide in Ciudad Juárez, a border city in the Mexican state of Chihuahua where hundreds of women have been murdered or disappeared between 1993 and the present—Chris Arsenault of *Al Jazeera* cites a figure of approximately 878 murders between 1993 and 2010, although he notes that activists believe the number could be much higher—mostly workers in *maquiladoras*. In the song, the title of which translates to “Not One More,” Zavala calls for an immediate end to the murders and disappearances of women in Juárez, singing, “Not one more, enough!” In our interview, Zavala notes that while the song was written specifically about femicide in Juárez, she now considers it to have a broader meaning, stating, “the more I’ve thought about the song, it’s like *ni una mas* in every fucking aspect, like no violence against women at all.” Something of an outlier in the group’s repertoire, “Mata Tu Tele” (“Kill Your TV”) warns against wasting one’s life sitting in front of a television screen, a theme that also appears on a T-shirt for the band, which depicts a Molotov cocktail being thrown through a television screen. The demo tape also includes a cover of Spanish hardcore band MG-15’s “Destruye y Huye” (“Destroy and Flee”), from which the band takes their name.

Formed in 2010 with members from South Los Angeles, Mid City, and Anaheim, a city in Orange County, Generacion Suicida is composed of Abarca on guitar and vocals, Martinez on drums and vocals, Mario on guitar, and Juan on bass. Abarca says that the band’s musical style, which is cleaner and more melodic than much of the punk coming out of South L.A., is influenced by the Ramones, as well as Swedish bands like Masshysteri and the Vicious (Interview), and Martinez, like many others from the scene, lists Eskorbuto as an influence, as well as the Danish band, Gorilla Angreb (Generacion Suicida, *MRR*). Abarca notes that the band’s name is taken directly from a song by the Vicious called “Suicidal Generation” (Generacion Suicida, *Razorcake* 47). The band has released a number of recordings, including a demo cassette, a seven-inch single, a split seven-inch with Catholic Spit, and two albums on Going Underground Records. The band has done a number of tours, covering the West Coast (including dates in Vancouver, BC), the East Coast, Mexico, Europe, and South America. Generacion Suicida’s lyrics, written by Abarca, deal with themes like boredom (“Aburrimiento,” or “Boredom”), romance (“Mil Amores,” or “A Thousand Loves”), and feeling ostracized by the local

punk community over disagreements with other members of the scene (“Estoy Sangrando,” or “I’m Bleeding”). As noted above, Abarca claims that his lyrics are not meant to convey political messages. However, during our interview, I pressed him on the song, “Metralleta” (“Machine Gun”), in which he speaks out against police brutality with the lyric, “Corrupt cops patrolling my neighborhood/And killing my people, and killing them with passion/I hear gunshots.../Fascist machine gun, that fires on human bodies!” (translation mine). He concedes that the song does have a political dimension, although he notes that he wrote the lyrics with his own neighborhood in mind, rather than as a diatribe against police brutality more generally (Interview). He states, “I wrote that song because right here, in the hood, the police are extra tough on everything. Right here they don’t think twice before beating you, arresting you, and in some cases even killing you, because right here, since you’re from here, people are gonna be like, ‘He must have deserved it’” (*ibid.*), a statement which demonstrates an awareness of popular perceptions of South L.A., and the degree to which such perceptions of marginalized areas often allow police to act with impunity in those areas. “Rechazados Por La Sociedad” (“Rejected by Society”) is another song with political subject matter—social and economic marginalization—but Abarca once again centers the song in Los Angeles, this time by specifically naming the city in the lyric.

After playing guitar for a band called Hordes, Mark Ocegueda formed Pesadilla Distopika (“Dystopian Nightmare”) in order to have a platform to address issues that were of importance to him that he was not able to address in Hordes (Interview). The band is composed of Ocegueda on vocals, Chaz on drums, Alec on guitar, and Ronnie on bass. Inspired by the political consciousness of 1990s Latina/o hardcore bands, Ocegueda uses Pesadilla Distopika to confront issues that are relevant to Latina/o and immigrant communities, although some of the songs are more personal in nature. For instance, while one song addresses intensified surveillance of the U.S./Mexico border in recent years, in another song he reflects on feelings of desperation and anxiety that he experienced as a middle school student, which he believes is an experience many Latina/o youth may share, while another deals with alienation and a lack of autonomy within the various institutions that constitute our society. He states:

One [song] is just about feeling super alienated, like no matter what you do, you're just stuck within all these institutions that make up society, and it's really hard to gain any sense of autonomy because of that. And especially I felt more urgent about that because I've been in grad school, and institutional education and all that has really made me kind of cynical about a lot of stuff. (Ocegueda, "Interview)

While Ocegueda stressed the political influence of 1990s Latina/o hardcore bands, he notes that musically the band is more influenced by a range of hardcore bands from the 1980s, including Death Side and Gauze from Japan, MG-15 and Qloaqa Letal from Spain, and Xenofobia and Atoxxxico from Mexico (Pesadilla Distopika). The band self-released a demo cassette in 2013, and a seven-inch record through Ocegueda's Verdugo Discos later the same year. More recently, Ocegueda formed Ausencia ("Absence") with members of Tozcos and Poliskitzo. While Ausencia's lyrical themes are similar to those of Pesadilla Distopika, the musical style is more melodic; a description of the band on the Verdugo Discos Website describes their sound as "Nostalgic Oi!" Ausencia recorded a demo cassette in 2014, jointly released by Verdugo Discos and Silenzio Statico, and a number of songs from the cassette were remastered for release as a seven-inch single on Discos MMM in 2015.

The use of the adjective "nostalgic" to describe Ausencia's sound speaks to an important point about the current scene based in and around South L.A. (a point that is perhaps equally true of all current punk scenes): today's punks are the inheritors of over thirty years of punk history. If first wave East L.A. bands existed in a time when it was still believed that punk could overtake the mainstream, East L.A. backyard bands during the era when punk went underground, and 1990s hardcore bands in the age when punk once again became political, current bands can take influence and glean knowledge from historical shifts, trends, and developments in punk in Los Angeles, across the United States, and throughout the world. The list of influences cited by the bands discussed above demonstrates an awareness of and interest in a wide range of punk music from around the globe and stretching back over three decades, from which they take both stylistic and political cues. Growing from a backyard scene that demonstrates the

continued importance of backyard parties in Los Angeles's Latina/o communities, members of the scene also draw from an established tradition of DIY cultural production to create zines, radio shows, record labels, and venues. Members of the current South L.A. scene also benefit from the increased accessibility of the Internet, both in terms of access to knowledge about punk history and in their ability to form networks with members of other scenes nationally and internationally. In their use of Spanish and networking with other Latina/o and Spanish-speaking bands, to an extent the South L.A. scene resembles the hardcore scene of the 1990s. However, as the preceding discussion illustrates, while many bands from the South L.A. scene address issues faced by Latina/o communities, the same cannot be said for all bands in the scene, again challenging an idealized notion of Chicana/o or Latina/o punk.

2.6 Conclusion

The chronology of Chicana/o and Latina/o participation in Los Angeles and broader U.S. punk scenes provided here demonstrates both the longevity of a Latina/o presence in punk, and the diversity of bands and scenes that have existed over the past several decades. An important point that emerges from recognizing this diversity is that the history of Chicana/os and Latina/os in punk cannot be reduced to a single narrative. This history is composed of numerous scenes, each of which emerged from specific political and economic circumstances, as well as trends in art and music, and factors such as age and geography. Even within individual scenes or time periods, bands ranged widely in musical styles and political inclinations. For instance, whereas Los Illegals foregrounded Chicana/o politics in their lyrics, other bands of the period like the Brat and Thee Undertakers, although still writing politically oriented lyrics, were more ambivalent about emphasizing Chicana/o politics, while the Stains rejected the Chicano tag altogether. Like the history of punk more generally then, the history of Chicana/os in Los Angeles punk scenes contains many examples of bands and individuals working to create social change, but it is also marked by conflict and contradictions. One source of conflict, namely, the degree to which racism existed in the early Los Angeles scene, is the topic of the next chapter.

Chapter 3

3 See No Color, Hear No Color, Speak No Color: Colorblindness in Los Angeles Punk Historiography

People in the punk scene are notorious for saying “racism sucks,” but when it comes down to having friends of color, it’s cool until they open their big mouths. There are desirable people of color and there are undesirable people of color, and if you’re too brown or too down, then you’re going to piss somebody off or make somebody uncomfortable. (Michelle Gonzales, *Mas Alla de los Gritos/Beyond the Screams*)

[T]he “problem” of race comes in some time after the moment of American national constitution as something to be overcome (and something that sullies “real” Americanism) rather than itself a constituting factor of that Americanism. Little by little, through a series of linear interventions (abolition, civil rights) the problem is indeed put into the rearview mirror—which is what the white folks wanted all along, we are told—leading to the post-racial utopia in which we now all live. This narrative would tell us that to bring up race today is to inflict a new violence, one that ruins the harmony that we have supposedly achieved. (Golnar Nikpour, *Punk is a Moving Target*)

In this chapter I examine the historiographical implications of debates over the existence of racism within the early Los Angeles punk scene, as well as the degree to which they are at times shaped by a discourse of colorblindness. As the underdog story of East L.A. punk, discussed in Chapter Two, took hold in academic texts and museum exhibitions in the 2000s, participants in the initial Hollywood scene took umbrage at a narrative that they felt unfairly accused members of their scene of practicing racial discrimination. In defending their scene—and, crucially, their own legacies—against these supposedly unwarranted accusations, participants such as Brendan Mullen and Alice Bag employ rhetorical strategies that mirror a neoliberal discourse of colorblindness and reactionary understandings of historical revisionism. Thus, while Mullen and Bag tout the egalitarian nature of their scene, in their desire to control its history they unintentionally lapse into language that, as critical race scholars argue, serves to perpetuate rather than to challenge racial inequality by dismissing the experiences of those who suggest that exclusion took place. Building from arguments presented by Michelle Habel-Pallán (“Death to Revisionism”), I argue that Mullen’s and Bag’s defense of their scene (and reputations)

both works toward the continued exclusion of certain stories and voices from L.A. punk history and demonstrates the pervasiveness and insidiousness of colorblindness as a “racial common sense.”

Over the past decade and a half, the history of punk in Los Angeles has been a subject of continual revision. In the late 1990s, following the publication of a number of books on the history of punk in the early New York and London scenes, a new set of works began to appear to reassert the importance of the early Los Angeles scene in the punk rock canon. These included Don Snowden’s edited collection, *Make the Music Go Bang! The Early L.A. Punk Scene*, an exhibition held at Track 16 Gallery from April to June of 1999 and accompanying catalogue, entitled *Forming: The Early Days of LA Punk*, and Marc Spitz and Brendan Mullen’s oral history, *We Got the Neutron Bomb: The Untold Story of L.A. Punk*. Spitz and Mullen, whose book is perhaps the most widely recognized of these works, state that their goal is “to give Los Angeles punk rock the respect and consideration that it’s due” (xv), since, they say, its history had been “relatively ignored” (xvi) prior to the publication of their book. Inevitably, there were others who felt that their own musical contributions were being ignored within this new canonization of Los Angeles punk, including members of first-wave East Los Angeles punk bands like Los Illegals and the Brat. Quoting members of these bands, Josh Kun argues in a March 2003 article for *Los Angeles* magazine that the histories of L.A. punk that were emerging at the time “treat[ed] [the East L.A. scene] like it was treated back in the day, as one of punk’s unincorporated ghettos, marginal barrio music with permanent residence in history’s footnotes” (“Vex Populi” 64).

Kun’s claim that the initial East L.A. scene was treated as an “unincorporated ghetto” during its existence is particularly important because this claim, which has been repeated in much of the work published on the East L.A. scene since, is a subject of heated debate. As noted above, the now widely accepted underdog tale of the East L.A. scene has drawn spirited rebuttals from members of the early Hollywood scene who view the story as an accusation of racism within their scene. For instance, in response to a *Los Angeles Times* review of the *Vexing: Female Voices From East L.A. Punk* exhibition, in which *Times* writer Agustin Gurza repeats a narrative of exclusion, Brendan Mullen (who passed away

in 2009) was incensed enough to write a 5,000-word email, which he titled “Death to Racism & Punk Revisionism,” accusing Willie Herrón of Los Illegals of playing “the race card” to cover up for being “a horrible rock band” (qtd. in Gurza, “L.A. Punk History”). More recently, in an oral history of Latina/os who were active in the early Hollywood scene, published in the April/May 2014 issue of *Razorcake*, Alice Bag claims to have “busted” the myth “that the Hollywood scene was racially discriminatory” (45). In large part, such responses are motivated by the belief among participants that the early Hollywood scene was an egalitarian space. Habell-Pallán states:

Hollywood punk *has understood itself* as against the status quo, colorblind, and democratic in that it did not exclude social misfits, amongst them young women, untrained musicians, and queer youth (some of them people of color). Generally within Hollywood punk, creative originality or uniqueness, supported by a discourse of individualism, was prized more than ethnic or racial identity and one was accepted if one did not highlight one’s racial or sexual difference. The scene was colorblind in the most basic sense—it did not exclude based on skin color or perceived racial difference. (“Death to Revisionism” 261, italics mine)

Habell-Pallán compares the colorblindness of the Hollywood punk scene to Ralina Joseph’s notion of a “post-identity” ideology, “a fabricated realm where race- and gender-blind fiction supplants racialized and gendered fact” (Joseph qtd. in *ibid.* 264).

I attempt to clarify and contextualize some of these arguments in this chapter, but my intent is not to provide definitive answers about the existence of racial exclusion in the early Los Angeles punk scene, since, as Colin Gunckel argues, these questions are “ultimately unanswerable” (“Vexing” 128). Instead, my concern is to identify and examine the moments when the pushback against the underdog narrative of East L.A. punk reflects a “post-identity” or colorblind ideology. Michael Omi and Howard Winant and a number of other critical race scholars argue that, while aspirations toward colorblindness appear noble on the surface, the actual effect of a colorblind ideology is to obscure the degree to which race continues to structure our society, conferring advantages to some and disadvantaging others. By employing the rhetorical strategies of

a colorblind ideology to dispel the notion of racially discriminatory booking practices on the part of Hollywood/Westside venues, figures such as Mullen and Bag likewise both silence particular voices and obscure the ways in which the punk scene, which they tout as an egalitarian moment in which categories such as race ceased to matter, may have in some ways replicated the racialized ideologies of the larger culture. As Habell-Pallán argues, “Mullen’s vigorous stand against the reconstruction of punk history, and his desire to leave undiscussed the implications of racialized difference in the punk scene (despite his invocation of racism), illustrate why it has been difficult to narratively ‘speak’ the influence of Chicanas”—and Chicanos—in L.A. punk history (“Death to Revisionism” 249). I begin with an overview of several theorizations of colorblindness and its effects on efforts to reach a state of racial equality. I then offer a brief discussion of existing narratives and counter-narratives of Los Angeles punk to contextualize the debates that have emerged in the wake of these stories. Finally, I examine the ways in which Mullen’s and Bag’s claims of ownership over L.A. punk history led them to employ the rhetoric of colorblindness.

3.1 Colorblindness

Critical race scholars such as Omi and Winant, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, David Theo Goldberg, and Imani Perry argue that popular understandings of race in the present moment are often characterized by a belief that the best way to combat racism and racial inequality is to refuse to “see race” at all—in other words, for one to declare that race does not shape their views of the world and relations to others. However, these scholars also argue that race continues to structure our society in ways that advantage some and disadvantage others, meaning that the refusal to see race, noble as it may appear, often amounts to a refusal to acknowledge the persistence of systemic racial inequality, and in this way to contribute to the perpetuation of the racial status quo. As Perry states, “To say ‘I don’t see color’ not only is likely to be inaccurate but also reveals a central anxiety about race. Indeed, it is perhaps the fact that ‘no one wants to be called/considered a racist’ that animates our mainstream sense of racial justice. And yet the disparities and distinctions between groups are so visible that they cannot be denied” (16). Yet this ideology of colorblindness prevails in both the histories of punk in Los Angeles, where

the Vex is viewed as a moment of racial harmony, and where, in the debates that followed the *Vexing* exhibition, those who suggest that racism might have existed in the early Los Angeles punk scene are chastened simply for invoking race. I do not mean to suggest that participants in the early Los Angeles punk scene who employ the language of colorblindness do so with the conscious intention of upholding the racial status quo. Rather, I mean to highlight the degree to which the pervasiveness of this ideology influences the discussion of race and racism in L.A. punk history, obscuring uncomfortable histories and attempting to prevent continued discussion of the racial dynamics of the scene. In so doing, I wish to draw attention to the perniciousness of colorblindness as a guiding racial ideology both as it relates to this particular, temporally-bound scene and more broadly.

Omi and Winant argue that in the decades since the Civil Rights movement “colorblindness” has become the racial “common sense” of U.S. society (*Racial Formation* 3rd ed. 256).²⁸ Proponents of colorblindness contend that we now live in a “post-racial” moment, as “overt forms of racial discrimination are misunderstood to be a thing of the past” (*ibid.* 257). As such, “it is suggested that the most effective anti-racist gesture, policy, or practice is simply to ignore race,” since, “[f]rom a colorblind standpoint, any hints of race consciousness are tainted by racism” (*ibid.* 257). While a colorblind view of race may appear compelling on the surface, Omi and Winant argue that the concept is contradictory and deceptive, since race continues to organize U.S. society, both on the level of the individual (for instance, the influence of perceived racial categories on social interaction and presentation of the self) and within the political sphere (racial profiling, mass incarceration, nativism) (*ibid.* 259). Tying colorblindness as it is understood today to the rise of neoliberalism, they situate this ideology as a “racial

²⁸ The emergence of the #BlackLivesMatter movement in response to a series of police killings of unarmed Black citizens, as well as Dylann Roof’s anti-Black terrorism have initiated renewed discussion of race and racism in the United States, drawing into question the notion of an identifiable racial common sense in the present moment. However, this does not diminish the usefulness of Omi and Winant’s critique of colorblindness, since, as I will demonstrate, this ideology plays a defining role in the debates over racism and racial discrimination in the L.A. punk scene, and continues to serve as a guiding ideology for many (the cooptation of the #BlackLivesMatter tag by those who misdirectedly insist that #AllLivesMatter, for instance).

reaction” to the gains of the Civil Rights movement and other social movements of the 1960s that threatened to more equitably redistribute wealth and power (*ibid.* 256). Some participants in the early stages of the Civil Rights movement promoted a notion of colorblindness, understood as looking past race on an interpersonal level, in order to humanize their cause and therefore increase white support (*ibid.* 257). But, by rearticulating the meaning of the term in order to make race-consciousness taboo, the present incarnation of colorblindness ultimately works to maintain the racial status quo by taking discussions of race off the table altogether. As Omi and Winant argue, although “[c]olorblindness allows people (mainly whites, but not only whites) to indulge in a kind of anti-racism ‘lite,’” it also masks “policies and practices that continue to produce racially disparate outcomes” (*ibid.* 259).

Goldberg offers a similar argument through his notion of “antiracialism.” He argues that, following the nominal successes of antiracist struggles such as the American Civil Rights movement, the South African anti-Apartheid movement, and numerous anti-colonial movements in the global South, *antiracism* was quickly supplanted by *antiracialism*, by which Goldberg means the attempt to render “any reference to race illegitimate, irrespective of the (inclusionary or exclusionary) motivation or implication” (21). Through the shift from antiracism to antiracialism, Goldberg says, “[w]e are being asked to give up on the word, the concept, the category, at most the categorizing. But not, pointedly not, the conditions for which those terms stand” (21). For Goldberg, therefore, as for Omi and Winant, the move to antiracialism (or colorblindness) signals an attempt to mask and protect existing structural racial inequality by removing the language to identify and critique it—a move he also connects to the rise of neoliberalism through which the logic of privatization has been applied even to “racially driven exclusions,” thus setting them “off-limits to state intervention” (337).

But, Goldberg asks, if race is made invisible conceptually, what happens to *racism* (360)? Along with Perry, he suggests that racism becomes exclusively the terrain of individual actors; he states, “As race is rendered irrelevant socially, racism *conceptually* becomes stigmatized so that only the obviously bigoted—extreme individuals—get to qualify” (*ibid.* 360, italics in original). Perry likewise argues that “[r]acism, in the minds of many,

is a question of blame, what is in someone's heart, and the impoliteness of race altogether" (15). Such an understanding of racism perhaps explains Perry's statement that no one wants to be seen as racist (16), since, as Bonilla-Silva argues, "even saying things that sound or can be perceived as racist is deemed immoral" in the age of colorblindness (103). At the same time, Goldberg continues, "racism is redirected to malign those who invoke race, implicitly or explicitly, but not to undo the historical legacies of racisms, even modestly to redress its effects" (360). In other words, charges of racism may apply both to those who are "obviously bigoted" *and* to those antiracists who invoke race in order to critique the lasting effects of racial inequality. Thus, to many the continued existence of racism is largely attributable to what Omi and Winant call race-consciousness, or the recognition of "the social fact of race, the presence of racial identity/difference, racial inequality, and racial hierarchy" (*Racial Formation* 3rd ed. 260). They observe that race-consciousness "may take various forms, both democratic and despotic, both emancipatory and reactionary" (*ibid.* 260), and thus includes both those who hold openly racist views and actively practice racial discrimination *and* those who acknowledge and attempt to challenge the continued significance of race in organizing society and perpetuating inequality (*ibid.* 261-2). As I will now outline, such understandings of racism are in clear display in the debates over Los Angeles punk history.

3.2 Competing Histories

In order to analyze the debates over Los Angeles punk history, it is necessary to briefly examine what has been written about the scene. There are at least five major works that attempt to document the early Los Angeles scene as a whole. Among these are at least three book-length works, which include, in chronological order, *Hardcore California: A History of Punk and New Wave* edited by Peter Belsito and Bob Davis, Snowden's *Make the Music Go Bang!: The Early L.A. Punk Scene*, and Spitz and Mullen's *We Got the Neutron Bomb: The Untold Story of L.A. Punk*. Also of note is the aforementioned exhibition catalogue from *Forming: The Early Days of L.A. Punk*, which features essays from a number of key figures in the early L.A. punk scene such as Claude Bessy, editor of *Slash Magazine*, and Exene Cervenka and John Doe of X. Finally, in his history of

popular music in Los Angeles, *Waiting for the Sun: Strange Days, Weird Scenes, and the Sound of Los Angeles*, Barney Hoskyns includes a chapter on the early Los Angeles punk scene and the various subgenres and scenes which emerged from it. The authors of these works generally present a similar timeline of the early Los Angeles punk scene: the transition from the glam or glitter rock scene to the beginnings of a punk scene, facilitated in part by radio DJ Rodney Bingenheimer; the coalescence of the early Hollywood scene around the Masque, a club operated by Brendan Mullen; the spread of punk to the suburbs, which almost simultaneously led to the emergence of hardcore and the disintegration of the original Hollywood scene; and the furthering splintering of the punk scene into numerous subgenres and factions, which signaled the end of anything like a single, centralized Los Angeles punk scene.

But what do these authors have to say about the East L.A. punk scene, and its relationship to the larger scene? In most cases, very little, but the narrative they do present is once again very similar from text to text. The narrative in these texts is one of bridging cultural divides between the East and West sides of Los Angeles, with the exceptions of Shreader, a then-16-year-old zine writer, who in *Hardcore California* dismissively describes the East L.A. scene as “strange and untimely” (50), and Hoskyns, who argues that “[t]he real sound of LA punk was to be heard not in the productions of Ray Manzarek but in [...] the scuffling Chicano irritation of the Brat and Los Illegals” (317),²⁹ but offers no further comment in support of his claim. In a four-page chapter of *We Got the Neutron Bomb* entitled “The Vex: Los Lobos and the East L.A. Scene,” Willie Herrón, Joe “Vex” Suquette, and Sean Carrillo offer testimony about the ways in which the opening of the Vex encouraged and enabled unprecedented exchange between the East and West sides of Los Angeles. Suquette, for instance, states:

²⁹ Hoskyns makes this claim in direct comparison to X’s *Los Angeles*, which was produced by Manzarek, previously keyboardist for the Doors. There is a note of irony in this pronouncement, though, since, as noted in Chapter Two, the Brat would go on to work with Paul Rothchild, the Doors’ producer, while on a development deal with Capitol Records, and Los Illegals briefly worked with Manzarek while on a development deal with A&M Records (Herrón and Velo, Interview).

[T]he Vex became the link between East L.A. and Hollywood. Eventually people started giving East L.A. bands recognition. I think we opened the door for a lot of these bands. Los Lobos came to the Vex and shortly thereafter they were playing the Cathay de Grande in Hollywood [...] If it wasn't for the Vex, a lot of East L.A. bands wouldn't be playing the Whisky and the Roxy. (qtd. in Spitz and Mullen 247)

The chapter also includes a quotation from Louis “Louie” Pérez of Los Lobos about the band’s first experience of playing to a large Westside punk crowd when they opened for Public Image, Ltd., a 1980 gig they landed with the assistance of Tito Larriva of the Plugz. In “East to Eden,” an essay that appears in the *Forming* catalogue, Sean Carrillo extols the inclusiveness of the early L.A. scene, citing a strong Latina/o presence and reiterating the cultural exchange enabled by the Vex. He says that “Latinos were integrally involved” with the L.A. punk scene from its inception, which he supports with a list of bands with Latina/o members (38-9). Carrillo contends that the Vex brought the scene full circle by bringing Westside bands into East L.A. Thus, he states, “The punk scene had done the impossible. It had accomplished what few cultural movements before it had been able to do: it attracted people from all over town to see Latino bands, and it brought musicians from all over the city to a location deep in the heart of East L.A.” (Carrillo 42). Pérez offers a similar perspective, in “Weird Hair Pendejolandia,” his essay in *Make the Music Go Bang!*, celebrating the types of exchange facilitated by punk, in spite of the eyebrows it raised on both the East and West sides. He states:

I guess to some Chicanos we were doing it all wrong, we as Mexican-Americans had our own rebellion, our own concerns about equality and racial attitudes, but as musicians we had discovered a way to bring down walls and erase those imaginary boundaries that divide. It was in this music scene that we found acceptance for what we were—musicians, pure and simple. (Pérez 113)

It is interesting to note that, although there were many Latina/os present in the early Hollywood scene, quotes from many of whom are included in *We Got the Neutron Bomb*, these musicians are seldom acknowledged as being Latina/o in accounts of the L.A. punk

scene—Carrillo is the exception here. This may be because participants in the Hollywood scene often foregrounded a punk identity over other categories, such as race, gender, or sexuality—a complex question which I will discuss in greater detail later in the chapter. As Gunckel says, “To somehow separate the participation of musicians like Alice Bag (The Bags), Dez Cadena and Ron Reyes (Black Flag), or Tito Larriva (The Plugz) strictly on the basis of ethnicity would certainly produce an inaccurate and impoverished account of the scene in its entirety” (“Vex Marks” 13).

Don Snowden, editor of *Make the Music Go Bang!*, also makes brief mention of the East L.A. scene in his essay, “You Should Get to Know Your Town,” again celebrating East-West intermingling, but also pointing out contradictions in these exchanges. When East L.A. bands did cross over to the Westside, he argues that these bands “were instantly barrio-ized by the clubs there into *only* playing on East L.A. Nights, except when bands like X used their power and had them open gigs” (Snowden, “You Should” 152, italics in original). Snowden’s statement points to a certain irony in these accounts of the East L.A. scene. While all of these authors offer tales of inclusivity and bridging cultural divides—both Carrillo and Pérez make direct reference in their respective essays to the Los Angeles River, which serves as a dividing line between the two sides of the city, making a “bridging divides” metaphor quite literal—discussion of East L.A. bands and the East L.A. scene is almost entirely confined to these specific, very short chapters. Thus, while the editors of these texts do acknowledge the existence of the East L.A. scene through the inclusion of these chapters, with the exception of Snowden the only voices actively celebrating this exchange are those from East L.A. This lends weight to Kun’s claim that the East L.A. scene was/is viewed as an “unincorporated ghetto,” at least from the outside. Also noteworthy is the very limited range of voices present in these accounts. Across all of these texts, only four different voices from within the East L.A. scene are present, and, additionally, these voices are exclusively male, despite the many contributions made to the scene by prominent female figures, such as Teresa Covarrubias, lead singer of the Brat, and artist and photographer Diane Gamboa. Furthermore, these accounts also tend to focus around a small set of artists, a single venue, and a very brief period of time, all of which minimize the East L.A. scene as only a momentary blip in the

greater history of L.A. punk. In fact, subsequent generations of punks have kept the East L.A. scene alive into the present.

Members of East L.A. bands, along with a number of scholars and curators, have dedicated a great deal of effort to reasserting the importance of the early East L.A. scene within the history of punk in Los Angeles since the publication of these works. While the authors of many of these accounts also celebrate the Vex as a cultural bridge between the East and West sides of the city, most also suggest that the original inspiration for opening the Vex was to remedy the exclusion of East L.A. bands from Westside venues, a narrative that does not appear in earlier histories of L.A. punk. Kun, for instance, presents this narrative in both his *Los Angeles* magazine article (66), and in his essay for the catalogue to the *Vexing* exhibition (21). Gunckel also figures the Vex as a response to exclusion in his essay in the *Vexing* catalogue (15), although he later problematizes this narrative in an article in *Aztlán* (“Vexing” 128-9), which I will return to briefly. Gaye Theresa Johnson also repeats this narrative in a chapter on Black and Latina/o punk, citing Kun’s “Vex Populi” (141). Although this narrative has gained steam in recent years, it is not a new one. As early as 1980, Herrón was claiming that East L.A. bands were excluded from Westside venues. In an article in the *Los Angeles Times*, he states, “We can’t even get booked into most of the Hollywood clubs. Call it racism or whatever you like, but they shut the doors when they see us coming” (qtd. in Goldman M7). In a 1984 interview with Steven Loza, which was published in Loza’s *Barrio Rhythm* in 1990, Jesus “Jesse” Velo, bassist of Los Illegals, says that the band could not get gigs in Hollywood because of their name (226). Yvette Doss repeats this in a May, 1997 *Los Angeles Times* article, stating, “Before Los Lobos began changing perceptions in the ’80s, Willie Herron [...] found few venues where a group with the word ‘Los’ in the name was welcome.” In a 1997 article in *Frontera* magazine, Carolina Gonzales writes that “westside venues such as Madame Wong’s and the Whisky were not as accessible to [East L.A.] bands as to Hollywood-based bands—some might say racism played a part” (34). In *Land of a Thousand Dances*, first published in 1998, David Reyes and Tom Waldman also note that there were barriers for bands wishing to play outside of East L.A. (136), and Michelle Habell-Pallán in turn repeats this story, quoting Reyes and Waldman in a chapter on Chicana punks (*Loca Motion* 152).

As these examples demonstrate, the narrative of a sometimes closed-off Westside scene, and of the creation of the Vex as a response to perceived exclusion, has now been in circulation for thirty-five years, largely through the efforts of members of Los Illegals, who are cited in nearly all of these accounts. This story gained serious traction following the reunions of several East L.A. bands in the early 2000s and the publication of several histories of the Los Angeles punk scene, *We Got the Neutron Bomb* in particular. Through this repetition, it has become the taken-for-granted narrative of the East L.A. scene, and has been further repeated in Gurza's *Los Angeles Times* review of *Vexing*, a 2012 *LA Weekly* article by Nicholas Pell, and in the exhibition, *American Sabor: Latinos in U.S. Popular Music*—although Habell-Pallán, a guest curator in the exhibition's original run at the Experience Music Project, notes that text implying that racial prejudice was the reason East L.A. bands had difficulties finding shows on the Westside was added without the consent of the original curatorial team when the exhibition was taken on the road by the Smithsonian ("The Past" 47). My own sense is that there is likely some legitimacy to claims of exclusion made by members of Los Illegals and the Brat (whether or not the exclusion was racial in nature is less certain), but that the narrative of exclusion is often decontextualized and oversimplified in retrospective works. Although Gurza is only one in a long line of authors to present this narrative, his review of the *Vexing* exhibition served as the catalyst for a dramatic pushback against this version of L.A. punk history, and I turn now to this debate.

3.3 Vexing Fallout

According to the title of Gurza's May 24th, 2008 *Los Angeles Times* article, "L.A. punk history is a serious subject," a lesson he learned quite clearly upon publishing his initial review of the *Vexing* exhibition. After the publication of his review, Gurza found himself caught in the middle of a heated debate between Brendan Mullen, founder of the Masque (L.A.'s first punk club) and co-author of *We Got the Neutron Bomb*, and Los Illegals' Willie Herrón, two outspoken participants in the early L.A. punk scene whose versions of history conflict in seemingly irreconcilable ways. In his original review of *Vexing*, Gurza repeats the narrative of exclusion discussed above, stating:

For Chicanos in East L.A., creativity meant channeling their rebellion against the established punk scene of the day, which thrived in Hollywood clubs with bands such as X and the Blasters. Unlike the Bags, which were part of that scene, many Chicano punks felt left out. They were doing a lot of head-banging, but it was against the doors of clubs that would not let them in to play. (“Museum Showcases”)³⁰

He goes on to state that the Vex “was started in 1980 as an alternative for those shut-out East L.A. bands, including Los Illegals with Willie Herrón” (*ibid.*). Gurza also refers to the history of the East L.A. scene as an “often untold story,” noting that the curators “discovered a dearth of information on the scene,” and that one punk anthology—although he does not state which one—devoted only one page to the East L.A. scene, accompanied by a photograph of Los Lobos, “hardly a punk band” according to Gurza.³¹ Gurza does not quote Herrón directly when he argues that the Vex was created in response to exclusion from the Hollywood scene, but he does quote from an interview he conducted with Alice Bag, lead singer of the Hollywood band, the Bags, and an East L.A. native, to support his contention. Bag states, “from that rejection, from that closed [Hollywood] scene, people just turned around and created their own scene in their own backyard [...] The [Vex] legacy is that, if you find a door that’s closed to you and you can’t kick it down, then create your own scene somewhere else. You’re not going to be deterred” (qtd. in Gurza, “Museum Showcases”).³² It is important to note that the

³⁰ Gurza’s statement suggests a somewhat distorted timeline of the Hollywood punk scene, since he positions the Bags and the Blasters as contemporaries, although the Blasters did not form until 1979, by which point the Bags were on the verge of breaking up. In “We Were There,” Bag is very critical of the way in which Gurza condenses several years of a rapidly evolving scene into a single moment, which I will shortly discuss in further detail.

³¹ It is possible, and probably likely, that Gurza is referring to *We Got the Neutron Bomb* here since the book does include one short chapter on the East L.A. scene that is accompanied by a photo of Los Lobos. If this is the case, then Gurza’s claim is a slight exaggeration since the chapter is four pages long, rather than a single page.

³² This statement and a number of others in this section are also quoted by Habell-Pallán in her discussion of the fallout of the *Vexing* exhibition, but I include them again here to provide the necessary context for my discussion of the role of a colorblind rhetoric in the debates.

insertion of “Hollywood” in brackets in Bag’s statement is Gurza’s, and is an assumption that Bag might take issue with for reasons I will return to shortly.

Following Gurza’s initial review, Mullen penned a 5,000-word response entitled, “Death to Racism & Punk Revisionism,” in which he singles out both Herrón and Gurza as targets of his ire. In his follow-up column, Gurza notes that Mullen responded to Herrón’s contention that the Vex was founded in response to exclusion—although, again, while Herrón’s talk of exclusion dates back at least thirty-five years, he is not quoted directly in Gurza’s review—by stating, “Why do desperate people always need someone else to blame their failures on? [...] Sometimes a horrible rock band is just a horrible rock band, Willy, no matter which way you try to slice it with the race card” (qtd. in Gurza, “L.A. Punk History”). Mullen also argues that Gurza is “a professional divider of people whose meal ticket is to keep on perping [sic] racial differences” (qtd. in *ibid.*). In his response to the review, Mullen explains his motivation for speaking out, stating, “I’m reacting because basically something that I stood for is being called racist by people who weren’t there” (qtd. in *ibid.*) It is worth noting that Gurza does not specifically name Mullen or the Masque in his original review (though in his follow-up column he does cite *We Got the Neutron Bomb* as one text that gives short shrift to the East L.A. scene), and he never directly cites race as the reason for exclusion. Mullen goes on to place the burden of proof on those participants who believed they were excluded from the Hollywood scene or Westside venues, saying, “All I’m asking is, can they name one specific incident? Not like, ‘Oh, they might have felt excluded.’ I’m demanding more. Who exactly and where? In other words, what is this punk scene, this abstraction, that you say excluded you?” (qtd. in *ibid.*).³³

³³ Mullen also offered a more measured and concise response to Gurza’s review in a May 17th, 2008 letter to the *Los Angeles Times*, in which he states: “While the ‘Vexing: Female Voices From East L.A. Punk’ exhibition will no doubt add another layer to the rich history of L.A. music, I’m perplexed at the assertion in the article that Chicano punks were somehow rejected from the Hollywood punk scene (ditto the idea that the scene was male-dominated: The all-girl Go-Go’s and female-fronted X, Alley Cats, and the Eyes were among the definitive bands of the time).

The column ignores—with the exception of the Bags—many of the Chicano- (and Latino-) led bands and musicians, such as the Zeros, the Gears, the Plugz, the Gun Club, Tito Larriva, Danny Hidalgo, Victor Bissetti, Gerardo Velasquez, Michael Ochoa and Margaret Guzman, to name a few, who helped create the original Hollywood punk scene.”

Alice Bag was also inspired to write two blog posts considering the existence of racism in the early Los Angeles punk scene because of the mixed reactions to the *Vexing* exhibition, in which she was included. In the first, “Vexing Questions,” posted on May 13th, 2008, Bag contextualizes her relationship to the East L.A. scene, and her statements in Gurza’s review of the exhibit. Although an East L.A. native, Bag notes that her band, the Bags, was based in Hollywood, not East L.A., and that she only played the Vex once, not with the Bags, but as a sometime member of a later band called Castration Squad. Responding to questions raised by her statements in Gurza’s review, she expresses discomfort with the way her words were used, stating:

The interview in question ran for almost one and a half hours. From that, a few sentences were culled and used in a piece which condensed a three to four year timeline in the LA music scene into a short article. [...] It's important to note that I spoke at length with the interviewer and told him that my own experience in the early scene (1976-1979) was not one of exclusion or racism, but that other people who were part of the later scene (1980 and beyond) may have encountered racism and closed doors. (Bag, “Vexing Questions”)

Noting that the Masque and—from her perspective—the small, inclusive community that it fostered, the community to which she belonged,³⁴ predated the Vex by several years, Bag acknowledges that some East L.A. musicians, such as Teresa Covarrubias, had a difficult time getting shows on the Westside until they had built a name for themselves by playing at the Vex. She also quotes Mullen stating, “Bookers back then and to the present day are generally concerned with assessing whether the band mean any bodies in their club space,” although she observes that Mullen himself did not always abide by this policy when booking the Masque (*ibid.*).

³⁴ In her memoir, *Violence Girl*, Bag suggests that in the spring of 1977, there were around forty or fifty people who were deeply involved in the burgeoning Hollywood punk scene (185), but that by early 1978 the scene was “growing exponentially” (233). She argues that those involved from early on were protective of their scene, but not cliquish: “Not everyone was welcomed. There were outsiders who were destined to remain outsiders, people who just didn’t get it” (234).

In her second post, “The Road To (and From) Claremont” published on May 24th—the same day as Gurza’s second column—Bag addresses the fallout from the opening of the exhibition and Gurza’s review. She notes that in the wake of the exhibition, she was subject to scrutiny from communities on both sides of the river: while some Eastsiders questioned the inclusion of certain musicians and artists, such as Bag and Exene Cervenka of X, who were viewed as “outsiders” to the scene, she was also accused by some on the Westside of “betraying the Hollywood scene” (“The Road”). She quotes from one particularly venomous email, whose unnamed author states, “I think it's kind of creepy that you'd sell out the old scene just to be down with a couple of dink bands” (*ibid.*). Bag adds that she was even accused of “playing the race card” because of her comments in Gurza’s review (she does not specify in the blog post that this accusation came from Mullen, but she later indicates that it did in her oral history in *Razorcake* (“We Were There” 43)). She responds to this accusation with an extended disquisition on the way in which such accusations work to silence the voices of already-marginalized groups; she states:

I will not deny anyone the right to point out discrimination by belittling their experiences with a dismissive phrase like “playing the race card.” This response is insulting and only discourages people from shedding light on discrimination. Racism is not a game to be played, nor is there any real victory to be won by bringing it into an argument. If whatever argument you are trying to make is predicated on perceived racial favoritism or discrimination, it’s [sic] legitimacy will be called into question, so most people I know will avoid bringing race into the discussion at all. Many Latinos I know would rather deal with racism in quieter ways, precisely because they don’t want to be accused of playing the race card. And that is how accusing people of playing the race card effectively silences anyone from bringing up issues of racism and supports the status quo. (“The Road”)

Bag’s statement offers valuable insight into the ways in which the condemnation of what Omi and Winant call “race consciousness,” or the recognition of race as a social force from either racist *or* antiracist perspectives (*Racial Formation* 3rd ed. 260), functions to

uphold, rather than challenge, the racial status quo, and I will discuss this in greater detail in the following section.

More recently, Bag published her oral history, “We Were There,” in which a number of Latina/os who were involved in the early Hollywood punk scene discuss their experiences of racism—or lack thereof—within the scene. In her introduction to the article, Bag contends that the notable presence of Latina/os in the early Hollywood scene is rarely mentioned in works about Chicana/os in punk because this inclusion would disrupt the “perpetuat[ion of] a dramatic storyline that never really existed—or perhaps existed for only a handful of people” (“We Were There” 30), namely, the idea that Chicana/os were excluded from the Hollywood scene because of their race. Bag put together this project in response to the implication on the *American Sabor* website, as well as in an *LA Weekly* article by Nicholas Pell, that Westside venues were inhospitable to Chicana/os in the early days of punk in Los Angeles. Seemingly responding to Mullen’s demand that those who felt excluded from the scene provide details of specific incidents, Bag concludes her introduction by stating, “We were there and we can tell you first-hand how we were treated and how we treated others. I asked for concrete, specific first-person accounts only, and that’s what you’re getting” (*ibid.* 30). In a section with the subheading, “L.A. Punk’s First Wave: Punk as Its Own Race,” nearly all of Bag’s respondents report that they never personally experienced racism in the Hollywood scene—the one exception is Margaret Guzman, an artist, who recalls being told by a writer for *Slash* that she looked Spanish, to which another woman in the room responded, “She doesn’t [look] Spanish. She looks stone-cold Indian,” in a voice that Guzman says carried a tone of “non-acceptance” (*ibid.* 32).

Several respondents also note that during this period their identities as punks moved to the foreground, while other identity categories, such as race, gender, sexuality, etc., dropped into the background. A statement from Kid Congo Powers, guitarist for the Gun Club and later the Cramps, suggests that there may have been some social pressure to privilege a punk identity over other identity categories; he states, “I never felt any racism in the first wave of punk. It was an open field for everyone, all races, women, gays, and men! I do know that the idea of labeling was taboo, so there was not politicization of

anyone's roles. As a matter of fact, there was no talk of it" (*ibid.* 32). Bag's own impression of this issue differs from Powers's; she states, "I think it's important to note that nobody was denying their ethnicity and we did speak about each other's backgrounds. We sometimes even joked about it" (*ibid.* 34). If Powers is correct, though that there was some pressure to avoid discussion of other identity categories in favor of a unified punk identity, this presents a complicated issue. While some punks of color may have willingly downplayed race in service of the cause, for others this may have felt like an erasure of a core part of their identity. This suggests that colorblind rhetoric is not only present in the arguments over L.A. punk history, but that a particular form of colorblindness may have existed within the scene from the start.³⁵

Elsewhere in the article, Bag again clarifies the timeline of the early years of punk in Los Angeles, and defends Brendan Mullen's reputation against any accusations of racial prejudice in his booking practices. Responding directly to Pell's *LA Weekly* article, she challenges Pell's statement that a rivalry existed between the Hollywood and East L.A. scenes, observing again that the scene that coalesced around the Masque predated the East L.A. scene by several years ("We Were There" 40). She points in particular to the inaccuracy of Pell's statement that "[t]he Vex provided a platform for bands like The Plugz, The Brat, and the Zeros, who were known as the 'Mexican Ramones' and featured a young El Vez" (qtd. in *ibid.* 40), noting that the Plugz and the Zeros had both established themselves in the Hollywood scene before the Vex even opened. Robert Lopez, a member of the Zeros who went on to record and perform as El Vez ("The Mexican Elvis"), also challenges Pell's statement, saying, "I don't remember ever playing the Vex. I quit the Zeros in 1978" (*ibid.* 40). Javier Escovedo, another member of the Zeros, likewise states that the band never played the Vex. Bag again expresses her displeasure with the way that Gurza's review of *Vexing* collapsed the timeline of L.A. punk history, erasing the distinction between the early Hollywood scene and the later

³⁵ The notion of colorblindness in service of punk unity is a recurring theme in Mimi Thi Nguyen's compilation zines, *Evolution of a Race Riot* and *Race Riot 2*, suggesting that this is an enduring idea throughout punk's history, at least in the U.S. See, for instance, Alex Rodriguez's letter to Nguyen on pages 32-33 of *Evolution of a Race Riot*, and Nguyen's essay on pages 107-111 in *Race Riot 2*.

East L.A. scene (*ibid.* 40), and notes that this erasure contributed to Mullen's feeling that he was being called racist, although his name never came up in the review (43). In an effort to undo any damage done to Mullen's reputation in the fallout of the *Vexing* debate, she asks her respondents if they ever perceived Mullen to be racially prejudiced, and they unanimously report that they did not. Sean Carrillo, evoking a discourse of colorblindness (or deafness, in this case), contends that Mullen's commitment to music trumped all else, stating, "He was a man whose ears knew no color. He may not have liked your band or your music, but it had nothing to do with the color of your skin. Of that, I am completely sure" (*ibid.* 45). Given the testimony of her respondents, Bag concludes that the "myth that the Hollywood scene was racially discriminatory," and that this was the principle motivation for the creation of the *Vex*, can be considered "busted" (*ibid.* 45). Once again echoing Mullen's response to Gurza, Bag asks the reader to "consider the accounts of those of us who were there when you hear or read misinformed reports or writers with revisionist agendas tell our story. Go to the source. Just because something is in print doesn't make it true, even if those words appear in the Smithsonian catalog or the *L.A. Times*" (*ibid.* 47).

My aim here is not to resolve the debate over the presence of conscious or unconscious racism in the early Los Angeles punk scene, a likely impossible task. However, several noteworthy points emerge from this debate that highlight the complexity of the issue. One important point that arises from Bag's response to Gurza's *Vexing* review is that the authors of articles about the East L.A. scene often attempt to condense a period of several years into short pieces, resulting in confused timelines and blurred distinctions between scenes. Bag rightly observes that "[t]he Hollywood punk scene predated the East L.A. punk scene" ("We Were There" 30); although the Stains formed in 1976 and Thee Undertakers in 1977, the beginning of an identifiable "scene" in East L.A. may be placed closer to 1978 or 1979, whereas the Hollywood scene began to take shape in 1976 and coalesced around the Masque, which opened in 1977 and closed by 1979. Bag notes that her own involvement with the punk scene was tapering out by 1979 ("Vexing Questions"), and that the initial Hollywood scene also ceased to exist around the same time—at least in the small, inclusive form that she says existed initially ("We Were There" 40, 47). Considering that the Brat and Los Illegals, the two bands whose members

most often report having trouble getting gigs at Westside venues, both formed in 1979, from a chronological standpoint Bag is perhaps correct in saying that the Vex, which opened in 1980, was not created as a direct result of racial discrimination in the scene, at least not the one to which she belonged.

However, this does not mean that East L.A. bands did not actually experience difficulty in getting gigs on the Westside. There are numerous reasons why East L.A. bands may have had trouble landing gigs on the Westside early in their careers. Members of the Brat and Los Illegals themselves do not explicitly state that racism was to blame for their trouble getting into Westside venues—although Herrón does intimate the idea in Goldman’s *Los Angeles Times* piece (M7). Tito Larriva of the Plugz acknowledges that some East L.A. bands rarely played in Hollywood early on, but saw this more as an issue of geography, rather than racism (Bag, “We Were There” 40)—although this disregards a history of racial segregation that isolated a significant portion of L.A.’s Chicana/o community to the Eastside, systemic racism that may have limited mobility for Eastside punks, even if racism was not active in the Hollywood scene in individual terms.³⁶ Further, as Mullen suggests, bookers may have believed that the East L.A. bands would not draw sufficient enough crowds for their performances to be profitable (Bag, “Vexing Questions”). While this is a common consideration for bookers, and could have been informed by the belief that East L.A. bands lacked adequate name recognition, a statement from Teresa Covarrubias suggests that these decisions may have also been motivated by stereotypes of East L.A. bands and their audience. In a 1982 *La Opinión* article, Covarrubias states, “Since we’re from East L.A., some people expect to see knives and guns at the shows. Others think we’ll sound like Tierra or something like that” (qtd. in Gunckel, “Vex Marks” 13). In his article on the East L.A. scene, Dan Vargas includes a conversation between a booking agent and a member of an East L.A. band in which, upon learning that the band is from East L.A., the booker immediately asks if their

³⁶ See for example Ricardo Romo’s *East Los Angeles: History of a Barrio* for a detailed discussion of racially-driven city planning and real estate practices that led to the isolation of Los Angeles’s Mexican and Mexican American residents in East Los Angeles, as well as Mike Davis’s *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* for the importance of neighborhood associations in maintaining racially segregated neighborhoods after redlining was outlawed.

following includes gang members (191-2). While this conversation may have been fabricated for the article—Vargas does not provide the name of the band or booker involved—the implication is still that such conversations were a common enough occurrence that the inclusion of this one gives the reader a more accurate representation of the music scene in East L.A. and its relationship to the larger L.A. scene. Both Covarrubias’s statement and Vargas’s article suggest that the contemporaneous media hype over gang violence in East L.A. may have informed the decisions of Westside bookers. While this does not prove the existence of discriminatory booking practices, it does trouble definitive statements that such practices did not exist (although, again, it is important to note that these articles were both written in 1980 or later, after the disintegration of the scene to which Bag claims to have been a part).

Herrón and Velo also argue that, at least in the case of Los Illegals, their strong identification with a Chicana/o identity and their foregrounding of Chicana/o politics may have contributed to their difficulty breaking into Westside venues. When asked by Alvarado why Los Illegals had such a difficult time getting gigs on the Westside when other Latina/os, such as Alice Bag and members of the Plugz, the Zeros, Circle One, and the Stains, did not, Velo responds: “Because we actually stood forth, and identified, and pulled our badges out and said, ‘Hey, we’re Chicanos. Hey, we’re here.’ The Plugz had two guys that were very white, very blue-eyed, and only the lead singer is Chicano looking. We’re all Chicano, and we’re announcing ‘We’re here,’ whereas the other ones sounded very English” (Herrón and Velo, “Los Illegals” 41). Herrón continues, “I think a lot of it is the way [...] Mike [Vallejo, guitarist of Circle One] was saying that he didn’t identify with that part of it. See, we identified with it so much that we advocated it and that’s what made us different. They didn’t advocate it. They blended more, and we were like this black stone on the beach and they were like part of all the other sand piles” (*ibid.* 41). Keeping in mind that Los Illegals formed around the same time that the initial Hollywood scene was entering a state of decline, it is still interesting to consider the way in which punk functioned as its own identity category in the Hollywood scene, with other identity categories, such as gender, sexuality, and race, relegated to the background. While Bag says that people in the scene did not hide these aspects of their identities, Powers suggests that there was sometimes social pressure to not talk about racial or

ethnic identity. If this was still true when Los Illegals began looking for gigs on the Westside, then there could be some truth to Herrón and Velo's explanation of why they were a harder fit for Westside crowds. While the Plugz referenced Chicana/o identity through their cover of "La Bamba," and Los Lobos fused traditional Mexican styles with rock, Los Illegals was possibly the only band at the time using punk as a direct platform for confrontational Chicana/o politics, which may have caused bookers at Westside venues to question their audience appeal.

Acknowledging that the East L.A. scene and the Hollywood scene to which Bag belonged were not concurrent also does not mean that racism did not exist in the early years of punk in Los Angeles. Members of the Stains and Thee Undertakers, who had both performed in Westside venues prior to 1980, do not report experiencing the same difficulties in entering Westside venues as the Brat and Los Illegals. However, members of each band do recall instances of overt racism, although their statements suggest that these instances came from audience members, rather than from bookers. Robert Becerra, the only constant member of the Stains, reports to Vargas that, "When we play with Black Flag [...] we always get these honkies that yell shit like 'Go back to the barrio!' or 'Go back to Mexico'" (200). He continues, "They've always hated us because we're Mexican. We kept playing and playing and they couldn't accept us. Now, they're accepting us ever since the Plugz started up. [...] They couldn't get it in their heads that Mexicans could play crazy" (*ibid.* 201). Becerra does not specify if such events occurred in Hollywood clubs, but Tracy Garcia of Thee Undertakers recalls a similar experience during the band's first performance at the Whisky-A-Go-Go. He states, "the Hollywood crowd was a lot different from the East L.A. crowd. The East L.A. crowd, once they got into us, they knew who we were. When we went to Hollywood to play, they were just like, 'Who the fuck are these guys?' And then you get the 'wetback' thing and the 'go back to Mexico' thing" (Thee Undertakers 45). While these may have only been isolated incidents, and not characteristic of the Hollywood scene as a whole, these incidents, as well as Guzman's experience of being called "stone-cold Indian," do challenge the notion that racism was nonexistent in the scene.

3.4 Historiography and Colorblindness

The debates over Los Angeles punk history also suggest a number of historiographical dilemmas. For starters, as his response to Gurza and Herrón demonstrates, Mullen takes the position that his understanding of race in L.A. punk history differs entirely from those who argue that East L.A. bands faced exclusion. This suggests that for Mullen there is one “true” version of events that negates any alternative readings of the past. The same could be said for Bag, who claims to have definitively “busted” the “myth” of racial discrimination in the early Hollywood scene. Their belief in a single, non-racist past leads both Mullen and Bag to accuse those whose readings conflict with their own of engaging in “revisionism.” While the word clearly carries a negative charge in Bag’s and Mullen’s usages, within the field of historical scholarship, revisionism is considered an integral and indispensable part of the process of writing history. James McPherson, former president of the American Historical Association writes:

History is a continuing dialogue between the present and the past. Interpretations of the past are subject to change in response to new evidence, new questions asked of the evidence, new perspectives gained by the passage of time. There is no single, eternal, and immutable “truth” about past events and their meaning. The unending quest of historians for understanding the past—that is, “revisionism”—is what makes history vital and meaningful.

Mullen and Bag are therefore correct that those advancing alternative interpretations of L.A.’s punk past are engaged in acts of revisionism, but, counter to their understandings of the term, this is a necessary and vital process in attempting to understand the past since, as Keith Jenkins suggests, the past is “an effectively absent subject” (12).

Rather than recognizing history as a dialogue, McPherson argues that the “pejorative usage of ‘revisionist history’” is meant to “denigrate critics by imputing to them a falsification of history.” This resonates with the ways in which Mullen and Bag employ the term. In particular, Mullen’s accusation that Herrón played “the race card” in order to cover up for his band’s failings implies a belief that Herrón was attempting to alter the historical record in order to advance his own agenda. Mullen’s use of “revisionism” in

the title of his email thus suggests an effort to discredit Herrón's account of the L.A. punk scene. Mullen and Spitz use the term in a similar manner in the introduction to *We Got the Neutron Bomb*, suggesting that histories of punk that came out in the 1990s focused on New York and London and wrote Los Angeles out of the record so that some figures could "seal their own legacy and sustain a quasi-mainstream career as a 'professional punk.' To let anybody else in, especially a surfer or a skater, would stall the gravy train" (xv). Echoing Mullen, in "We Were There," Bag urges readers to question those with "revisionist agendas," and to seek instead the word of those "who were there" (47). Bag's words are targeted at the Smithsonian's presentation of the *American Sabor* exhibit and Pell's *LA Weekly* article, both of which do contain notable historical inaccuracies that justify criticism, but her usage of "revisionist," like Mullen's, carries a decisively negative connotation. Both Bag's and Mullen's usages of the term thus represent attempts to discredit accounts that challenge their own narratives of the L.A. punk scene. Ironically, their respective projects to reinsert "untold" stories into the history of punk can also be described as "revisionism," only in the way the term is used by historians rather than the pejorative sense in which they both employ the term.

In addition to challenging competing histories of L.A. punk through accusations of revisionism, both Bag and Mullen emphasize the importance of first-hand accounts and therefore privilege oral history as the most objective way of telling history, which in turn raises its own set of questions. Joseph Turrini notes that, given the general scarcity of traditional source material on punk scenes, such as diaries and correspondence, scholars and historians of punk have had to depend largely on materials such as recorded music and accompanying lyric sheets, fanzines, rock journalism, and, to a significant degree, oral history (61). While oral history can take numerous forms and can be used to complement other types of historical research, Turrini points to a growing body of punk oral histories that cut-and-paste quotations from large numbers of interviews in order to create a narrative of a particular subgenre or geographical scene (62). He lists Spitz and Mullen's book as one example of this format (*ibid.* 63), also noting that some quotations in the book were lifted from previously published interviews in fanzines and magazines, rather than new interviews, with no indication of where specific quotations were taken from (68). Bag's "We Were There" also appears to fit within the format Turrini

describes.³⁷ The authors/editors of this type of oral history often claim a kind of authority based on their direct connection to the scene or genre, and they also tend to suggest that their projects are “far more objective than traditional narrative history, autobiographies, cultural studies, or journalistic accounts, specifically because of their reliance on the participants [sic] own words as the primary text” (Turrini 65). This holds for Spitz and Mullen’s book, as well as for Bag’s article. In Spitz and Mullen’s case, although they acknowledge that their work is not definitive and that their interviewees may “get it right *or wrong* along with us” (xvi, emphasis mine), they structure their introduction in a way that creates an oppositional relationship between themselves and their participants and so-called “revisionists” who, they assert, falsify history or present an intentionally incomplete picture to advance their own agendas. Bag similarly creates a dichotomy between those with “revisionist agendas” and those “who were there” in order to present her project as more objective than other accounts.³⁸

Turrini, however, raises concerns about the degree to which works presented in the format employed by Spitz and Mullen and Bag can be considered objective. Firstly, he states, “the particular format of these books does not create unbiased, definitive historical accounts; [...] the decision of who to interview and the selection and placement of the interview quotes does indeed mean that the authors/editors are making decisions that fashion and create the historical narrative, even if using the participants’ own words” (Turrini 67). Additionally, he says, “The personal connection of the authors/editors to the subject matter provides them with easier access to interviewees, and an authenticity, but also an increased stake in the narrative they are fashioning” (*ibid.* 67). This second point

³⁷ Bag does not specify whether her project is a transcription of a roundtable discussion or pieced together from a series of individual interviews, but the flow of the piece suggests the latter.

³⁸ As a point of comparison, see George B. Sanchez’s oral history of the punk scene in the Pilsen and Little Village neighborhoods of Chicago, which ran in the March, 2004 issue of *Maximum Rocknroll*. Like Spitz and Mullen, Sanchez acknowledges that his project is not a definitive history of the scene, but he then goes on to also acknowledge his own role as editor in shaping the narrative, as well as the underrepresentation of particular voices, a significant departure from the way that Spitz and Mullen and Bag set up their projects. Sanchez states: “As an oral history, this is really a journalist’s snapshot of five weeks spent in Chicago’s Pilsen & Little Village neighborhoods. [...] There are voices unrecorded and stories still waiting to be told. To be honest, some important tales were lost to the cutting room floor and I’m still bummed there isn’t enough women’s voices here.”

is particularly important to debates about the existence of racism in the early L.A. punk scene; in *We Got the Neutron Bomb*, and especially in his response to Gurza's article, Mullen clearly demonstrates a vested interest in the way that the history of L.A. punk is told, and the same holds for Bag in "We Were There." This suggests that these debates are at times as much about who owns L.A. punk history as they are about the "facts" of the past. As Jenkins states, "History is never for itself; it is always for someone" (21). In this case, Mullen's defensiveness suggests a deep investment in protecting his own legacy and the legacy of the scene in which he was a participant, as well as in defending his reputation against accusations of racism. Bag's defense of the scene also suggests an investment in protecting her legacy and the legacy of the scene, but also an equal investment in defending the now-deceased Mullen's reputation in the wake of these debates. In attempting to protect their legacies, though, Mullen, Bag, and some participants in Bag's oral history at times employ rhetorical strategies that mirror the discourse of colorblindness.

In many of the accounts discussed above, punk is seen as providing a temporary bridge between the East and West sides of Los Angeles. Punk's ability to facilitate movement between Hollywood and East L.A., which Carrillo describes as "the largely misunderstood, ill-portrayed, seldom-experienced Latino subsection of Los Angeles" (38), is indeed noteworthy. However, the ways in which this moment of increased movement are discussed in histories of the L.A. punk scene either treat Eastside-Westside exchange as a sort of utopia in which the question of race became irrelevant, or sidestep the issue of race altogether. In "East of Eden," for instance, Carrillo celebrates both the exchange enabled by the Vex and the overall inclusivity of the scene, noting that Latina/os were present not only in the East L.A. scene, but in the Hollywood scene as well. He concludes by stating, "As long as ethnic diversity is considered a 'problem' instead of a solution, there is little hope that governments or institutions can accomplish what artistic freedom is able to pioneer. The inclusiveness of the seminal L.A. punk scene demonstrates that alienation and separateness are imaginary hurdles in the face of genuine collaboration" (Carrillo 42). Pérez offers a similar take in his essay in *Make the Music Go Bang!*, although, as his statement above demonstrates, he does acknowledge that some Chicana/os may have felt that Los Lobos should have focused their energies on

their own community. Spitz and Mullen, on the other hand, include quotes from Carrillo and Joe “Vex” Suquette that acknowledge that Westsiders rarely ventured east of the L.A. River before the Vex and that celebrate East-West exchange through punk (246-7), but their selection of quotes skirts the degree to which the divide between the East and West sides of L.A. has historically been a racial one. In all of these examples, an adherence to an ideology of colorblindness can be sensed, though to different ends: Carrillo’s and Pérez’s essays celebrate the potential of looking beyond race, while the erasure of race in Spitz and Mullen’s case suggests an aversion to race-consciousness (it is perhaps a stretch to draw this conclusion based only on the short chapter on the Vex in *We Got the Neutron Bomb*, but Mullen’s comments elsewhere, which I will discuss in the following paragraphs, offer additional support for this claim). Of the popular accounts of L.A. punk history only Snowden’s assertion that East L.A. bands were often confined only to playing “East L.A. Nights” when they ventured to the Westside offers a more critical reading of the question of race (“You Should” 152).

While Bag suggests that Mullen responded so passionately to Gurza’s *Vexing* review because of his strong belief in the egalitarian nature of the early Hollywood punk scene (“We Were There” 43), the language used in his response reads as a dismissal of those who suggest racism may have existed in the scene and a condemnation of race-consciousness. In the first place, by demanding proof of “one specific incident” of overt racism or openly discriminatory booking policies in order to prove the existence of racism in the scene, Mullen limits the discussion to one very particular type of racism, one attributable only to the “obviously bigoted,” to borrow Goldberg’s words. Although there seems to be nothing in the existing literature on the scene that meets Mullen’s demand for a specific instance in which an East L.A. band was denied a gig on the Westside because of racist booking practices, the examples provided above by members of the Stains and Thee Undertakers demonstrate that overt racism likely did exist in the early L.A. punk scene, at the very least among a minority of audience members. More importantly, though, Mullen’s insistence on the name of a bigoted booker disregards and delegitimizes a long history of systemic racial segregation, discrimination, and inequality in Los Angeles that may have contributed to the difficulty punk groups from the Eastside experienced when trying to cross over into Westside venues—although it is important to

note once again that race is never directly cited as the reason for exclusion in the literature on East L.A. punk. Further, in shifting the burden of identifying a specific example of discrimination onto those from East L.A. who felt excluded from the Hollywood scene, Mullen saddles them with an unfair challenge. As Perry says of proving intent in the context of employment discrimination cases, “This is an extraordinarily difficult standard to meet and often requires a ‘smoking gun’—virtually irrefutable evidence of intent to discriminate” (15). Invalidating the perspectives of those who claim exclusion on the grounds that they cannot provide the “smoking gun” is thus a clear example of the shift identified by Goldberg in which racism is conceptually reconfigured from a structural force to the purview of “extreme individuals” (360).

Given the perceived inability of members of East L.A. bands to meet his demand for concrete proof of racism on the part of bookers from Westside venues, Mullen suggests that the only clearly identifiable example of racism is the insistence on talking about race among those who claim exclusion existed—again, though, as Gurza notes in his follow-up article, race is never mentioned in his original article. Mullen’s accusation that Herrón employs “the race card” to cover for Los Illegals being a “horrible rock band,” and that Gurza makes his reputation from perpetuating discussions of race implies that bringing race into the conversation is a comparable offense to overt racial discrimination. The effect of Mullen’s accusations is to attempt to silence those who challenge the idea that the Hollywood punk scene was anything but a multicultural utopia, with the likely unintended consequence of contributing to the maintenance of the existing racial order. As Bag herself makes clear, the effect of an accusation of “playing the race card” is not only to delegitimize the seriousness of the discrimination the speaker is attempting to address, but also to silence further discussion by creating an air of fear around open discussion of race and racism lest one become a target of further consternation (“The Road”). This is precisely the objective of a neoliberal rearticulation of colorblindness: to silence discussions of racial inequality by creating a social taboo around so-called “race-thinking,” and, in this way, to perpetuate dominant social relations that benefit some groups over others. My intention here is not to vilify Mullen, who likely did not imagine his argument in these terms—indeed, as the discussion of Mullen in Bag’s “We Were There” suggests, Mullen was likely reacting to the fact that he believed the early

Hollywood punk scene had transcended the racial inequality existent in the broader culture, and claims of exclusion challenged this belief. Nevertheless, regardless of intention, his invocation of “the race card” in this instance ultimately works against reaching a more complex understanding of the racial dynamics of the early L.A. punk scene by attempting to silence voices that challenged his own understanding of the scene. As Habel-Pallán states, channeling Joseph’s notion of “post-identity,” as well as Goldberg’s “antiracism,” “rather than creating a space for discussion about the racialized undercurrents in the Hollywood punk scene, Mullen labels those who had experiences of racism within punk ‘racist’ because they dare to mention the presence of racialized difference or ethnicity. Any discussion of racism is then deflected away from history by the scene itself” (“Death to Revisionism” 263).

Bag’s critique of Mullen’s invocation of “the race card,” along with her larger body of work, displays a more nuanced reading of the continued importance of race in organizing society. However, the discussion of race in “We Were There,” like Mullen’s 5,000 word email, contradictorily engages a discourse of colorblindness by implying that racism is an individual phenomenon. While Bag is more willing to acknowledge claims of exclusion than Mullen—it was, after all, her support of these claims in Gurza’s review that provoked Mullen to accuse her, along with Herrón, of “playing the race card” (“The Road”)—she also suggests that if overt racism did exist in the Los Angeles punk scene, it was likely attributable to the skinhead contingent that arrived on the scene later, rather than to anyone in the initial scene that she was a part of. She states:

Some of the punk bands that came along a little later felt that they were being discriminated against on the basis of race and somehow that got blamed on the Hollywood scene. Most of the people I know who were playing the Vex didn’t have those racist experiences, but some people did and I don’t want to negate or make light of their experiences. The truth is that by late ’79 things were already really different than they had been in the early years. The Hollywood scene was all but over by the time the Vex came along. [...] [A]llegations of racism in punk at large are possible. I mean, there were skinheads in those days. They weren’t

hanging in our circles, but they were out there calling themselves punks. (Bag, “We Were There” 40)

Hellin Killer, a participant in Bag’s oral history, offers a similar take, stating:

I think the shows were very different in the ’70s. It all seemed much more like family. Everyone stuck up for each other and gender or race were irrelevant! Maybe people were kinda judgmental about long hair but it was more in fun. In the ’80s, things got weird. More new kids were influenced by the news propaganda saying punk was violent and they started to act like the skinheads in England who were driven by their own racial tensions. Things were not safe or fun. (“We Were There” 38)

Even Margaret Guzman, Bag’s only respondent who reports an instance of overt racism, when she was called “stone-cold Indian,” suggests that racism lives in the individual, and that any racism in the scene was attributable to a few bad apples, saying “there did seem to be a bit of underlying hostility or non-acceptance from a few individuals” (*ibid.* 32). The language employed by participants in Bag’s oral history thus further demonstrates the pervasiveness of a colorblind or antiracial conception of racism as an individual character flaw, rather than a systemic or structural force.

As stated previously, Bag’s observation that the East L.A. scene was in its infancy as the Hollywood scene that she knew entered its period of decline presents a challenge to narratives that collapse the years from 1976-1980 into a single moment. While this is an important point of clarification in the discussion of race in L.A. punk history, the attempt to cast blame for whatever racism may have existed within the small Hollywood scene Bag and her participants belonged to onto a few individuals, or onto a larger, less centralized scene that existed by 1980 is troubling. As in Mullen’s case, this tendency obscures the degree to which a long history of systemic inequality in Los Angeles may have contributed to limited mobility for musicians from East L.A. Additionally, this disregards the degree to which participants in the initial Hollywood scene may have inadvertently participated in more subtle forms of racism, even if participants in the scene generally respected each other’s identities and backgrounds. Daniel Traber argues that

while many punks in L.A. derived a sense of authenticity by leaving their suburban homes to take up residence in inner-city slums, this “downward” mobility relied upon the existence of the largely racialized urban poor, whom he terms the “sub-urban,” to grant legitimacy to the perceived subversiveness of their downward move (32). He concludes, therefore, that “punk unwittingly repeats the *ideological* patterns of the dominant culture by privileging the importance of the self and self-interest, thus treating the Other as an object to be used for their own desires” (Traber 40, italics in original). Traber singles out the Canterbury apartments, where a number of participants in the initial Hollywood scene lived, Bag included, as one such example, stating:

The punks treated the Canterbury the way they thought it deserved. They behaved like spoiled kids who refuse to clean up after themselves and showed no respect for a place some are forced to live in because they lack a choice. [...] Here we see them using the sub-urban identity but refusing the possible multiple desires of people in that habitus. The sub-urban subject is exoticized, forced into a preexisting stereotype that further stabilizes a monolithic view of marginality. (52)

Thus, while Bag and her respondents remember the Hollywood scene as a moment largely free of racism, Traber’s account demonstrates that members of the scene may have unintentionally reproduced certain patterns of inequality that existed in the dominant culture from which they were attempting to separate themselves. Fiona I.B. Ngô further suggests that L.A. punks’ “acts of violence and destruction” during the “Chinatown Punk Wars” represent “the policing of other communities dispossessed by the economic restructuring of the area in the shadow of war” (224), as Madame Wong’s, a restaurant-turned-venue where punks rioted during a Bags performance in 1978, was owned by Esther Wong, an immigrant woman of color, and the larger Chinatown area was home to a large Vietnamese refugee community.³⁹ These examples in turn challenge the idea that racism within the scene existed only in the form of overt racism attributable

³⁹ Ngô also notes that Mullen refers to Esther Wong with “the old orientalist marker ‘Dragon Lady’” in the liner notes to a compilation of the Bags’ discography (233).

to a few individuals and highlight the limits of colorblindness as a racial “common sense,” in Omi and Winant’s terms.

3.5 Conclusion

To reiterate, the preceding discussion is not meant to prove definitively that racial prejudices prevented East Los Angeles bands from procuring gigs in Westside venues, but rather to demonstrate that the history of race and racism within Los Angeles punk, and within the history of punk more generally, is complex and contradictory. Unraveling this already complex history is made even more difficult by the fact that competing versions of the story are dependent on the recollections of individuals with interests in the way the story is told (a principle which applies equally to participants in both the Hollywood and East L.A. scenes). Looking not for a definitive resolution to debates that have emerged from the telling of L.A. punk history, but instead at the ways in which the debates are framed reveals the degree to which they are shaped by discourses of colorblindness or antiracism as described by critical race scholars such as Omi and Winant, Goldberg, and Perry. This is evident both in the way that the initial Hollywood scene is framed as a moment free of racism, sexism, homophobia, etc. that seems to embody the aims of an egalitarian, colorblind society, and in the way that colorblindness, in a sense that closely reflects the neoliberal rearticulation of the term, has been deployed to attempt to silence voices that are perceived to pose a challenge to the idea of the Hollywood scene as an egalitarian moment. As I have argued throughout the chapter, the deployment of the language of colorblindness in the telling of L.A. punk history is cause for concern. In particular, the notion that recognition of racial difference is akin to racism perpetuates the exclusion of particular stories and voices from L.A. punk history. Further, treating racism as an individual character flaw, rather than as a powerful force that continues to shape the social and political organization of everyday life in the United States, obscures the degree to which systemic racial inequality may have limited the mobility of East L.A. bands, as well as the ways in which L.A. punks and clubs may have been unintentionally complicit with longstanding racial hierarchies. A close reading of the debates over L.A. punk history thus demonstrates the perniciousness of

colorblindness as an ideology that claims to want to move past racial thinking while simultaneously upholding racial inequality.

Chapter 4

4 The Racial Limits of Genre Discourse: Chicana/o Punks in the Recording Industry

[B]y far the most crucial factor determining the commercial success of Latino popular musics in the United States has been their unstable location within an industry that has insisted on defining and containing musicians and audiences within unambiguous racial and ethnic categories. (Deborah Pacini Hernandez, *Oye Como Va!: Hybridity and Identity in Latino Popular Music*)

So what we ended up doing was working with a lot of different producers, and everyone had their own idea of what we should sound like. Some had this fantastic idea we should have maracas, or fuckin' castanets because we were a "Spanish" band, or all Mexicans play with castanets, I guess. (Rudy Medina, "The Brat")

The next two chapters explore the ways in which discourses of race and structural inequality impact the production and circulation of music created by Chicana/o and Latina/o punks. To this end, I consider two streams: first, the attempts of early East Los Angeles bands to work within the mainstream music industry, and second, bands from the three other scenes under examination that employ Do-It-Yourself, or DIY, approaches to music-making. In this chapter, following the work of Keith Negus and Deborah Pacini Hernandez, I contend that the experiences of early East Los Angeles Chicana/o punk bands working within the major label system were shaped by the ways in which discourses of race influence both understandings of genre and the structure of the industry. In particular, I argue that these bands were constrained by racially bound understandings of genre that reflect discourses of Chicana/os and Latina/os as "foreign." I contend further that the assumptions of music industry personnel about who Latina/o musicians are, as well as who their "natural" audience is, not only place constraints upon Latina/o musicians, but also contribute to the creation and maintenance of societal fragmentation along ethnic and racial lines. The examples of Los Illegals and the Brat in particular demonstrate the ways in which racialized understandings of genre in the 1980s placed constraints upon the first wave of East Los Angeles Chicana/o punk bands that limited their success within the industry. Thus, while these bands wished to challenge common assumptions about Chicana/o communities, by pushing these bands to work

within static definitions of “Latin” music and by marketing them only to Chicana/o and Latina/o communities, the ultimate effect of the racialized assumptions of producers and managers was instead to contribute to the continuation of a notion of Chicana/os and Latina/os as perpetually foreign.

4.1 Race, Genre, Marketing

Following closely on the heels of bands from the more widely recognized and celebrated early Hollywood scene, such as the Weirdos, the Germs, the Plugz, and the Bags, the first wave of East Los Angeles punk bands like the Stains, Thee Undertakers, the Brat, Los Illegals, and others began to take shape between the years of 1977 and 1979. After playing in rented halls and at backyard parties and car shows for a number of years, the bands found something of a home in the Vex, the only long-running punk venue in East L.A., which existed first as a bi-weekly event held at Self-Help Graphics and Arts from March to November of 1980, and continued on as a series of stand-alone clubs in several different locations in East L.A. until September of 1983 (Alvarado, Interview). Contrary to later generations of punk bands who often wished to insulate themselves from the mainstream music industry—and had greater opportunities to do so, given the emergence of a network of independent labels and touring circuits during the 1980s—the first generation of East L.A. bands, much like many of their Hollywood compatriots, often hoped to land record deals on major labels and achieve mainstream success. As Tracy “Skull” Garcia of Thee Undertakers reports:

the ‘80s was the hardcore, that’s when everybody was anti- this and that. We were more like, yeah, we can be rebellious and anti-political, but it would be nice to have an album out on a major and would be able to make a little bit of money off of it. Yeah, it might be called selling out. But if you can make a living off of music, it would be great. And then you get to speak your mind, and you’re actually kind of preaching to other people—not preaching, but getting your message out. [...] we wanted to get our message out, but we wanted to get it out worldwide, not just in L.A. (Interview)

Jesus Velo of Los Illegals echoes this sentiment in an interview with Jimmy Alvarado, stating, “the bigger you get your message out there, the better it is. You say you’re going corporate, but you know, fuck it, you’re going to get a million more people going corporate than you will being independent” (Herrón and Velo, “Los Illegals” 38). As the bands established themselves on the scene, they began to attract a certain amount of label interest. Thee Undertakers recorded an album that was to be issued independently by Los Angeles record store, Roadhouse Records. The Stains recorded an album for influential DIY punk label SST, founded by Greg Ginn of Black Flag. The Brat recorded an EP for Fatima, an independent label run by Tito Larriva of the Plugz, along with Richard Duardo and Yolanda Comparan Ferrer, and the band had plans for a follow-up full length on Capitol Records (Covarrubias and Medina 64). Los Illegals signed to A&M Records, where they released one seven-inch single in 1982 and an LP in 1983, and recorded a second album, *Burning Youth*, which was never officially released. However, though these groups were able to attract label attention, the Stains and Thee Undertakers from newly formed independents, the Brat and Los Illegals from majors, none translated this interest into sustainable recording careers or significant commercial success. My interest then is in exploring how discourses of race may have affected the success of Chicana/o punk groups within the recording industry.

Keith Negus’s notion that “*an industry produces culture and culture produces an industry*” (14, italics in original) is a valuable starting point. Negus uses the phrase “industry produces culture” to describe “how entertainment corporations set up structures of organization and institute distinct working practices to produce identifiable products, commodities and ‘intellectual properties’” (14). This clause of his argument is drawn from the field of political economy where, he notes, it has been argued that corporate domination of cultural fields “can limit the circulation of unorthodox or oppositional ideas and [...] contribute to broader social divisions and inequalities of information” (*ibid.* 15). However, without entirely discounting this line of argument, Negus contends that the argument treats corporate power structures as overly static, when in fact they “are produced through everyday human activities which are dynamic, change over time and contribute to the maintenance of these ‘structures’” (16). Following this logic, the clause “culture produces an industry” describes the ways in which “production does not take

place simply ‘within’ a corporate environment structured according to the requirements of capitalist production or organizational formulae, but in relation to broader culture formations and practices that are within neither the control nor the understanding of the company” (*ibid.* 19). As an example, he notes that the recording industry is structured according to notions of distinct markets, such as R&B, Country, and Latin, based upon supposedly “common-sense categories which do not so much involve an understanding of ‘reality’ as a construction and intervention into reality” (*ibid.* 19). Negus’s argument is useful in considering the ways in which racially- and ethnically-defined marketing divisions within the recording industry are shaped by popular discourses about Latina/os, and how these divisions in turn work to reinforce the same discourses.

Such an analysis of marketing divisions also requires an understanding of genre. Musical genre is perhaps most commonly understood as sets of conventions by which music—and art more generally—can be divided into distinct stylistic categories (jazz, pop, hip-hop, rock, etc.). According to Simon Frith, though, in the field of popular music genre not only refers to stylistic categories, but is also intrinsically tied to questions of marketing categories; it is, he says, “a way of defining music in its market, or, alternatively, the market in its music” (76). He stresses the degree to which the relationship between genre and market influence all decisions made about the course of a performer’s or group’s career right from the start, stating, “Genre distinctions are central to how record company A&R departments work. The first thing asked about any demo tape or potential signing is what *sort* of music is it, and the importance of this question is that it integrates an inquiry about the music (what does it sound like) with an inquiry about the market (who will buy it)” (*ibid.* 75-6, italics in original). Once a performer or group has been slotted into a marketing category, the genre rules associated with that category will shape not just the musical style, but also the production of recordings, visual aesthetics, and press campaigns. In other words, as Frith says, marketing strategies are “determined by genre theories, by accounts of how markets work and what people with tastes for music *like this* want from it” (76, italics in original).

While genre distinctions are largely determined by the preferences of audiences as Frith’s statement suggests, they are also shaped in part by sociological factors, such as race and

ethnicity. To return to Negus's notion that culture produces an industry, while he notes that much of the work of creating genre divisions and marketing categories is done through formal market research, he stresses, again, that knowledge about markets is also created through "apparently intuitive, obvious and common-sense categories," including "common-sense" understandings of race and ethnicity (19). This logic leads to the creation of black and Latin divisions to handle genres believed to appeal primarily to members of the black and Latina/o communities, respectively. As Negus argues, these divisions can be seen as an intervention into the social construction of race. He states:

Recording companies distribute their staff, artists, genres, and resources into divisions defined according to social-cultural identity labels, such as black music division, Latin division, domestic division, international department. Such practices can be viewed as a direct intervention into and contribution towards the way in which social life is fragmented and through which different cultural experiences are separated and treated unequally. (qtd. in Pacini Hernandez 16)

Negus's statement thus suggests that the cultural biases of recording industry personnel that can shape the organization of the industry are not only reflective of socio-cultural fragmentation and hierarchies, but also work to perpetuate resulting inequalities. Deborah Pacini Hernandez draws upon Negus's argument to suggest that the organization of the recording industry, and the place of Latina/os within it, is not simply dictated by the musical practices of Latina/o communities, but that "the culturally constructed predispositions and values of the individuals who carry out the work of the music industry strongly influence (in both positive and negative ways) the range of sounds and images emerging from that industry" (16).

Emerging Genres: "Latin" and Punk

Racially- and ethnically-defined divisions in the recording and marketing of popular music in the United States have existed for nearly as long as the industry itself. Pacini Hernandez argues that the recording industry "has insisted on defining and containing musicians and audiences within unambiguous racial and ethnic categories" (13). Thus, supposedly "white" musics have been marketed to white audiences, "black" musics to

black audiences, and “ethnic” musics to corresponding immigrant groups. Paralleling growing immigrant populations in large American cities, she traces the origins of so-called “ethnic” recording divisions back to the first decade of the 20th century, citing a 1909 letter sent from Columbia Records to record dealers (*ibid.* 16-7). The letter states:

Remember that in all large cities and in most towns there are sections where people of one nationality or another congregate in ‘colonies.’ Most of these people keep up the old habits and prefer to speak the language of the old country. ... To these people RECORDS IN THEIR OWN LANGUAGE have an irresistible attraction, and they will buy them readily. (qtd. in Pacini Hernandez 17)

Pacini Hernandez suggests that the “Latin” music industry in the United States originated from and continues to operate under similar assumptions: “a domestic ‘Latin’ music industry specializing in Spanish-language music of Latin American origins has always existed alongside (but secondary in influence to) an English-only mainstream popular music industry that has viewed U.S. Latinos and their musics as Latin American (i.e., foreign)” (15). Negus notes that the so-called “Latin music market” is in fact “a conjunction of two distinct but overlapping and interacting entities shaped by culture, geography, politics and commercial business practices. There is a distinct Latin music market within the United States: what some people working for record companies call a ‘sub-market’. In turn, this is connected to the music market of Latin America” (134). He argues further that, despite being “domestic” genres, in the sense of being produced and consumed in the United States, Latin genres are managed in separate Latin departments, which for most of the major corporations are contained within their international divisions. Negus likewise suggests that the placement of domestic Latin music within international divisions marks Latin music “basically as a ‘foreign’ music within the US” (*ibid.* 142).

From the 1930s through the 1970s, major label investment in Latin musics ebbed and flowed, often in relation to dance crazes, but demographic shifts in the 1980s led to a more sustained interest. According to Negus, this intensified interest is largely

attributable to the perceived growth of a domestic “Hispanic” market during the 1980s, and the stability of Latin American markets during the same period (134). He notes that the growth of the “Hispanic” market was a frequent topic of conversation in entertainment trade publications. For instance, a 1993 article from *Music Business International* “excitedly informed its executive readers that ‘Hispanics’ spend ‘more per capita’ than other consumers in the United States and [...] quoted an official estimate that there would ‘be 40m Hispanics in the United States’ by the year 2000” (*ibid.* 134). Negus notes that many in the industry already considered this number to be an underestimate. In response, “[t]he major companies of the time—EMI, CBS (shortly to be purchased by Sony), PolyGram, BMG, Warner (WEA)—began creating distinct Latin departments and then acquiring catalogues to boost their market share and profit” (*ibid.* 140). When these departments were first established, Latin music was generally considered to be a “wild cat” or “question mark” (140), terms used in the recording industry to describe a new genre that could potentially increase market interests, although, as Negus notes, some also considered it to be a “dog,” meaning a genre that “produce[s] little, if any, profit and [is] usually considered a bad investment” (48).

Evidence will show that the history of “Latin” music outlined above played a defining role in the recording careers of East L.A. bands Los Illegals and the Brat, but so too did the history of Latina/os within the rock genre, particularly within Southern California. One of the first and most widely recognized Chicano rock stars is, of course, Ritchie Valens,⁴⁰ a native of Pacoima, CA, a neighborhood located in the San Fernando Valley region of Los Angeles. Thanks largely to the 1987 biopic of same name, Valens is now best known for his 1958 rock ‘n’ roll rendition of the Mexican folk song, “La Bamba,” which peaked at #22 on the *Billboard* Hot 100 in February, 1959 (Reyes and Waldman 42), and the song would later receive an anarchist reworking by the Plugz and would make stars of Los Lobos, who covered the song for the soundtrack to Valens’s biopic. During the 1960s, bands such as ? and the Mysterians, Sam the Sham and the Pharaohs,

⁴⁰ Valens is an Anglicization of Valenzuela. Bob Keane, who recorded and released Valens’s music through his Del-Fi label, states: “I knew that if he kept the name Valenzuela nobody would play the record” (qtd. in Reyes and Waldman 39).

and the Sir Douglas Quintet brought a Tex-Mex sound into American rock ‘n’ roll by recreating the sound of *conjunto* accordion on Vox and Farfisa organs, but in East Los Angeles, Pacini Hernandez says, bands such as Cannibal and the Headhunters (whose rendition of “Land of a Thousand Dances” landed them an opening slot on the Beatles second U.S. tour), Thee Midneters, the Premiers, the Romancers, and the Blendells incorporated fewer “Latin” influences—although references to East L.A. culture and geography were common (38-9). Perhaps most importantly for East L.A. punk bands—in terms of industry expectations, though most certainly not in terms of musical influence—were the “Latin rock” bands of the 1970s, such as Santana, Malo, Sapó, and Azteca from San Francisco, and El Chicano, Tierra, and Yaqui from East L.A., who melded Latin influences with contemporary rock and soul sounds. Pacini Hernandez notes that though a number of these bands incorporated Chicana/o politics into their music in response to the Chicana/o Movement, in many cases their musical influences “were not Mexican but Spanish Caribbean, thereby invoking a more generalized pan-Latino identity” (40-1). The legacy of these bands would weigh heavily on Los Illegals and the Brat as they attempted to negotiate the major label system.

At the same time, East L.A. bands came up against punk’s tenuous position within the recording industry. In its early years, the often abrasive sound of punk music and the confrontational dispositions of punk musicians left many British labels to view the emerging genre as a “wild card” and many American labels to see it as a “dog.” Theo Cateforis observes that, “[i]n the midst of a devastating national recession, British record companies saw punk as a potential answer to their troubling economic slump” (22), and many British punk groups were happy to sign up. As Simon Reynolds says, “When punk came along, the top bands without exception followed the traditional rock route and looked for the best major label deal they could get” (93). Thus, British bands like the Sex Pistols, the Clash, and the Buzzcocks all signed major label deals (with EMI/A&M/Virgin, CBS, and United Artists, respectively). Although some felt that punk became too commercialized as bands signed to majors and its visual aesthetic was incorporated into commercial fashions, Cateforis argues that for the major labels to which the bands had signed, “the problem was hardly that punk had been commercialized, but rather that it was not selling enough. By late 1977 and early 1978, it was clear to the

British major labels that the punk bands that they had signed in the wake of the Sex Pistols' media sensation would not amount to 'the next big thing'" (24). In the United States, on the other hand, punk "was a nonstarter, a style that was seen as virtually unmarketable" (*ibid.* 25) because it was perceived by labels as "too confrontational for mainstream radio" (1).

If "punk" was unmarketable in the United States, American labels still saw potential in "new wave," punk's more accessible counterpart, a label that applied more easily to Los Illegals and the Brat than to the Stains and Thee Undertakers. Though the terms "punk" and "new wave" were initially used almost interchangeably, beginning in late 1976 and throughout 1977, the "new wave" label was increasingly used to distinguish "more melodic, pop-oriented groups [...] from punk's increasingly politicized and violent realm" (Cateforis 25). The move to differentiate new wave from punk was particularly pronounced in the U.S. "through the efforts of Seymour Stein, president of Sire Records [...] who had signed such important New York punk bands as the Ramones, Talking Heads, Dead Boys, and Richard Hell and the Voidoids in 1976" (*ibid.* 25).⁴¹ Stein believed that punk's "controversial connotations would impede attempts to market his roster to a broad American audience" (*ibid.* 25), and he went so far as to write an open letter to radio stations stating that "new wave" was the preferred term. New wave's profile was boosted by a twenty-page "spotlight" feature in the January 14, 1978 issue of *Billboard*,⁴² which noted that most majors had already signed at least one new wave group, and that a large number of independent labels existed from which more bands could easily be plucked (28). Like the British recording industry, the American industry was facing a financial crisis in the final years of the 1970s, a slump "symptomatic of a larger national recession, compounded by the oil crisis and skyrocketing gasoline prices"

⁴¹ Sire Records was an independent label at the time these groups were signed, but had a distribution deal with ABC Records from 1974 to 1977, and with Warner Brothers from 1977 until it was fully acquired by Warner Brothers in 1980.

⁴² Cateforis notes that this was, coincidentally, the exact day the Sex Pistols imploded following a "disastrous performance" in San Francisco on their first and only American tour (27), an event which was regarded in the UK as the final blow to punk's commercial viability (24).

(*ibid.* 35) Many in the industry also blamed the slump to some extent on an overinvestment in disco, though Cateforis notes that a number of “proven superstar rock acts” also sold significantly fewer albums during this period than predicted (36). Thus, as the British industry did with punk, the American recording industry turned to new wave as a potential quick fix to their financial woes (*ibid.* 37). But again as in the case of punk in the UK, new wave was unable to achieve what the American industry hoped for: “The labels had lunged for new in 1979 in the midst of an economic collapse, but the passage of two years failed to alleviate the industry’s financial ailments” (*ibid.* 43). All the same, Cateforis notes, a handful of successful acts and occasional one-hit wonders demonstrated that new wave was, if not the quick fix the industry had hoped for, at least “a sustainable, growing movement” (43).

As I will demonstrate shortly, all of these factors came into play when Los Illegals and the Brat entered into the major label system in ways that impeded their chances of establishing themselves within the industry. On the one hand, at points in the career of both the Brat and Los Illegals, each band was pushed to adopt a more identifiably “Latin” sound, and A&M personnel attempted to shoehorn Los Illegals into the Latin marketing category. On the other hand, both bands were working within an emerging genre for which record labels were still struggling to find an audience. If the audience for new wave was elusive, it is perhaps safe to assume that the imagined audience was primarily white. As Cateforis says, new wave “was overwhelmingly perceived as a white genre of music. Little has been made of new wave’s specific racial constitution, but even a cursory examination reveals that in the United States especially the majority of the genre’s performers were white, and more precisely white middle class” (72-3). Returning, then, to Pacini Hernandez’s assertion that the recording industry relies upon “unambiguous racial and ethnic categories” (13), she argues that the “unstable location” of Latina/os within the industry is “by far the most crucial factor determining the commercial success of Latino popular musics in the United States.” The reliance upon these unambiguous categories put bands like Los Illegals and the Brat in a particularly difficult place within the recording industry. As Pacini Hernandez continues, “As long as Latino musics and musicians did not cross the boundaries of these ethnically or racially defined categories, industry personnel, non-Latino and Latino alike, could promote their musics to segments

of the population perceived to be their ‘natural’ audience” (13). Los Illegals’ and the Brat’s resistance to easy “Latin” signifiers in favor of a genre with an assumed white audience can be read as a crossing of these racial/ethnic boundaries that frustrated labels’ attempts to locate their “natural” audiences. Before entering into a detailed discussion of each band’s experiences working with major labels, though, I will briefly discuss the experiences of the Stains and Thee Undertakers working with independent labels.

4.2 The Limits of Independents: The Stains and Thee Undertakers

For the Stains and Thee Undertakers, the rigid racial categories of the major label system appear to have played a much lesser role than they did for Los Illegals and the Brat; instead, the bigger challenges each band faced in circulating their music in recorded form were the financial limitations of fledgling independent labels SST⁴³ and Roadhouse, respectively. Although the Stains recorded their self-titled album in 1981, SST delayed release of the album until 1983, by which point the band had already broken up. The reasons for the delay remain a subject of debate. According to Rudy Navarro, vocalist for the Stains from 1980-1982, the album may have been intentionally held back out of a sense of competition between Black Flag and the Stains. He states, “I almost feel like [SST] just put us in the closet. ‘We’re gonna make Black Flag more like the Stains and fuck you guys. We’ve got your shit in the closet. We’re gonna be the new Black Flag and metal it up a bit and you guys will come out later’” (Alvarado, “Sick, Pt. II” 41). The Stains were not the only ones who felt that SST prioritized Black Flag over other bands on the label. Grant Hart of Hüsker Dü stated after leaving the label that, “I think there’s a little reluctance on their part to let anything get a little more attention than Black Flag” (qtd. in Azerrad 187). In a 2012 email to Jimmy Alvarado, Joe Carducci, co-owner of SST from 1981-1986, offers a different rationale, saying, “We had so little money and so

⁴³ Though SST has remained independent throughout its existence, in 1981 Greg Ginn, SST/Black Flag founder, signed a deal with MCA to distribute Black Flag’s records, one condition of which was that all Black Flag albums would be co-released by Unicorn Records, another small label distributed by MCA (Azerrad 36). Azerrad details the legal troubles that followed from this deal (36-7), a situation that likely exacerbated the label’s financial difficulties.

much to do that we really didn't get a cash flow that allowed us to catch up until early '85. When the Stains broke up they couldn't be a priority. The Meat Puppets and Hüsker Dü were active and they have complaints about late pressings, too" ("Sick, Pt. II" 41). Michael Azerrad lends credence to Carducci's claim by noting that with a slew of major releases in 1984 the label was stretched so thin that they had to under-press the already established Hüsker Dü's *Zen Arcade*, leaving the band without copies to sell on tour after the initial pressing sold out within weeks (182-183). Whether or not the Stains' album was intentionally held back, there appears to be no evidence to suggest that race or ethnicity had any influence on the label's approach to marketing the band or the decision to delay release of the album.

Thee Undertakers faced a situation similar to the Stains. According to Tracy Garcia, while Thee Undertakers had completed recording and had artwork prepared, the intended release date of the album was stalled by financial issues at Roadhouse and conflict between the label and members of the band. In the meantime, the band broke up, and the album was shelved until 2001 when it was released on CD by Grand Theft Audio Records. Garcia states, "all the artwork was ready, recording was ready, everything was ready to go, and I think it was just a matter of they didn't have enough money, and [...] a lot of internal problems, and for some reason it just didn't come out, which is unfortunate" (Garcia and Garcia, Interview). Although he does not cite this as a contributing factor to the shelving of Thee Undertakers' album, Garcia does note feeling pressure from Roadhouse to market the band in particular ways:

[Roadhouse] was like, "Okay, you guys are gonna do this, you're gonna do that, we want this, we want that." And you're going, "Yeah, but is it really going to get us anywhere if you're going to market it just a certain way?" "Thee Undertakers, from East L.A.!" And we're saying, "Who gives a fuck about East L.A.?" It's more like, "It's Thee Undertakers, here." [...] they were trying to market it to, "Oh, these Latino bands are coming out of L.A. with records." More like, these are bands coming out of L.A. It doesn't have to be that we're Mexican, or this and that. (Garcia and Garcia, Interview)

Garcia's statement suggests that Roadhouse did see the fact that Thee Undertakers were Chicanos from East Los Angeles as a potential marketing gimmick, and one that he resented because he felt that it undermined the universality of the band's message (Interview). This is indicative of a desire to achieve success solely on the quality of the music and the potency of their message, rather than by exploiting racial signifiers in order to stand out from the crowd. What, if any, role this played in the shelving of the album is unclear, but Garcia's sentiment resonates to a certain degree with the sentiments of members of Los Illegals and the Brat.

4.3 East L.A. Punks and the Majors: Los Illegals and The Brat

The problems encountered by the Stains and Thee Undertakers were typical of those faced by bands working with small, independently operated labels. But the examples of the Brat and Los Illegals, who found themselves working with major labels, suggest a set of problems particular to Chicana/os who enter into the mainstream music industry. As Pacini Hernandez states, "If Latinos' racial and cultural hybridity has always been problematic within the United States, it has been particularly vexing for music industry personnel seeking the illusory comforts of neat and impermeable marketing categories" (15). Likewise, in her study of the Black Rock Coalition, an organization of black musicians working to challenge the idea that rock is an exclusively white genre, Maureen Mahon states, "Racialized music genre separation perpetuates the idea that race and culture are coterminous and creates confusion about artists whose identity and music don't fit this model" (161). Chicana/o punks in the early 1980s, like black rockers in the late 1980s and early 1990s, created confusion for managers, producers, and marketers whose understandings of Chicana/o identity and "Latin" music were incongruous with their understandings of punk or new wave, with negative consequences for the bands' recording careers.

For instance, very early in their career Los Illegals encountered music industry personnel who approached them with preconceived notions of Chicana/o music that did not align with the band's musical aspirations. In a personal interview with Willie Herrón and Jesus Velo, Herrón says that the group made the cover of the Calendar section of the *Los*

Angeles Times in October of 1980, and that this brought A&R people from a number of major labels to their shows. In a 1983 article for *BAM* magazine by Dave Zimmer, Velo notes that the talent scouts and managers who first approached the band wanted to push them toward a more stereotypically “Latin” sound. He states, “There were a lot of ‘prospective managers’ who came around and suggested, ‘Why don't you add some timbales, a cow bell and sing in Spanish? We'll do the rest.’ They didn't understand. And when record company A&R people started showing up, they'd get out of their limos and ask, ‘Is this the barrio?’” Velo’s statement suggests that these scouts perhaps wished to push the group toward a sound more reminiscent of the tried-and-true 1970s “Latin rock” bands discussed above. Velo goes on to say that a representative from Capitol Records envisioned turning the band into “the Mexican Knack,” a statement which suggests a desire to cash in on both the rapid growth of the U.S. Latina/o population, and the new wave trend, of which the Knack were the prime model of success (their first album for Capitol, *Get the Knack*, spent five weeks at #1 on the *Billboard* album chart (Cateforis 39), and the single “My Sharona” spent six weeks at the #1 position on the Hot 100 chart, becoming the top-selling single of 1979 (123)). The Knack’s apolitical power pop seems a poor comparison to Los Illegals’ confrontational Chicana/o politics, though.⁴⁴ In response to these kinds of suggestions, the band was considering signing to an independent label in order to have freedom to pursue their own vision. However, Herrón says that the band was not satisfied with the limited potential for distribution on independent labels (Interview), so, as Zimmer reports, when the band was approached by David Anderle of A&M Records, who offered them more creative freedom, the band jumped at the chance. As Velo tells Zimmer, “The creative outlets we wanted, David assured us we could have.”⁴⁵

⁴⁴ In our interview, Herrón also mentions the term, “the Latin Clash,” which is perhaps a more appropriate comparison, since the Clash also foregrounded global politics in their music. The Knack’s sound, which Cateforis describes as mid-1960s nostalgia (37), also had little in common with Los Illegals’ original material, although Los Illegals’ live repertoire did contain hits by ‘60s bands such as the Dave Clarke Five and ? and the Mysterians, which Velo and Herrón explain was at least initially a way to get the attention of audiences at East L.A. car shows, who preferred “oldies” to punk/new wave (Interview).

⁴⁵ Barney Hoskyns notes that in the 1970s, when A&M were largely purveyors of radio-friendly soft pop, “Herb Alpert and Jerry Moss gave David Anderle room to experiment with the likes of Rita Coolidge and

Herrón and Velo indicated in our interview that they did receive a significant degree of artistic freedom during the recording of the band's first album, but they still encountered challenges in the way that they were recruited specifically to appeal to Chicana/o audiences and were therefore almost exclusively marketed to this demographic. Herrón believes that the band was chosen because major labels had been looking for a way into the Latin market but were unsure of how best to gain access to it, and that Los Illegals' attention to Mexican and Chicana/o experiences might provide the way in (Interview). Reyes and Waldman corroborate this, noting that representatives from A&M Records, including attorney Peter Lopez, cofounder Jerry Moss, head of A&R David Anderle, and executive Bob Garcia, scouted Los Illegals at a performance at Madame Wong's, a venue in Downtown L.A., because Moss "was eager to sign at least one Chicano act" (136). Echoing Negus, Peter Lopez states, "There was a view that this was a big audience, a big market that we should be able to do something with" (qtd. in *ibid.* 136). Following a development period, the band was signed to the label and released a single, "El-Lay," in 1982, produced by Anderle, and the album *Internal Exile* in 1983, co-produced by the band and glam rock guitarist Mick Ronson. Following the release of *Internal Exile*, A&M sent the band on tour "with a specific purpose: Get the Chicano audience" (*ibid.* 137). Bob Garcia states, "The marketing plan covered all the Hispanic clubs, all Hispanic radio stations and all of the colleges that had a MEChA [Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán] on campus" (qtd. in *ibid.* 137).

However, this marketing strategy, which assumed a more or less universal Chicana/o experience, proved to be a flop, since Chicana/os from other regions could not always relate to Los Illegals' subject matter or musical style (*ibid.* 138). Bob Garcia notes that the band was not well received outside of Southern California, and attributes this in part to the band's foregrounding of East Los Angeles, as well as their aggressive politics and sound. He states:

the Ozark Mountain Daredevils" (230), which suggests that Anderle was in fact in a position at the label to allow certain bands to retain more creative control.

We thought the band would have a more universal appeal in terms of Hispanic community support [...] But it just wasn't there. This is not to take away from Los Lobos, who were able to do it [...] because of their music and a sort of softer lyric, and more pop appeal across the board. The Illegals couldn't do it their own way; they were too rough and they were too political. (Qtd. in *ibid.* 138)

Zimmer also notes the divide between Los Illegals' hard-edged politics and the lighter sound and lyrical themes of Los Lobos; Los Lobos, he writes, "are one of the best party bands around." Los Lobos guitarist Cesar Rosa suggests that the group's more universal themes account for their greater success not just in Chicana/o communities, but also more broadly, saying to Zimmer, "We've never been political or anything [...] Love themes, old fashioned situations that *anybody*, not just Chicanos, can relate to — that's what we sing about" (*Italics in original*). These statements are revealing in two ways: first, they suggest a totalization of Latina/o audiences on the part of A&M personnel, and second, an assumption that other audiences could not relate to, and therefore could have no interest in music that addressed issues directly concerning Chicana/o communities.

Herrón believes that marketing the band only to Chicana/o and Latina/o communities was a shortsighted decision on the part of the label (Interview). He argues instead that the label should have placed the band on bills with popular punk or new wave groups like the Police and R.E.M. in order to appeal to the same crowd. He states, "they should have just marketed us with all their other groups, to open up for everybody that was a major seller and on their label as a major artist. And that's how I think they would have been more successful, financially, to market us that way." However, he says, "They thought that that's not what we were there for, they thought we were there to tap into the Latin market, and they had no way to tap into it." In a similar vein, in Steven Loza's *Barrio Rhythms*, Velo suggests a more effective strategy would have been to market the band to white college students at the same time as Chicana/o and Latina/o audiences (229). In our interview, he recalls playing to an enthusiastic crowd at the University of Southern California, and bemoans the fact that the label still chose not to pursue the college crowd. Velo suggests that, in essence, Los Illegals needed to do twice the work of other groups because they not only had to do the usual work of recording and touring, but also had to

educate the label on how to market the band (Loza 229). The unnamed author of an article in *Esencia* magazine also suggests that marketing the group only to a Chicana/o and Latina/o audience prohibited the group from conveying their message to their desired audience. They state, “Herron stressed the point that Los Illegals’ purpose is to voice problems of Mexican-Americans through a medium accessible and acceptable to the non-Latin. It is important, he said, that the non-Latin as well as Latin begin to understand the ever-growing Latin population and the gravity of their condition in this country” (*ibid.* 14). As Herrón tells Don Snowden in a 1984 *Los Angeles Times* article, “[Los Illegals] want to make the Hispanic very conscious of their roots and educate and enlighten anyone with a stereotypical viewpoint of the Hispanic life style of East Los Angeles” (N60).

Herrón also suggests that the name “Los Illegals” contributed to the label’s uncertainty about how to market the band (Interview). Promotional materials provided to Sean Carrillo by the label in 1983 demonstrate the way in which the label played up the “Illegals” aspect of the group’s name in its promotional campaigns. For instance, a flyer for a series of Los Illegals performances stamped with the A&M logo includes an image of the Immigration and Naturalization Service’s (INS) Form 1-151, Alien Registration Receipt Card, with the band’s photo where the picture of the card’s carrier would normally appear. Additionally, a flyer or ticket for a show at Madame Wong’s is printed on INS Form 1-94, Arrival-Departure Record, with the word “ILLEGALS” stamped on it. Likewise, a blurb written by Bob Garcia that appears on the back cover of *Internal Exile* states, “Los Illegals are five young Mexican-Americans currently living and challenging the American dream on and in the streets of the barrio in East Los Angeles—an Hispanic haven for both legal and illegal aliens and refugees.” As Herrón suggests, this preoccupation with the idea of “illegals” possibly conveys a degree of unease on the part of the label about how the band would be perceived by audiences, in turn leaving the label uncertain of who the band’s likely audience might be.

While Los Illegals were granted a significant degree of artistic freedom for their first album, when it came time to record their second album, Velo suggests that the “next regime” at the label was uncomfortable with the band’s new direction (Interview). He

says that the band incorporated acoustic guitars and more percussion into their new sound, but that the label “had a hard time with us using Spanish instruments, percussive instruments, in a way that hadn’t been done yet, and hadn’t been proven commercial yet.” He finds an irony in this, noting that the band was incorporating more recognizably “Latin” sounds into their music, but “it was still rejected for not being Chicano punk enough.” Thus, as discussed in Chapter Two, the second album, which was to be titled *Burning Youth*, was never officially released, although the band released unofficial cassette copies during a tour of Mexico.⁴⁶ Though Velo says that the label wanted *Burning Youth* to carry on the sound of *Internal Exile*, the band also experienced pressure to adopt a sound that was assumed to have greater appeal in the Latin American market. As Herrón says, while *Internal Exile* was targeted primarily to the American market, the label also wanted an album that they could market specifically in Latin America (Loza 229). To this end, the album was to be released through A&M’s newly created Latin division, AyM Discos, directed by José Quintana. Leslie Pfenninger, author of the two-volume tome, *From Brass to Gold: Discography of A&M Records and Affiliates in the United States and Around the World*, notes that A&M Records was the first of the American major labels to create a Latin division, founding AyM Discos in June of 1982 (“AyM”). The album was to be produced by famed Mexican singer Juan Gabriel, with all of the songs sung in Spanish, despite the fact that Herrón preferred to combine English and Spanish, with a stronger emphasis on lyrics in English (Interview). Herrón states that Quintana’s agenda for the album was to prove to A&M that a Spanish-language album produced specifically for the Latin American market could be a bigger seller than the band’s first album, recorded with David Anderle and Mick Ronson. Herrón indicates that he felt uncomfortable with this agenda, though. Velo echoes this sentiment, suggesting that Quintana was calling on the band to become “the fathers of *rock en español*”, a genre of Spanish-language rock music that emerged in the mid to late 1980s that included bands such as Maldita Vecindad, Caifanes/Jaguares, El Tri, Los Fabulosos Cadillacs, and Café

⁴⁶ Though the album was never officially released, a promo video for the song, “No Bed of Roses” was viewable on YouTube at the time of writing. The song has a softer sound than those on *Internal Exile*, and incorporates Spanish guitar and various percussion instruments.

Tacvba, but he contends that the band rejected the pressure to conform to a sound that did not reflect their artistic and political aspirations (Interview). Thus, whether or not the band could have been successfully marketed to a Latin American audience remains a question because, rather than capitulating to pressures from label personnel, according to Velo, they instead opted to adhere to their principles.

The evidence presented thus demonstrates that Los Illegals faced numerous barriers within the recording industry because their music could not be easily contained within the rigid, racially and ethnically defined categories of the industry. Although the band played a style of music that could have fit comfortably on a concert bill or radio playlist with other “new wave” acts of the time, their emphasis on Chicana/o politics and use of the Spanish language led A&M personnel to assume that Los Illegals’ “natural” audience could only be found in Chicana/o or Latina/o communities. This suggests that marketing personnel may have believed that Los Illegals’ politics and use of Spanish would mark them as too foreign for white audiences. That A&M then pushed the band to sing only in Spanish and to market their music specifically to a Latin American audience through the label’s new Latin division is further proof that Los Illegals’ music was regarded as foreign and unmarketable to a domestic audience. To return to Pacini Hernandez’s contention that the predispositions of recording industry personnel, at times shaped by cultural biases, may constrain “the range of sounds and images emerging from [the] industry” (16), for Los Illegals, the assumption that their music would not be marketable to white audiences limited their opportunities to convey their ideas to a broad audience. As Herrón told Snowden, Los Illegals were not only interested in addressing Chicana/o audiences, but also in challenging others’ stereotyped views of Chicana/o communities (N60). To do so, though, the band would need their music to reach other audiences, a goal that was impeded by the racialized assumptions of A&M personnel about Los Illegals’ “natural” audience.

Like Los Illegals, the Brat faced pressure to adopt a sound that their managers and producers believed would appeal to a Latina/o audience, but that did not align with the band’s own ambitions. However, whereas Los Illegals were at least able to record and release an album on a major label, the Brat never released a major label album because of

their dissatisfaction with the direction that various managers and producers wanted to push them in. Reyes and Waldman write that the Brat's Fatima EP, *Attitudes*, "received considerable airplay on alternative LA rock stations and sold a fair number of copies of around Southern California" (140).⁴⁷ Rudy Medina, lead guitarist, notes that the Brat planned to release a follow-up 7" single on Fatima, but that the project fell through, at which point the band began working toward signing to a major label (Covarrubias and Medina 64). Vocalist Teresa Covarrubias laments the decision to move away from independent labels, stating, "Instead, we got sidetracked. We were managed by the guy who managed The Knack who thought he was going to make us into another Knack, like all of a sudden we were going to have a hit and he was going to make a bunch of money" (*ibid.* 64). At this point, the band secured a development deal with Capitol Records, and was given some money from the label (Covarrubias and Medina do not specify an amount).⁴⁸ Covarrubias, observing that the band never saw any of the money, implies that the manager may have pocketed whatever was not invested in the band: "I hate to say; actually, he probably did make some money off of us" (*ibid.* 64).

Reyes and Waldman write that the Brat recorded fifteen songs with Paul Rothchild, producer of the Doors,⁴⁹ but that these songs were never released, citing Covarrubias and Medina's frustrations with their management company as the primary reason why the songs never made it onto an album (141). They state, "Medina and Covarrubias now say the [management] company would not accept the band as it was, and wanted to turn it into something it wasn't, namely, a Latino rock group, with emphasis on the Latino"

⁴⁷ Reyes and Waldman do not quantify "a fair number of copies," but the EP went through two pressings: it was originally released as a 10" record, and was soon repressed as a single-sided 12".

⁴⁸ It is interesting to note that the Brat was signed to a development deal with Capitol Records through their manager who had also managed the Knack, and that Los Illegals also report being approached by a representative of Capitol Records who wanted to make them "the Mexican Knack." Neither band names names, but this coincidence raises the question if they are referring to the same person.

⁴⁹ The Brat may have also recorded more songs with other producers: Medina tells Alvarado that "the only good thing [to come] out of that whole fuckin' experience is that we have a shitload of recorded music" (Covarrubias and Medina 64). Medina notes that these recordings are to be released on an anthology disc, but this has not yet been released at the time of writing.

(*ibid.* 141). Covarrubias and Medina's interview with Alvarado is revealing in this regard:

Teresa: They⁵⁰ took the band and what we wanted and it turned into what they wanted. They killed the spirit of the band.

Rudy: So what we ended up doing was working with a lot of different producers, and everyone had their own idea of what we should sound like. Some had this fantastic idea we should have maracas, or fuckin' castanets because we were a "Spanish" band, or all Mexicans play with castanets, I guess.

Jimmy: [laughs] Yeah, and that was the complete opposite of what you were.

Rudy: Remember that one time they had that guy, Victor, who had a fuckin' truckload of percussion? [laughs] Oh my god, they spent a fortune on this shit.

Teresa: And they never bothered to ask the band: "Well, what do you think? What do you want?"

Rudy: Well, I had ideas, but they were shot down. (Covarrubias and Medina 64)

The attempts to foist Latin percussion instruments upon the band suggests that managers and producers with whom the Brat worked failed to see potential for a Chicana/o punk band, and, like the scouts who approached Los Illegals prior to their signing with A&M, instead wished to recreate the sound of commercially-tested Latin rock groups like Santana and El Chicano, or perhaps the newly popular Los Lobos. If record labels and management companies had few models of success of Chicana/os playing rock music with which to inform their approach to Chicana/o punk/new wave bands, the pool was even smaller for bands fronted by women. So it was that the Brat's management company pushed the band to record a cover version of "Angel Baby," a doo-wop ballad recorded in 1960 by Rosie and the Originals (Reyes and Waldman 141), fronted by Rosie

⁵⁰ The trajectory of the conversation up to this point suggests that the "they" Covarrubias refers to is the management company who helped sign the band to Capitol. In general, though, it should be noted that there are too many gaps between the information Covarrubias and Medina provide to Alvarado and that presented by Reyes and Waldman to assume that both accounts cover the same period of time. For instance, it should not be taken for granted that the band was under the same management when they recorded with Rothchild, or that the songs recorded with Rothchild were recorded for Capitol Records. I was unable to interview any members of the band to confirm these details.

Hamlin, whose mother was Mexican and her father white. “Angel Baby” spent twelve weeks on the *Billboard* Hot 100 chart, peaking at #5, and the song is still revered in the East L.A. Chicana/o community. As Reyes and Waldman assert, though, this suggestion did not sit well with the members of the band, who were more interested in creating a new sound than reproducing old ones.

As in the case of Los Illegals, then, the Brat’s recording career was limited by racially based assumptions guiding recording industry personnel’s ideas of what would or could be profitable. In a March 1984 article in the *L.A. Weekly*, Darcy Diamond notes Covarrubias’s frustration with the Brat’s handling by managers and producers, stating, “[Covarrubias] sees no reason why her group can’t enjoy pop success. She thinks that barrio concerns are pretty much universal: finances, men and women together, oppression, Malathion...” (20). Covarrubias further elaborates on what she perceived to be the band’s potential for wider appeal, saying, “I don’t think that a major label should look at us any different than any other band. They don’t have to look at us funny ‘cause we’re from E.L.A. We can be marketed, I hope, just like the Police. We’re influenced by what we hear on the radio, so we’ve got to be pretty mainstream” (qtd. in *ibid.* 20). If Herrón saw Los Illegals’ lyrics as a way to challenge common stereotypes of Chicana/o communities, Covarrubias’s statement to Darcy suggests that she also wished to challenge stereotypes simply by demonstrating that Chicana/os could be successful playing contemporary music. That the band was not able to record and release music on their own terms again supports Pacini Hernandez’s contention that the cultural biases of industry personnel can constrain both “the range of sounds and images emerging from that industry” (16). Medina sums this up very bluntly by stating that the Brat’s management “would have wanted to see Teresa with a fruit bowl on her head” (qtd. in Reyes and Waldman 141).

It is therefore apparent in the examples of both Los Illegals and the Brat that for the managers, producers, and marketers with whom they worked the assumed audiences for Chicana/o or Latina/o groups, regardless of musical style or regional specificities, were Chicana/o and Latina/o communities. Angie Garcia, wife of Tracy Garcia and fellow member of post-Undertakers bands Peace Corpse and Insulin Reaction, suggests that the

perspective of industry personnel was that “nobody else will like it, so we have to present it only to the Latino market.” A decade after the Brat and Los Illegals entered into the major label system, such assumptions still proved to be a roadblock to some Chicana/o groups. While not a part of the East L.A. scene, Yaotl Mazahua (born Rene Orozco), member of the 1980s San Fernando Valley anarcho-punk band Iconoclast and Chicano rap-rock group Aztlan Underground (founded in the 1990s and still active), notes that Aztlan Underground was prepared to sign to Polygram Records, but was prevented from doing so because the marketing director did not understand how or where to market the group. He states that when an A&R representative passed their demo to the marketing department, the marketing director’s response was, “Are they Latino? Are they Native? How come Latinos are doing flute? No one’s gonna get it” (Interview). Although the group had already been offered a contract, Mazahua reports that the label executed a “drydock deal,” meaning that the label did not respond to amendments to the contract requested by the group for a period of six months, thereby nullifying the contract. This experience again reflects Pacini Hernandez’s argument that Latina/o musicians who do not hew to racially- or ethnically-constructed notions of genre often create confusion for industry personnel, thus limiting their ability to achieve commercial success.

As a point of comparison to the experiences of Los Illegals, the Brat, and Aztlan Underground, it is worth returning to Bob Garcia’s statement to Reyes and Waldman on the relative levels of success achieved by Los Lobos and Los Illegals, because his statement is also suggestive of where Chicana/os fit or do not fit within the realm of popular music, as well as within the U.S. national imaginary. As Garcia notes, as opposed to the rough sound and radical Chicana/o politics of Los Illegals, Los Lobos played in a softer style with more appeal to a general—read, white—audience (*ibid.* 138). Although associated with the early Los Angeles punk scene through their relationship to bands like X and the Blasters, Los Lobos cannot be easily categorized as a punk band; rather, their sound might more appropriately be described as roots rock, with an emphasis on Mexican traditional music, especially during the early stages of their career. Jimmy Alvarado and Teresa Covarrubias question if this may have contributed to the success of Los Lobos compared to other bands that came out of East Los Angeles around the same time:

Jimmy: There are certain expectations based on [white] stereotypes. There's a reason why a band like Los Lobos is loved and are considered...

Teresa: And I love Los Lobos, too.

Jimmy: ... right, me too... are considered the greatest band in the world, where somebody like the Bags, or The Zeros or The Plugz were completely marginalized.

Teresa: So you think that is because the Lobos were doing—what they were representing—was something people could relate to as being Chicano, so they could understand it?

Jimmy: They had one number one hit, and it was “La Bamba.”

Teresa: Yeah, and it was like, “Hey, well, yeah, Chicano. Oh, okay.” Connect the dots. (Covarrubias and Medina 59)

While Los Lobos did not release their version of “La Bamba” until 1987 as a part of the soundtrack to the Ritchie Valens biographical film of the same name, they also released three albums on Slash Records—formerly independent, but by the time a subsidiary of Warner Brothers—between 1983 and 1987, including the critically acclaimed *How Will the Wolf Survive?*, which contained strong influences from traditional Mexican music. In suggesting that other East L.A. Chicana/o punk bands could not attain the level of recognition that Los Lobos did because their sounds disrupted expectations of Chicana/o music in a way that Los Lobos' music did not, this conversation between Alvarado and Covarrubias once again highlights the ways in which popular understandings of Chicana/o music and Chicana/o subjectivity can constrain or enable Chicana/o musicians working within the music industry.

4.4 Conclusion

The experiences of Chicana/o punk bands within the major label system in certain ways parallel those of the black rock musicians who created the Black Rock Coalition (BRC). While Pacini Hernandez suggests that musics understood to be either “white” or “black” have always been marketed separately (13), Mahon notes that the formation of actual “black music” departments at major labels during the 1970s “perpetuated segregation in the interest of sales” (162). Mahon traces the formation of these divisions to a 1972

Harvard Business School study commissioned by CBS that concluded that major labels were neglecting an important market by not actively pursuing black audiences (162), which bears a similarity to the creation of Latin music divisions in the 1990s to profit from demographic shifts that created new potential markets (Pacini Hernandez 142). While major labels were compelled to create black music departments, the formation of these departments was shaped by racialized assumptions of who the audience was for certain types of music, lumping black musicians from a range of genres together into “black” departments that were segregated from “rock” and “pop” departments, where, with the exception of occasional “crossover” artists, white performers were marketed to white audiences (Mahon 163).

Similar to the experiences of Chicana/o punk bands confronted with expectations of what “Latin” music sounds like, or who would buy music made by Chicana/os, this segmentation/segregation left black rock musicians in the lurch, as industry personnel did not know how or where to market their music. The perspective of marketing departments was that white audiences “might have been unwilling or unable to identify with black rockers enough to want buy their records” (Mahon 170), and, further, “that it would be nearly impossible to market rock—even black rock—to black audiences” (171). Mahon, like Pacini Hernandez, argues that racial segmentation/segregation within the music industry is not only shaped by “assumptions about racial identity and musical taste” (145), but also helps to reinforce and perpetuate such assumptions within society at large. Thus, the cases of both Chicana/o punks and the BRC demonstrate the ways in which culture industries participate in the circulation of racial discourses that place constraints upon the subjectivities of racialized groups and help to uphold racial hierarchies.

The experiences of Chicana/os and Latina/os working within the major label system are shaped by particular discourses of race and nation that differentiate their experiences from those of black musicians, however. Specifically, as scholars such as Pacini Hernandez, Lilia Fernandez, Rodolfo Acuña, and Leo R. Chavez suggest, Chicana/os and Latina/os have historically been regarded as a foreign and unassimilable Other. Such notions of race and national identity are clearly present in the treatment of Los Illegals and the Brat by recording industry personnel, who assumed on the one hand a totalized

Latina/o audience and on the other a general (i.e., white) audience that would not or could not relate to Latina/o musicians or issues of relevance to Latina/o communities and who would therefore be unwilling to purchase recordings by Latina/o musicians. These assumptions imposed limits on what sounds and images Los Illegals and the Brat could produce within the major label system (for instance, pressure to reproduce signifiers of “Latin-ness” such as Latin percussion, Spanish rather than English or a combination of the two, etc.), as well as what audiences they could reach (marketing Los Illegals only to Spanish-speaking/Latin American audiences). Further, these limitations were not only based upon racialized assumptions about Latina/os, but also contribute to the reinforcement and perpetuation of discourses that place Chicana/os and Latina/os outside of popular understandings of U.S. national identity. This in turn demonstrates the crucial role that media industries can have in shaping discourses of race and nation.

Chapter 5

5 “Making Do”: Chicana/o and Latina/o DIY Cultural Production

When conservative economic policies produce joblessness, poverty, and declining infrastructure, an outsider’s observation of a low-income neighborhood may yield only the most obvious indicators of economic inequality. It may be impossible to see how a dilapidated backyard becomes a weekly venue for music performances or how a discarded industrial warehouse can become an unauthorized cultural center. It may be even more difficult to distinguish why those spaces would hold spatial and historical significance for a community that has a seemingly compelling interest in overcoming the obstacles produced by their spatial location. (Gaye Theresa Johnson, *Spaces of Conflict, Sounds of Solidarity: Music, Race, and Spatial Entitlement in Los Angeles*)

Having to do it yourself has become veritably the only way that artists and musicians from East LA have ever been able to receive any sort of recognition. (Dan Vargas, “No Cover”)

In this chapter I continue to explore the ways in which race impacts the production and circulation of music created by Chicana/o and Latina/o punks. From the experiences of early East Los Angeles bands working inside the mainstream music industry I turn to the subsequent 1980s East L.A. backyard scene, the Latina/o hardcore scene of the 1990s, and the current South Los Angeles scene to explore how racial and economic marginalization of Chicana/os and Latina/os influence the ways in which punk bands from predominantly Latina/o and Chicana/o neighborhoods employ Do-It-Yourself, or DIY, approaches to cultural production. Whereas a DIY approach to music-making is often understood as an ideological rejection of the mainstream music industry, the ways in which many of these bands employ practices that might be considered DIY suggest that they do so as much out of necessity as by choice. Scholars such as Alan O’Connor suggest that DIY cultural production becomes a necessity for bands that choose to play music with no commercial value, whether the decision to do so is ideologically motivated or not. I argue, on the other hand, that the question of necessity is complicated by factors such as race and class: while for some—namely, white middle-class punks—the decision to play non-commercial music necessitates DIY methods, for others from racially- and economically-marginalized communities, a DIY approach is necessary because of limited

access to material resources. Drawing from the work of Michel de Certeau and Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, I therefore argue that for predominantly Chicana/o and Latina/o punk scenes, DIY may be as much a form of “making do” with limited resources as a willful refusal of the mainstream music industry.

5.1 DIY vs. Making Do

As the previous chapter makes clear, many early punk bands desired to work within the major label system, including bands from the early East L.A. scene, although these groups were unable to attain the same degree of success as bands in the UK or New York, or even fellow Los Angeles bands like X, the Dickies, and the Go-Gos (although it is important to note that the Go-Gos, whether by choice or through label pressure, had transitioned to a more pop-oriented sound before finding commercial success). At the same time, following the example of the Buzzcocks’ pre-United Artists release of their first EP, *Spiral Scratch*, on their own newly created independent label, New Hormones, many bands also began to release their music themselves or through a new batch of small, independent labels, either as a means to eventually secure a major label deal, or as an end in itself. Speaking on the impact of the 1977 release of the *Spiral Scratch* EP, Simon Reynolds notes that around 50 percent of rock ‘n’ roll and R&B hits of the late 1950s were released through independent labels, and that independents continued to serve regional and niche markets throughout the 1960s and 1970s, but that, within the field of rock music, “the notion of independently releasing your own music felt fantastically novel at that particular time” (92).

By the mid 1980s, what was novel in 1977 had become a much more formalized approach to cultural production, thanks to a number of pioneering independent labels such as Rough Trade in the UK, and SST and Dischord Records in the U.S., as well as bands like Black Flag and the Minutemen who helped to establish independent touring circuits for punk bands in the U.S. This approach also found a name: Do-It-Yourself (DIY). Steven Gelber suggests that the term “Do-It-Yourself”—capitalization and hyphenation included—may have first appeared in print in the October, 1912 issue of *Suburban Life* “to refer to owner-completed household projects” (79). Tying the burgeoning Do-It-Yourself home improvement and maintenance movement—primarily

the province of husbands—to the growth of middle-class suburbs (68), Gelber states, “by the end of the 1950s the very term ‘do-it-yourself’ would become part of the definition of suburban husbanding” (67). In the 1980s, however, punks co-opted the term to describe a form of cultural production that existed on the margins of mainstream culture, a move that suggests either an intentional subversion of the term’s association with middle-class consumerism and suburban living, or an unintended irony, given many punks’ rejection of middle-class values and suburban lifestyles.

In writings on punk and related music scenes, it is often taken for granted that a Do-It-Yourself approach to cultural production stems directly from punks’ desire for autonomy from the mainstream music industry and, in some cases, from a capitalist economic system more generally. For those punk musicians who commit to a DIY ethos, therefore, the refusal to “sell out” to the major labels is regarded as a public declaration of integrity and a marker of authenticity. Amy Spencer puts this rather succinctly in her history of DIY culture when she defines a DIY ethos as “the urge to create a new cultural form and transmit it to others on your own terms” (12). In her discussion of the Olympia, WA punk scene of the 1980s, Sara Marcus states:

DIY was a philosophy and a way of life, a touchstone that set its industrious adherents apart from the legions of Americans who passed their lives—as the punks saw it—trudging from TV set to first-run multiplex, from chain record store to commercial radio dial, treating art and culture as commodities to be consumed instead of vital forces to be struggled with and shaped, experimented with and created, breathed and lived. (37)

Like Spencer, Marcus foregrounds autonomy from the mainstream culture industries as a central tenet of punk cultural production, but takes the argument a step further by drawing binaries between passive consumption of mass-produced culture and the independent production of culture.

While Spencer’s and Marcus’s takes on DIY are perhaps overly celebratory, examples of a foregrounding of a desire for autonomy can be seen even in more nuanced writings on punk and DIY. For instance, in his study of DIY punk record labels, Alan O’Connor

already foregrounds the question of autonomy in the title: *Punk Record Labels and the Struggle for Autonomy: The Emergence of DIY*. Ryan Moore likewise situates DIY as a struggle for autonomy, stating, “The various local [alternative music] scenes scattered across the American landscape had arisen in opposition to corporate capitalism, as the DIY ethic sought to establish at least some degree of autonomy from the culture industry” (120). In stating that punk and alternative musicians sought only a degree of autonomy, Moore usefully collapses the binaries set up by Marcus. Jason Middleton also emphasizes the question of scale in his study of the Washington, D.C. punk scene, suggesting that the DIY practices employed by members of the scene “soften[ed] the distinction between producer and consumer” without eliminating commodity exchange altogether, so that DIY cannot be seen so much as “an effort to break out of capitalism, but simply to develop a space of relative autonomy within it” (345). Stacy Thompson likewise recognizes a tension between the desire for autonomy and the material realities of living within a capitalist system, arguing that “[t]he entire field of punk can be understood as a set of problems that unfold from a single contradiction between [...] punk, understood as a set of cultural productions and practices that comprise an aesthetic field, and capitalism and the commodity, an economic field and an economic form in which punks discover that they must operate” (2).

However, the assertion that a punk commitment to DIY cultural production is driven primarily by a desire for autonomy is precisely what I want to challenge here. This assertion rests on two assumptions: first, that major label interest exists or could conceivably exist for any particular scene, and second, that DIY cultural production is motivated at least as much by ideology as by necessity. By conflating DIY with anti-corporate or anti-capitalist ideology and practice, these assumptions privilege those scenes whose members have the economic and social capital to choose to reject the mainstream music industry, more specifically, scenes whose members are predominantly white and middle-class. I argue that predominantly Chicana/o and Latina/o punk scenes challenge these assumptions because the DIY practices employed by members of the scenes often arise or arose as much from necessity as from an ideological objection to the mainstream music industry. After the initial East L.A. scene petered out, younger punk groups from predominantly Chicana/o and working-class neighborhoods in East Los

Angeles often had limited access to Los Angeles punk clubs, and likewise attracted very little interest from record labels, whether major or independent. With little interest from outside, East L.A. punks in the 1980s used the limited resources available to them to create their own DIY networks in which bands performed at parties in neighborhood backyards and distributed their music through homemade cassettes. In the 1990s, a national network of Chicana/o and Latina/o hardcore bands emerged in response to a wave of anti-immigrant anti-Latina/o sentiment in the United States. Bands from this scene placed DIY ideologies and practices in service of grassroots movements within Latina/o and Chicana/o communities. More recently, Chicana/o and Latina/o punks from neighborhoods of South Los Angeles facing comparable material constraints to the East L.A. backyard scene have employed similar practices in order to build their own scene. These scenes, which emerged in racially, economically, and geographically marginalized urban areas, demonstrate that DIY cannot be reduced simply to a willful and intentional refusal of the major label system, but must also be considered as a necessary mode of cultural production for those who lack resources and recognition.

Following this argument, I propose that it is necessary to reconsider the understanding of DIY as a specific form of cultural labor with clear, ideologically undergirded desires and goals, and to think of it instead as a range of cultural practices that arise from a variety of circumstances and to serve a range of purposes. Up to this point, attempts to theorize DIY as a form of cultural labor have been too narrow in their focus on a desire for autonomy as the primary underlying motivation for engaging in DIY practices. The definitions provided above generally come from works about more widely recognized and predominantly white, middle-class scenes, such as those in Washington, D.C., Seattle and Olympia, WA, and the greater Los Angeles punk scene. But none of these definitions can fully account for the kinds of cultural production that occur as a result of the material conditions of places such as East and South L.A. or Southwest Chicago. Conceiving of DIY as a spectrum allows us to consider the many points between, on the one hand, a band like Fugazi, who remained committed to a DIY ethos as a means toward authentic experience outside of the mainstream culture industries, in spite of being pursued aggressively by major labels, and, on the other hand, marginalized groups for whom

autonomy is rarely a question, and, therefore, for whom DIY becomes a necessary and practical means of cultural production.

The space that is opened up by conceiving of DIY cultural production in this way allows for an escape from the romanticized or one-dimensional understandings that are often found in discussions of DIY, thus enabling more meaningful and nuanced theorizations that can properly account for the ways in which those who exist on the margins make use of DIY practices. This is not to suggest, however, that an understanding of DIY as a question of necessity should be limited strictly to racially or economically marginalized groups, since necessity may at times arise from a variety of different circumstances. For instance, that my own punk band was required to record and circulate our music independently and on a limited budget had more to do with age and geography—we were teenagers from a small town in Michigan—than with race or class. Rather, I mean to draw attention to the necessity of considering how factors such as race and class (and age and geography) shape the ways in which particular groups employ DIY practices. Thus, while many of the problems and practices I discuss in this chapter may apply equally to both predominantly Latina/o, working-class scenes and predominantly white, middle-class scenes, it is important to recognize that there are likely different reasons why each group might face certain problems or rely on particular practices. In other words, while the abrasiveness and non-commercial nature of punk—a choice—may be the determining factor for some white middle-class punks who rely on DIY venues or labels, for working-class Latina/o punks, race and class—material circumstances—may play a greater role in necessitating DIY practices.⁵¹

The types of DIY practices taking place within the East and South L.A. scenes, as well as the 1990s hardcore scene can be seen as a kind of “making do.” While the practices employed by Chicana/o and Latina/o punks may appear on the surface to fall under the rubrics of previous definitions of DIY, the evidence I provide suggests that these practices are or were at times also a form of resourcefulness necessitated by material

⁵¹ For general discussions of the difficulties of operating DIY spaces, see for instance Makagon, Goble, Maloney, Dawson, or Bryony Beynon’s regular column in *Maximum Rocknroll*.

conditions, rather than simply a conscious commitment to a DIY ethos as described by O'Connor, Thompson, and Middleton. Along with Michelle Habell-Pallán (*Loca Motion* 150) and Tomás Ybarra-Frausto (160), Alvarado compares these practices to *rasquache*, a Chicana/o art aesthetic, describing a *rasquache* aesthetic as “basically making something out of nothing, [...] not let[ting] a lack of proper training or materials hamper you and using whatever’s available to make art” (Interview). Ramón Garcia argues that the term *rasquache* has traditionally been used as a demeaning term for working-class practices defined by tastelessness and a lack of resources (215). Ybarra-Frausto offers insight into *rasquache* as working-class practice, stating, “Limited resources mean mending, refixing, and reusing everything. Things are not thrown away, they are saved and recycled often in different contexts (automobile tires are used as plant containers, plastic bleach bottles become garden ornaments, discarded coffee cans are reelaborated as flower pots)” (157). Thus, he suggests, “[r]esponding to a direct relationship to the material level of existence or subsistence is what engenders the *rasquache* attitude of survival and inventiveness” (*ibid.* 156).

More recently, however, the term has been reappropriated by Chicana/o artists and critics—mostly middle- rather than working-class, according to Garcia—and is now generally understood to refer to a Chicana/o aesthetic defined by the practice of creating art using whatever materials are at hand, often creating new uses and meanings out of discarded household objects. Habell-Pallán argues that “the D.I.Y. (Do-It-Yourself) sensibility at the core of punk musical subcultures [finds] resonance with the practice of *rasquache*, a Chicana/o cultural practice of ‘making do’ with limited resources” (*Loca Motion* 150). Alvarado likewise argues that “a *rasquache* aesthetic is very much a punk rock aesthetic, and that is very much a part of the Chicano art experience and the Chicano art aesthetic” (Interview). Like Habell-Pallán, Ybarra-Frausto translates *rasquache* as “making do with what is at hand (*hacer rendir las cosas*)” (156). This translation is perhaps meant to refer to Michel de Certeau’s use of “making do” to describe “tactics” through which subjects use the materials of the dominant system to serve their own needs (29).

Employing de Certeau's conception of "making do," I wish to suggest that the DIY practices of Chicana/o and Latina/o punks are reflective of larger cultural practices through which Chicana/os and Latina/os make space for themselves within U.S. society. For de Certeau, "making do" is a "tactic," or "way of operating," through which members of a subordinate class "use, manipulate, and divert" the spaces imposed upon them by the dominant class (30). For instance, he says:

[A] North African living in Paris or Roubaix (France) insinuates *into* the system imposed on him [sic] by the construction of a low-income housing development or of the French language the ways of "dwelling" (in a house or a language) peculiar to his native Kabylia. He superimposes them and, by that combination, creates for himself a space in which he can find *ways of using* the constraining order of the place or of the language. Without leaving the place where he has no choice but to live and which lays down its laws for him, he establishes within it a degree of *plurality* and creativity. By an art of being in between, he draws unexpected results from his situation. (*ibid.* 30, italics in original)

De Certeau's notion of making do as a "way of operating" resonates strongly with Ybarra-Frausto's understanding of *rasquache* as "an underdog perspective": "In an environment always on the edge of coming apart (the car, the job, the toilet), things are held together with spit, grit, and movidas. Movidas are the coping strategies you use to gain time, to make options, to retain hope" (156). Likewise, punks in urban areas such as East L.A., South L.A., and Southwest Chicago, racially, economically, and geographically constrained to the margins of society, use the resources available to them to open up spaces of creativity within the margins. As my research suggests, practices of "making do" within Chicana/o and Latina/o punk scenes are also reflective of practices of making do with limited resources occurring within the larger Chicana/o and Latina/o communities of Los Angeles. Thus, the DIY practices taking place within these scenes problematize past theorizations of DIY that focus primarily on ideology, since, as Ybarra-Frausto argues, "Rasquachismo is a visceral response to lived reality, not an intellectual cognition" (156). Further, these practices also demonstrate the ways in which Chicana/os

and Latina/os negotiate space for themselves within a society that situates them as outsiders.

5.2 DIY in 1980s East L.A.

Young punk groups in East Los Angeles in the 1980s faced a number of difficulties in performing, recording, and circulating their music, one of the most significant of which was the lack of reliable venues. By September of 1983, Joe Suquette had closed his final Vex location; since the Vex was the only dedicated punk venue in East L.A. at the time, this presented a serious challenge to local bands wanting to play in the area. The closure of the Vex may have also made it more difficult for East L.A. bands to find gigs in other parts of Los Angeles, as well. Alvarado notes that many bands from East L.A., as well as from Orange County, the San Gabriel Valley, and other parts of the Los Angeles area, had used the Vex as a type of springboard into the more established Westside scene. He states, “It was a thing that you could say, ‘Well, we played the Vex, we have club experience,’ and then you could go to the Whisky, and play the Whisky or the Roxy or something” (Interview). The Vex served an important role in providing young and emerging bands with necessary club experience that they could then use as leverage to gain entrance into the Westside club circuit. While the members of the East L.A. bands that were taking shape in the early to mid 1980s likely attended punk shows at the Vex on a regular basis, many of them were simply too young to be able to play the Vex themselves. Alvarado recalls calling the Vex in 1983 to try to book a gig and being rejected after telling the person on the other end (likely Joe Suquette) that he was only fifteen years old and his brother was thirteen. Since prior club experience was a prerequisite to play many of the clubs on the Westside, for bands like Alvarado’s who were too young to play the Vex during its existence, the closing of the Vex may have signaled an indirect closing of doors into punk clubs anywhere in the city since they no longer had a place to gain the necessary experience.

While the lack of punk clubs in East L.A. subsequently meant a lack of opportunities to gain club experience, likely making it difficult for bands to find gigs outside of the area, it also meant that bands had to seek out alternative places to play within East L.A. There is a long tradition of live music at backyard parties in the neighborhoods of East Los

Angeles, and the first wave of punk bands from East L.A. often performed at backyard shows. Although backyard shows were still happening during the existence of the Vex, the closing of the Vex meant that backyards, and sometimes living rooms, became the primary performance spaces for the younger generation of punk bands. As Alvarado says, the mechanics of these shows were simple:

Find someone whose parents were either gullible or out of town, make flyers, pass them out at [L.A. punk venues], show up at the house with a couple of kegs of beer, play, dance, fight, leave when the cops crashed the party and find someplace else to finish the beer, usually an alley close to home. For three bucks or less, one could see, depending on when and if the cops showed up, anywhere from one to eight bands play. (“Teenage Alcoholics” 46)

Billy Branch, another member of the scene, notes that backyard shows were happening in various Eastside neighborhoods such as El Sereno, Montebello, and East Los Angeles proper, but primarily in City Terrace and Boyle Heights (Interview). He states that many shows were held at Alvarado’s parents’ house, as well as other houses with names like Velasco St., Booboo’s Pad, and the Dust Bowl. Like Alvarado, Branch says that the police often shut down backyard shows, and further notes that lack of access to equipment often caused setbacks at shows. He states, “no one really had that much equipment, everyone shared. When you get over there, you’re going, ‘Move this stuff out of the way, people might get crazy and fall on it.’ And there was maybe one extension cord. It wasn’t the best, optimum situation. Equipment breaks, someone breaks a string, no extra strings” (Interview).

By 1986, there were backyard shows happening every Friday and Saturday night, sometimes even more than one each night, at which point Alvarado says, “the gigs kind of became self-supporting [...] and it became the focal point for what we were doing and listening to” (Interview). Around 1989 an East L.A. band called Peace Pill, which shared a member with Alvarado’s band, Butt Acne, discovered a recurring event called No Talent Night at a downtown club called Al’s Bar, just across the Los Angeles River from East L.A. On No Talent Night, the bar would open up its stage to any band that showed

up ready to play, and after Peace Pill performed at the event, they returned to East L.A. to spread the word to other area bands. No Talent Night offered East L.A. bands with no club experience an opportunity to play outside of the neighborhoods, which in turn led to intermingling between East and Westside bands, creating further opportunities for East L.A. bands to play in other parts of the city. But from the period of roughly 1983 to 1989, punks in East L.A. were able to build a sustainable network of performances spaces in response to a lack of access to more official spaces. As Alvarado's and Branch's description of these shows suggest, though, the use of unsanctioned spaces for shows created additional difficulties, most notably, regular police interruptions and a lack of reliable equipment.

Another difficulty faced by East L.A. bands was how to record and circulate their music. A central notion in the myth of punk is that a sea change occurred when bands discovered they could circumvent the need for record labels by taking their recordings directly to a vinyl pressing plant. Dewar MacLeod, for instance, argues that “[punks] didn't need corporate support” to put out a record because, “by the middle of the 1970s it was possible, with a minor outlay, to record a couple of songs on a four-track recorder in a garage or jerry-rigged studio, press the recording into a 45-rpm single, print up a black-and-white sleeve, and sell several hundred copies at punk shows and through local record stores on consignment” (59). Likewise, O'Connor states that “[e]ach generation of punks discovers that it is not difficult to record songs and have them pressed” (xi). Yet, the dearth of vinyl recordings to come out of the East L.A. scene of the 1980s suggests that, on the contrary, it may have been quite difficult for bands from the working-class neighborhoods of East L.A. to make records. O'Connor stresses that the low cost of pressing a seven-inch record means that bands can recuperate expenses selling a minimal number of copies. MacLeod offers a concrete example, stating, “For his first single, Tito Larriva of the Plugz borrowed a thousand dollars from his father. Selling the seven-inch record from the trunk of his car at local shows, he recovered his costs within weeks” (59). However, as Alvarado says, young bands in places like East L.A. are perhaps less likely to have access to the kind of disposable cash necessary to invest in pressing a seven-inch, even if they would eventually make their money back (Interview). This may be especially true for bands that were effectively shut out of higher paying club gigs, since gigging is a

common way to raise money for recording and pressing records. It is, after all, difficult to pay for record pressings in beer, which was a frequent form of payment for performing at backyard shows (Alvarado, “Teenage Alcoholics” 46).

Cassettes therefore became the common format for the circulation of home-recorded music in the East L.A. scene because they are a cheaper alternative to vinyl records. As Alvarado says,

Few of the bands went into a proper studio and even fewer released a proper record. Most instead made demo cassettes on either a four-track recorder or a ghetto blaster, copied them onto cheap tapes and passed them out to friends or sold them. A handful of other would-be music moguls sometimes took these demos, picked a few songs from each tape, recorded them onto other cheap cassettes and passed them off as compilations. (“Teenage Alcoholics” 46)

While Alvarado’s reference to the makers of compilations as “would-be music moguls” is perhaps said with tongue in cheek, this approach to distributing music reveals a type of resourcefulness among the creators of these compilations. Jesse Killings of Social Conflict, a band that emerged from the generation of Eastside bands that followed Alvarado’s, reveals a similar kind of resourcefulness in an interview with Alvarado. Killings describes his process of home recording using a microphone and tape deck, processing the tape “through a little mixer,” and then trying to equalize the tape on a “regular cassette player where you could push the EQ to go to like ‘Rock’ or ‘Jazz’” (69). An anecdote he shares about acquiring the cassettes used to distribute his music is particularly revealing; he states: “I remember going to this Chinese church and they had all these free cassettes that they were giving out. It was all in Chinese. I went there for like a week straight, sit in there like I was part of the church or something. I was just in there racking all the cassettes. [...] I was recording our music over these cassettes” (*ibid.* 69).

5.3 DIY in the 1990s Latina/o Hardcore Scene

Compared to the predominantly teenaged East L.A. backyard scene of the 1980s, where DIY cultural production appears motivated at least as much—if not more so—by necessity than by philosophical or ideological commitment, in the geographically-dispersed Latina/o hardcore scene of the 1990s a DIY ideology became more defined. More bands during this period were able to mobilize resources in order to record and release vinyl records and professionally dubbed cassette tapes than in the 1980s East L.A. backyard scene, but many of the bands intentionally chose to either self-release their recordings or release through small DIY labels. Some of the 1990s hardcore bands also had more opportunities to perform in established, for-profit venues, but, because of their commitment to DIY ideals, still chose to turn down these opportunities in favor of alternative performance spaces, such as backyards, basements, community centers, or even laundromats. In this sense, the approach to cultural production of Latina/o hardcore bands in the 1990s appears very similar to the model established by DIY pioneers such as Ian MacKaye of Dischord Records and bands such as Minor Threat and Fugazi, a model very much driven by ideology over necessity. However, the material circumstances of Latina/o hardcore bands, along with factors such as race and immigration status still differentiate these bands from those from scenes with predominantly white, middle-class participants. Likewise, while many punk or indie bands rejected the major label system to protect their aesthetic purity, for many Latina/o hardcore bands, the choice to remain DIY appears to have been rooted in a desire for self-determination born as much out of coming from immigrant families and living in racially- and economically-marginalized areas as out of any concern for preserving aesthetics. I focus primarily on the case of Los Crudos here, because of their significant influence on the scene, as well as a larger number of published interviews with the band compared to others in the scene, but this example should not be regarded as entirely representative of the scene as a whole: because the scene was geographically dispersed, rather than concentrated in any one city or region, the unique local circumstances out of which Los Crudos emerged cannot be taken as universal to the local circumstances of all bands in the scene, even if similarities do exist between some cities.

The members of Los Crudos came from the Pilsen and Little Village areas of Southwest Chicago, areas formerly populated mostly by Eastern Europeans, but that had transitioned to predominantly Latina/o populations in the second half of the 20th century. In the late 1980s there were few punks in these neighborhoods and, according to Martin Sorrondeguy, vocalist for Los Crudos, only one place to hear punk music: Club Naked, an illegal nightclub held in a warehouse at the corner of Halsted and Cermak, where DJs would mix occasional punk songs into playlists otherwise dominated by House music and British synthpop (Rojas). In 1987, prior to the formation of Los Crudos in 1991, Sorrondeguy helped to put on the first punk show in Pilsen at Casa Aztlán, a local Mexican American cultural center, although all the bands on the bill came from other parts of Chicago because there were no punk bands from Pilsen/Little Village at the time. When a punk band did form in Pilsen/Little Village in 1988, there were no venues for punk music, so the band—Fuck the Bureaucracy, several members of which would become founding members of Los Crudos—would play in between DJ sets at nightclubs or parties.⁵²

The first Los Crudos show was held at the Six Feet Under, an illegal club located in a neighborhood basement, where parties were held and occasionally bands would play (“Discography”). With limited options in the area, the band found alternative spaces in cultural centers like Casa Aztlán and Calles y Sueños, church basements, house parties, backyards and laundromats. In terms of playing in their own neighborhoods, then, the band had to make do with what was available to them: non-commercial and sometimes illegal performance spaces. As Los Crudos grew in popularity, they had more options to perform outside of Pilsen/Little Village, but would still choose DIY spaces over commercial venues. Within Chicago, for instance, the band would often perform at the Fireside Bowl, an ailing North side bowling alley that would allow punks to put on DIY shows, and would turn down invitations to play the Metro, a 400-capacity commercial punk/alternative club near Wrigley Stadium, because it was a for-profit venue with higher

⁵² An interesting parallel exists to early East L.A. punk bands, who would also sometimes play between DJ sets when disco still dominated East L.A. functions.

ticket prices—although Sorrondeguy notes that the Fireside Bowl presented its own challenge in that it separated Los Crudos from their Pilsen/Little Village audience, who could not or would not often travel to the North side to see them perform (Amer and Knight). The band eventually performed in community centers, basements, and punk-run spaces across the U.S., and toured five continents, “each trip organized directly between members of the band and punks abroad” (Lefebvre, “Ambassador”).

The example of Los Crudos’ Lengua Armada record label, created in 1993 to release the band’s first seven-inch record, also demonstrates a convergence of necessity and ideology. Even before releasing the first Los Crudos record, though, Sorrondeguy had already independently released two records. In order to raise the money to release the first, a 1989 compilation of Chicago bands released as a seven-inch called *There’s a Fungus Among Us*, Sorrondeguy worked as a “pull boy” at a gun club, pulling the cord to launch clay pigeons for club patrons (O’Connor 95). Sorrondeguy followed this with a 1990 benefit compilation for the American Indian Treaty Rights Committee called *Built on Blood*, released as an LP plus seven-inch. Of the one thousand records pressed, eight to nine hundred arrived warped, requiring a young Sorrondeguy to negotiate with the pressing plant for a new pressing without the benefit of corporate or institutional support (96). Additionally, the printer where he went to have the booklets made told him the job would cost \$1,000, a price he could not afford to pay, but he was fortunate enough to meet a Kinko’s employee who hated his job and agreed to print the booklets for free. For the first Los Crudos record, Sorrondeguy says, “I really wasn’t interested, or even had the desire to send out tapes to people, and see if anybody was really into wanting to release it, because I honestly wouldn’t believe that people would be into it so we just kind of took it upon ourselves to release it ourselves...and that’s when we started the label” (“Lengua Armada”). In this instance, then, releasing the record by themselves was a necessity for Los Crudos because there was no interest in what they were doing—or at least Sorrondeguy perceived this to be true, likely based on the fact that there were no other politically-oriented Spanish-language punk bands in Chicago or on the national circuit at the time. For the most part, Los Crudos continued to self-release their music through Lengua Armada throughout the band’s existence, even though their increasing popularity meant that they likely had other options. In one notable case, a couple talent scouts—

“complete fucking suits” in Sorrondeguy’s words—approached Los Crudos at a show at the Fireside Bowl to ask the band to tour as an opening act for popular *rock en español* groups; Sorrondeguy refused to talk to them, and José Casas, Los Crudos guitarist, quickly showed them the door (Amer and Knight).

In the case of Los Crudos, then, the band appears to have relied upon DIY methods of performing and releasing their music early in their existence out of necessity, and to then choose to continue to employ DIY methods after other options were available to them out of their commitment to a DIY ideology. On the surface, this may seem like a standard trajectory for new bands operating within the realm of DIY punk. But Sorrondeguy’s initial belief that a band like Los Crudos would not have an audience outside of their own community demonstrates that factors such as race and class can create additional hurdles for some bands, even within punk. Their desire for self-determination should therefore not be read as simply a desire for artistic purity or authenticity, but as another instance in a longer history of racially- and economically-marginalized Chicana/o and Latina/o communities fighting to make their voices heard within U.S. culture and politics on their own terms. As discussed in Chapter Two, for the members of Los Crudos, as well as many of the bands in the Latina/o hardcore scene of the 1990s, punk was not a way to rebel against the communities in which they were raised, but instead to raise consciousness of issues affecting their communities, and to work with others in their communities to confront these issues. In other words, while punk is often regarded as a white, middle-class rebellion against the mundanity of suburban life, for Latina/o hardcore bands, punk was one tool in building grassroots movements to address the plight of racialized urban communities.

5.4 DIY in South L.A. 2008-Present

Interviews with members of the current punk scene based largely out of neighborhoods in South Los Angeles suggest that these punks face similar, though not identical, challenges to young punks in East Los Angeles during the 1980s. Formerly majority African-American neighborhoods, South Los Angeles has experienced a demographic shift in recent decades, with a large movement of Latina/os into the area, often recent immigrants to the United States. Like East Los Angeles, South Los Angeles is, to a large extent, a

racially and economically marginalized area of the city, which may contribute to some of the difficulties faced by members of the punk scene. Like punks in East L.A. in the 1980s, present day punks in South L.A. also confront unreliable access to officially sanctioned performance spaces and challenges in recording and circulating their music. At the same time, compared to the young members of the 1980s East L.A. scene who were often figuring things out as they went along, in terms of mobilizing what resources they do have, members of the current South L.A. scene benefit from the examples set by bands and scenes that came before, as well as from the presence of several older members who contribute knowledge and experience. Likewise, the relative accessibility of the Internet has made it easier for bands from the scene to transmit their music beyond their neighborhoods.

While some bands from the South L.A. scene have recently made their way into club spaces outside of the area, such as the Five Star Bar in Downtown L.A. and Los Globos in Silverlake, the scene is still largely reliant on unofficial spaces for shows that take place in or near South L.A. Like East L.A. in the 1980s (and into the present), backyard shows remain common (although less so than in earlier years of the scene). Members of the scene report that backyard shows remain vulnerable to police interruptions, although some point out that interruptions are more likely in some areas than others. Angeles “Angee” Zavala, singer of South L.A. band *Destruye y Huye*, states:

It depends on the area. I think there’s certain cities where it’s like, you already know not to have a late show there because you just kind of know it’s not gonna run past this specific time. I think it just really depends on the area where you’re playing your show. And, yeah, I think that’s where you could really see like, okay, this show won’t get raided because of that, or this show definitely will.
(Interview)

Erika Santillan, a native of Lennox, CA, bassist of the band *Fumigados*, and formerly bassist for the now-defunct Olympia, WA-based band *Weird TV* during her time at Evergreen State College, corroborates, stating, “in Lennox, I feel like [...] noise wasn’t an issue because everyone had parties every weekend at incredible noise levels, and

people didn't trip, people didn't say anything, and cops would seldom show up. But in Inglewood, cops would show up, or a fight would break out" (Interview).

Several respondents also mentioned community or cultural centers, such as the Blood Orange Info Shop in Riverside, CA and El Centro Cultural De Mexico in Santa Ana, CA, as alternatives to bar or club spaces, but some expressed concern for the possibility of bringing negative attention to the spaces. For instance, Mark Ocegueda, member of bands such as Pesadilla Distopika and Ausencia and founder of San Bernardino, CA-based label Verdugo Discos, states, "I also like cultural centers, cultural centers are cool, but you also run a risk there by bringing bad attention to it. And usually cultural centers are multi-faceted spaces, where they do classes and stuff like that. So I don't like bringing the potential of someone drinking on the site, or having the cops show up with that happening" (Interview). Likewise, Austin Delgadillo, a member of numerous South L.A. bands and one of several organizers of a warehouse space located near Downtown L.A., points to the difficulty of enforcing the sober policies that are sometimes in effect in certain types of spaces; he states, "we used to work with community centers, and charter schools, and places like that, but I stopped booking stuff like that just because I don't want to be responsible for trying to babysit something that I can't babysit, and potentially getting shut down if they get found out about people drinking in the space" (Interview).

Other alternatives to bar or club spaces are unofficial venues such as a warehouse space operated by Delgadillo and others on the edge of the Arts District, a tire shop in the Florence-Graham neighborhood of South L.A., and other similar spaces, but such spaces also come with difficulties. In addition to police surveillance, such spaces are also subject to fines or legal action over questions of licenses, permits, and insurance. In our interview, Delgadillo discussed an instance of the vice squad coming into a show, forcing everyone out, and randomly checking I.D.s of anyone carrying alcohol. Fortunately, in this instance everyone who was asked for their I.D. was of legal drinking age and the show was allowed to continue. But this incident set in motion a process of attempting to make sense of which types of permits and licenses were necessary to the operation of such a space. At the time of our interview, Delgadillo was seeking legal advice, but in the interim, he and the other organizers instituted policies in order to work around not having

permits. Most significantly, the organizers required all show attendees to either R.S.V.P., or to sign up as a member of the space. By maintaining a list of attendees, they could categorize shows as private parties, rather than as events open to the public. Further, by asking for donations, rather than charging a cover, they could claim that they were not a for-profit business. And, while attendees who were of legal age were allowed to bring alcohol into the space, the organizers did not sell alcohol. Despite having these policies in place to circumvent the issue of permits, the organizers were prevented from holding further shows in the space for several months in the summer of 2014 after fire marshals showed up to an event and declared it exceeded the building's capacity. The existence of this space, which is once again hosting shows, highlights an important difference between the East L.A. backyard scene of the 1980s and the current South L.A. scene, specifically the ages of participants in each. While the East L.A. scene was largely made up of teenagers who would not have been legally able to lease spaces even if they could raise the funds to do so, the South L.A. scene is largely made up of adults, which opens up the possibility of scene members pooling resources in order to lease spaces that can be used as performance spaces, as well as art studios and record stores, introducing a degree of stability not always available to the earlier East L.A. scene.

As in the 1980s East L.A. scene, finding ways to document the music coming out of the scene remains a concern for punks from South L.A. Despite disappearing completely from mainstream distribution channels, cassettes remain an important format for many punk bands in DIY scenes, including those in the current South L.A. scene. A typical trajectory for bands in DIY scenes—at least those that last long enough to make any recordings at all—is to first make a demo tape, either independently or with the help of a small label, and then to release a 7" record, generally through a label. While this approach is to some degree standard, which suggests that it is not just a question of resources, statements from my respondents suggest that for some within the South L.A. scene the question of affordability is still an important factor. For instance, Zavala says of the recording process:

[W]e want to make this as accessible as we can and work with people we know have the skills, instead of having to go through, like, "Oh, let's find some huge

record place, or let's rent out this." Which I think if you have the resources, that's fuckin' badass if you can do that, but realistically we can't. And even through connections, even if we have people that we know that do work in studios or whatever, we opt to work with them because there's that whole understanding of we don't have all this money, and yeah, we don't need to have a crazy-ass, clean-ass production to make fuckin' music that someone's gonna enjoy. (Interview)

Speaking more specifically of recording *Destruye y Huye*'s demo tape, she states, "when we recorded, we recorded at our homie's house in Compton, we were just in the living room, and we just had a mic and their laptop, and there's no fancy studio." Zavala also extends the example of making do with limited resources to the dubbing and assembling of the tapes, saying, "Even the production of our tapes, we printed our own things, we cut stuff, we folded them, we got our own tapes. Finding different resources, or things that we have access to and being able to use that, [...] I think that that's really DIY."

Although the relatively cheap cost of making tapes remains an important factor, it is important to note the role of aesthetics in the choice of cassettes over other inexpensive options such as recordable compact discs. Throughout punk's existence, vinyl records and cassette tapes have remained the preferred media for many DIY punk bands and labels, even as other formats gained prominence elsewhere, suggesting a sometimes purist or even conservative relationship to technology on the part of punks. The choice of South L.A. bands to circulate their music on cassette is likely influenced at least in part by this tradition.

For some, releasing cassette tapes is a cheap and efficient way to ensure that there exists some form of documentation of their scene, especially with the short lifespan of many punk bands. As Delgadillo, one of the founders of the *Silenzio Statico* label, a label that has primarily released music by South L.A. bands, states:

Abe [another member of the scene] and I were thinking we need to document all these bands because what ends up happening is there's so much good bands that go through and they never have demos or rehearsal tapes that go beyond the neighborhood or some friends. And the other thing is bands don't exist for too

long in L.A. It's like a year or two years, so in that quick window of time, it was just fighting for the resources to do what we could do to get things out. We obviously are in a better place now with resources, with the space to record [inside the warehouse space]. (Interview)

Ocegueda applies a similar logic to his project of releasing 7" records through his Verdugo Discos label. He states:

releasing records is going to be a cool project for me because I couldn't really do that in the past, because of lack of time and lack of money and all that. But now as I'm getting more resources to actually do something like that, I'm trying to take it on because I know that it would mean a lot to bands, especially when they can't do it themselves. Because if you can be someone that can support the scene by putting out a record, distributing it to different distros, it would make a particular part of this scene that I care about more meaningful and more visible to other punks throughout the country, the world. (Interview)

Both Delgadillo's and Ocegueda's statements express a desire for visibility or recognition outside the confines of their scene, but emphasize the degree to which the possibilities for recognition are limited by material constraints. For Ocegueda, then, having greater access to resources than he did in the past becomes motivation to assist others who may still lack the necessary resources to press a record. This is perhaps an attempt to pay back the favor done for Hordes, a band that Ocegueda previously played in, by a record label that put out a 7" record for them. He says, "We had a record label, King of the Monsters from Arizona, put out a 7", and that record label was cool because they paid for everything, and it was a big help for us in getting our name out and playing shows, and just having people know who we are." He goes on to say, "at that time, we didn't have resources to actually pay for all that. And he believed in our band, that he could move all the records that he pressed. So it's like he did all the work, and that was cool to me." Thus, while gathering the necessary resources to record and circulate music has at times been a challenge for those associated with the current South L.A. scene, members of this scene have often been more successful in this regard than many from the 1980s East L.A.

scene. The Silenzio Statico and Verdugo Discos labels both primarily release music by bands from or associated with the South L.A. scene, and bands from the scene have also had music released through a number of other small independent labels, including: Mata La Musica Discos, Lengua Armada Discos, Going Underground Records, and All Welcome Records. Interestingly, few bands from the scene post their music to popular streaming sites such as Bandcamp or SoundCloud; recordings are more often circulated online by bloggers who digitize punk tapes and make them available for download or post them to YouTube, or through file sharing platforms. The reasons for this are unclear, though may relate to access to technology or a wish to remain under the radar.

5.5 Making Do: Ideology and Practice in Chicana/o and Latina/o Punk Scenes

To return to Ybarra-Frausto and de Certeau and their related notions of “making do,” this is perhaps the clearest, most concise way to describe the approach to cultural production of punks in East L.A. during the 1980s, as well as in more recent scenes. While I have thus far concentrated on live performance and recording, focusing in on even more basic practices reveals the importance of *rasquache* or making do. For instance, Alvarado described to me the creation of his first electric guitar:

My dad was a gang counselor, he ran youth centers in East Los Angeles. And so we didn't have a lot of money, we couldn't afford a lot of things, but he did have access to audio-visual equipment. So my first electric guitar was an acoustic guitar, and we had taken one of the movie projectors that he had brought home, plugged the microphone into it, like a dynamic mic, wrapped toilet paper around the edge of the microphone, shoved it into the guitar hole for the acoustic guitar, plugged it into the movie projector and then turned it up full blast so it was just feeding back everywhere, and it sounded like two trains crashing. And I just ran a screwdriver or bottle up and down the neck while my brother screamed, and that was our first band. (Interview)

Alvarado applied the same logic to the creation of t-shirts, since in the 1980s hardcore punk still existed largely on the periphery of mainstream culture and pre-made band t-shirts were not easily accessible. He states:

You didn't have an overabundance of places like Hot Topic, or places where you could go in the mall where you could buy a t-shirt pre-made. You literally had to make your own, and in our sense we made them with food coloring or spray paint or markers, like Sharpie markers, and I think in one case we actually made a t-shirt with beef blood. My mother had made a steak, and she left the little tray on the side, and we made t-shirts with the blood because it stained the shirt. Just, you tried anything. (*ibid.*)

Branch demonstrates that making do not only applied to the creation of venues, but sometimes also to obtaining the price of admission to live performances, stating, "Manny [a friend] would pick me up, we would go to a gig, and his dad would lend me the money, and then the next morning I would go mow lawns and go back and pay him" (Interview). Zavala confirms that for some currently involved in punk, making do still plays an important role in things like procuring instruments. She states, "getting instruments, that took us a while, and for me I had my mic, but I didn't have my speaker, so [...] working to get that speaker. [...] And then also, too, working with what we have. We had at some point a broomstick as a mic stand" (Interview). For her, making do within the space of the band is an extension of similar practices in the home:

we've grown up seeing our parents trying to make things out of whatever it is that they have. I know that for us it's little things [...] like fixing the faucet, like, "fuck, we don't have money, so let's leave the pliers on the faucet, and this is how we're gonna work through this, we're gonna shower." Little things like that are very, very real to our communities.

These examples thus illustrate the degree to which practices that might be called DIY are also closely bound up with practices of "making do" for Chicana/o and Latina/o punks in Los Angeles, which are in turn reflective of similar types of everyday practices in Chicana/o and Latina/o communities.

To return once again to the definitions of DIY offered at the beginning, at the core of each is the idea that the driving force for DIY cultural production is a desire for autonomy from the mainstream culture industries. In the case of the 1980s East L.A. backyard scene, though, autonomy was not so much achieved through struggle as it was assured from the start based on the material realities of those involved, specifically, the reality of coming from economically and racially marginalized areas of Los Angeles. As Alvarado says, “when you’re fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, even twenty-two, twenty-three years old, and you’ve got no money, and you’ve got no prospects, and you’ve got no hope in hell of even being able to conceive of anybody even paying attention to you in that regard, in that sense, it’s not something that you’re trying to rebel against, it’s just a reality” (Interview). The early failures of labels to successfully market East L.A. bands, the general difficulty of marketing the type of punk being played by many bands in the East L.A. backyard scene, and the lack of access to sanctioned performances spaces and material resources all combined to assure that members of the scene could operate with a high degree of autonomy. Likewise, the marginalized status of members of the current South L.A. scene, along with the types of music being played by many of the bands, has assured the scene still exists largely independently of the mainstream music industry, even taking into account the differences between the 1980s East L.A. scene and the current South L.A. scene in terms of age of participants, access to performance spaces, and ease of recording and circulating music.

But whether or not this autonomy is desired is another question. For some of my respondents, autonomy is a clearly stated desire, while statements from others suggest a degree of ambivalence. For Ocegueda, for instance, operating in a DIY mode is clearly a question of integrity. He states:

DIY is doing your own shows where there’s no middleman, or you’re working with someone where your integrity’s not compromised. If you’re doing the show, you can get the money to split it with a cultural center and the band that’s touring, and that way the band’s not going through any organization that’s comprising the integrity of punk and your ethics. (Interview)

Kimberly “Kiwi” Martinez of Generacion Suicida likewise stresses the importance of DIY in ensuring that the band’s sound and vision are not compromised by outside interference, stating, “I would rather do it [DIY] because I don’t want anyone to alter what we’re doing. This is how we want to sound. And that’s how we want to do it. We don’t want anyone sitting over there like, ‘Hey, I can make it better.’ Just do it ourselves. We know what we want” (Interview). Speaking on the subject of the “East Los” documentary sponsored by Vans, and the 2005 film, *Wassup Rockers*, directed by Larry Clark, Delgadillo emphasizes that corporate sponsors and filmmakers, like record companies, are not necessarily invested in musicians or neighborhoods beyond their ability to generate profit. He states:

[W]e’re just like, “No, we’re doing it ourselves, fuck it, we don’t need nobody’s film, we don’t need nobody’s sponsorship, we’re gonna do it.” That’s our mentality, and so you can never be knocked down that way except by yourself. You don’t have to be dependent on something else; you’re only dependent on your homies, your neighborhood, the resources you can connect.

These statements demonstrate a clear desire for autonomy or independence from outside forces that might interfere with the integrity or vision of bands or scenes, whether these forces are record labels, corporate sponsors, filmmakers, or club owners.

Though a desire for autonomy cannot be discounted, statements from other respondents suggest more ambivalent understandings of DIY. For instance, Tony Abarca, also of Generacion Suicida, states:

[W]hen it comes to money, I think people see things as kind of like, evil. Let’s say your band makes it, and you’re a DIY band, people see it like, “They’re sell-outs.” But really, the way I see it is if your band somehow makes it, depending on what you mean by “make it,” if your band is suddenly getting paid to play, I don’t really see that as a bad thing. Because for myself, that I’m in a band, I’m broke like a hundred percent of the time pretty much, I struggle to do tours, to travel. I do it because I like it, but it stresses me out because I have no money. So I don’t really see it as a bad thing when people say the band is getting paid. It may be a

good thing because you're supporting that band. So you're helping them get to do what they do. (Interview)

Abarca's statement should not necessarily be read as a willingness to capitulate to major labels nor as a desire to get rich by playing in a punk band, but it does suggest more of a gray area than Ocegueda's statement that "you're not gonna make money off of punk in general, and even if that's your goal with it, then that's kinda weird" (Interview).

Alvarado also offers a more ambivalent take, albeit a very different one, suggesting that prior to 1994 there was no place for hardcore punk—regardless of the race or ethnicity of the band members—in the mainstream music industry, whether or not that was what bands desired. He states, "in the vast majority of cases prior to 1994, I don't think it was an intentional attempt at subverting the record industry so much as it was trying to create an alternative to it out of necessity, because bands like D.I. or Septic Death were probably not going to be offered a major label deal" (Interview). Speaking of his own band, Butt Acne, Alvarado notes, "There was no way that we were gonna get a record deal, and we knew it, there was no way that we were gonna get a club date, and we knew it, and we didn't care. We were street kids, we didn't care about those things" (*ibid.*).

Alvarado's statement suggests that his disinterest in the mainstream music industry might be at least partially rooted in the knowledge that record labels and club promoters had little interest in what was happening in East L.A., an ambivalence that seems to be both born out of occupying a marginalized position in society, and at odds with the supposedly ideological motivations of DIY cultural production in other scenes.

Even for those respondents whose understandings of DIY do align with the definitions offered by Thompson, O'Connor, and others, other statements made during their interviews still demonstrate an additional layer of understanding of DIY as a question of practicality or even as a mode of survival. For example, both Delgadillo and Ocegueda mention on numerous occasions the difficulties of working with limited resources and the importance of making connections with other people or scenes in order to pool resources, clearly demonstrating an aspect of practicality in their deployment of DIY practices.

Further, when questioned if DIY might have a different significance for those from

racially- or economically-marginalized areas such as South L.A. than for those from more middle-class areas, Delgadillo responded in the affirmative. He states:

I feel like in certain ways it can be more honest. I think there's a lack of honesty coming out of a lot of punk, especially from middle-class backgrounds. I'm not saying that's true across the board, but I'm just saying, with a lot more privilege to not have to deal with the same shit, like citizenship issues, or constant police surveillance of your high school, or your neighborhood, or your scene, or your shows, or growing up in foster care, whatever the fuck. Not to say that those things are always exclusive to one class. But I think it definitely has an impact on what bands are going to be singing about, where bands get to tour, if they feel comfortable driving through Arizona or not, whether they have documentation. [...] I think kids have to fight a lot harder in these neighborhoods to really make their shit crack. (Interview)

I do not include Delgadillo's statement about honesty in punk in order to suggest that some understandings of or approaches to DIY, or certain bands or scenes, are more authentic than others. Rather, I include his statement in order to demonstrate that lived experience and material realities impact understandings and applications of DIY. This is again demonstrated in Ocegueda's application of a DIY framework to his experiences not only in punk, but also as a graduate student. He states:

from what I've seen, a lot of people in graduate school come from places of privilege. They have families that have been involved in professional backgrounds, like attorneys, doctors, whatever, and they can already talk the talk, they know the vocabulary of a big institution like academia. And for me, I had to really learn a lot of that on my own, and I had to navigate through that on my own terms, and with the help of selected few professors that really cared and really supported me. (Interview)

Thus, for Ocegueda DIY is both an ideology that governs ethical approaches to cultural production and, at the same time, a practical approach to navigating inequitable distributions of resources and knowledge. These statements suggest a very particular

understanding of DIY shaped equally by an ideologically driven approach to cultural production and a lack of access to material resources.

5.6 Conclusion

It is important to reiterate that DIY as necessity is not always unique to particular marginalized groups, such as working-class Chicana/o and Latina/o communities. At the same time, however, it is crucial to understand the material conditions that create necessity. For instance, in Michael Azerrad's discussion of Black Flag, lead singer Henry Rollins details the hardships of life in the band, recounting the various ways in which members of the band attempted to scrounge food when there was no money to buy it, including stealing money from cash orders sent to the label, stealing from plates in restaurants, and accepting handouts from Greg Ginn's parents (42-3). While such financial hardships clearly suggest an aspect of necessity in Black Flag's employment of DIY practices, it is imperative to recognize that this was a lifestyle the band willfully opted into by opting out of their more stable middle-class backgrounds. As Rollins states, "Slowly I came to realize that this was it and there was no place I'd rather be. As much as it sucked for all of us to be living on the floor on top of each other, it still was better than the job I had left" (qtd. in Traber 36). Daniel Traber describes the self-marginalization of white punks in Los Angeles in the late 1970s and early 1980s as a move from suburban to "sub-urban," "a very specific class position, one that must confront the utmost levels of poverty, hunger, inadequate housing, and the constant threat of physical danger and death" (31). While noting that many young suburban punks left home to escape dysfunctional families or other hardships, Traber stresses that for most this move was a choice, and one that relied upon the existence of an—often racial—Other in order to "define itself as oppositional" (32). He argues, therefore, that the adoption of a sub-urban identity is inherently problematic because "'True' sub-urbans have considerably less control over their life choices, least of all over the identities they can afford to wear or the places where they can show them off. Punks ignore how some have the freedom to explore different identities while ontological mobility is restricted for others" (*ibid.* 52) (we may also add to "ontological mobility" social, economic, and geographic mobility). Traber contends that this ultimately re-centers and reinforces the power of whiteness

“through a logic of stereotyped racial and class difference—those sought-after characteristics of otherness that are actually products of dominant white discourses” (54).

In a November 3rd, 2015 article for Baltimore’s *City Paper*, Brandon Soderberg offers a critique of the city’s DIY music and arts scene that resonates closely with Traber’s appraisal of punk in L.A. Because Baltimore is “an apartheid city,” Soderberg argues, “the ‘DIY’ conceit is a canard.” He continues, “If you are a white artist who is part of the DIY scene, you benefit from the city’s racist policies—and that’s on top of the work-a-day privileges whiteness allows you. Baltimore’s white DIY scene is not ‘do it yourself’ because it was built on the backs and fueled by the pain of the city’s oppressed.” Like Traber then, Soderberg asserts that white DIY cultural practices in Baltimore depend upon the existence of a racialized Other, of historical and on-going systemic racism and racial inequality, and of the racialized dimensions of deindustrialization:

low rent for shabby spaces, an edgy scene, the cheap thrills of illegality are all the flip side of a history of segregated housing, white flight, vacant, repossessed homes, the drug wars, zero tolerance and police brutality. And while there has been a crackdown over the past few years of DIY spaces, it’s ultimately small potatoes compared to the de facto racist policing and governmental policies that run this city and seriously limit accessibility and resources for large swaths of black Baltimore.

Soderberg concludes by suggesting that while “[w]hen we say ‘DIY,’ we implicitly mean white artists making a certain kind of art,” various African American cultural practices—practices that could also be described as “making do”—“are all ‘DIY’ too, we just don’t call [them] that.”

The particular conditions of Baltimore in 2015 are not identical to those in Los Angeles and Chicago throughout the years covered in my study, and neither are the experiences of racism and inequality between African American and Latina/o communities. Still, Soderberg speaks to the need to address questions of privilege and mobility in discussions of DIY. Likewise, I do not mean to suggest that punks from East L.A., South L.A., or Southwest Chicago come from the kind of abject poverty that defines Traber’s

notion of a sub-urban class position, since this would likely be a false assumption in most cases. However, the working-class backgrounds of many punks from these areas suggests that making do is more of a necessity from square one than the necessity-mandated-by-choice of those who can choose to return to a more stable class position. Again, I do not call attention to this difference in order to suggest that one approach to DIY cultural production is more authentic than another, but rather to further emphasize the importance of considering factors such as race and class when discussing DIY practices. The evidence presented above demonstrates that the forms DIY takes among working-class Chicana/o and Latina/o punks are rooted in broader cultural practices in racially- and economically-marginalized Chicana/o and Latina/o communities, what Ybarra-Frausto, borrowing from Raymond Williams, calls “Chicano structures of thinking, feeling, and aesthetic choice” (155). Considering Chicana/o and Latina/o DIY cultural production through the lens of *rasquache* or “making do” thus enables a reading of DIY practices that takes into account the impact of racial inequality and differential access to resources on such practices, considerations largely ignored by previous theorizations of DIY. My analysis of these scenes therefore brings a much needed level of nuance into the study of punks’ cultural production.

Chapter 6

6 Summary and Conclusions

Throughout this dissertation, I have argued that the history of Chicana/o and Latina/o punks cannot be separated from a critical examination of continuing racial inequality and popular discourses about race. At various times throughout punk's long history, Chicana/o and Latina/o punks have confronted marginalization in the recording industry, developed strategies of making do with limited means in order to create art and build scenes, and have been regularly marginalized within, if not excluded from punk historiography and scholarship. My analysis of four predominantly Chicana/o and Latina/o punk scenes challenges the historical marginalization of brown punks, as well as narratives of Chicana/o and Latina/o involvement in punk scenes that present singular notions of "Chicano punk" or reduce their involvement to historically bound interventions during moments of crisis or apolitical celebrations of multiculturalism. Instead, my analysis reveals a complex, continuous, and continuously evolving Chicana/o and Latina/o presence in American punk scenes dating back to early in punk's history.

The historical overview of four punk scenes provided in Chapter Two demonstrated the inadequacy of singular narratives of Chicana/o and Latina/o involvement in punk. Though punks from each scene confronted common issues—anti-immigrant/Latina/o sentiment, racial and economic marginalization, the continued presence of which across the decades of my study points to the continued importance of critically investigating the relationships of Chicana/os and Latina/os to the larger culture—the particular ways in which these issues manifested varies from scene to scene, shaped by the historical moment in which each scene existed. Likewise, the dynamics of each scene were shaped by factors such as geography, age of participants, access to venues/recording technology, and the evolution of punk more generally. Even within individual scenes, participants varied in their identification with Chicana/o or Latina/o identities and their commitment to political ideologies and DIY practices. As such, totalizing notions of "Chicano punk" that assume identical motivations, ideologies, and aesthetics among all Chicana/o punks are revealed to be ahistorical and inadequate to describe the numerous ways in which

Chicana/os and Latina/os have engaged with punk. Further, Chapter Two demonstrated the need to take seriously questions of race within the study of punk. The long presence of Chicana/os and Latina/os (as well as other people of color) in punk documented in Chapter Two disrupted common assumptions of punk as white culture and made clear the inadequacy of studies of punk that only examine race in terms of whiteness or contain punks of color to temporally bound moments of intervention.

In Chapter Three, I examined the role of discourses of colorblindness in the historiography of Los Angeles punk. An analysis of debates over L.A. punk history in the wake of the *Vexing: Female Voices from East L.A. Punk* exhibit suggested that many from the early L.A. scene understood punk as an identity unto itself, relegating other categories such as race, gender, and sexuality to the background. Over time, this contributed to the erasure of these other identity categories from punk history, and attempts to draw attention to questions of race in L.A. punk history were met with fierce resistance from participants in the early Hollywood scene who, in the interest of protecting their legacies, would prefer not to disrupt a celebratory narrative of their scene as utopian and egalitarian. In their public defenses of the scene, detailed in Chapter Three, figures such as Brendan Mullen and Alice Bag often slipped into a colorblind rhetoric in which racism is understood as a problem of individual prejudice and encompasses any form of race-thinking, regardless of intention (although the latter part is more true for Mullen than for Bag). Though likely not the intention of Mullen or Bag, the use of such rhetoric worked to obscure the continued existence of systemic racism and to silence those who attempted to address historical and ongoing racial inequality. The appearance of a colorblind rhetoric in the debates over L.A. punk history offered clues to the limited discussion of race beyond whiteness in punk scholarship and the invisibility of people of color in punk historiography. Further, the use of this rhetoric within the supposedly progressive space of punk demonstrated the pervasiveness and insidiousness of colorblindness as a racial commonsense.

In Chapter Four, I documented the difficulties encountered by early East L.A. bands Los Illegals and the Brat when attempting to work within the mainstream recording industry. In the late 1970s and early 1980s record labels saw in New Wave, punk's more radio-

friendly counterpart, an opportunity to boost record sales after the disco bubble burst, and both bands were courted by labels. However, their experiences within the recording industry were shaped in negative ways by the racial assumptions of industry personnel and the often rigid racial categories of the industry. For instance, the Brat's managers and producers, wishing to recreate a proven formula, tried to pressure the band to mimic the sounds of previously successful Latin rock bands such as Santana despite the band's disinterest in incorporating signifiers of "Latinness." Continuously forced to work against personnel whose plans for the band had little to do with the band's own vision led the Brat to disintegrate before they could release a major label album. Los Illegals were granted more artistic freedom for their first album, but their label's insistence on marketing the album primarily to Chicana/o and Latina/o communities, based on assumptions about who the natural market was for Chicana/o bands, impeded the band's desire to take their message to a wider audience. Further, the label sought to release a subsequent Spanish-language album (that never came to be) through their newly created Latin division, with the hope of reaching a Latin American audience. The experiences of the Brat and Los Illegals within the recording industry revealed racialized assumptions about what music made by Chicana/os and Latina/os can or should sound like, and which audiences will—or will not—buy music made by Chicana/os and Latina/os. These assumptions imposed limitations on the bands' ability to record the music they wished to record, and to reach the audiences they wished to reach. Additionally, by pushing Chicana/o bands to incorporate signifiers of a "commonsense" understanding of "Latinness," these kinds of constraints also contributed to broader discourses of race that situate Chicana/os and Latina/os as "foreign" by limiting the range of sounds and images that can be heard and seen by audiences.

Finally, I examined Chicana/o and Latina/o Do-It-Yourself (DIY) cultural production in Chapter Five. Typically understood as an ideological objection to the mainstream music industry or to a capitalist system more generally, the DIY cultural production of working-class Chicana/os and Latina/os suggested instead a practical approach to producing art and music with limited means. This is not to suggest that Chicana/o and Latina/o punks did not also employ DIY practices out of ideological commitment, but instead that the racial and economic marginalization of Chicana/o and Latina/o communities often

produced material circumstances that require *rasquache* practices, or practices of “making do.” While others have previously discussed DIY as a kind of necessity for those with limited means, it is important to distinguish that for punks from white, middle-class backgrounds, this necessity was created by leaving behind more stable class positions, whereas the material conditions that required working-class Chicana/o and Latina/o punks in marginalized areas of cities such as Los Angeles and Chicago to employ DIY practices were more often the result of ongoing structural inequality. This is not meant to be a statement about authenticity, but rather to suggest that studies of DIY need to take into account factors such as race and class (as well as gender, age, geography, etc.). These questions have often been absent from studies of punk, but the evidence provided in Chapter Five demonstrated the importance of considering how such factors shaped the ways in which punks employed DIY practices.

Collectively, the evidence outlined in these chapters suggests a need to rethink taken-for-granted notions about punk, as well as to challenge discourses of race that situate Chicana/os and Latina/os outside U.S. national identity. The long and complex history of Chicana/o and Latina/o participation in American punk scenes clearly demonstrates the shortcomings of punk historiography and scholarship that assumes a straight white male subject position within punk. The study of punk’s relationship to race cannot be limited to discussions of whiteness, but must take into account other subjectivities and the ways in which structural inequality and popular discourses of race shape the experiences of people of color in punk. At the same time, a close examination of the experiences of Chicana/os and Latina/os in punk demonstrates the urgent need to question discourses of race that treat Chicana/os and Latina/os as perpetually foreign as well as those that obscure the continued importance of race in organizing U.S. society. The evidence shows that these discourses play a determining role in the marginalization of Chicana/os and Latina/os in or exclusion from punk historiography and scholarship, and have shaped the experiences of Chicana/o and Latina/o punks in dramatic ways. Questioning such discourses that contribute to the ongoing racial and economic marginalization of Chicana/o and Latina/o communities is particularly important now as Latina/os have come to represent the largest minority population in the United States—and now

outnumber whites in California. These recent demographic shifts signal the need for new national conversations about race that move beyond the dominant black/white binary.

6.1 New Directions

The preceding chapters make clear that the history of Chicana/os and Latina/os in punk has often been marked by various forms of exclusion and marginalization, chief among them the exclusion of Chicana/os and Latina/os from or marginalization in the history of American punk scenes more generally. This exclusion and marginalization in many ways mirrors industrial practices and a racial “commonsense” that places Chicana/os and Latina/os on the outside of U.S. national identity. Recently, a number of punks and scholars have begun to question this marginalization, producing articles, interviews, zines, oral histories, museum exhibitions, and documentary films that work to reassert the presence of Chicana/os and Latina/os in punk history. With the recent revival of interest in the East L.A. punk scene and the presence of Chicana/os and Latina/os in punk more generally, it is perhaps inevitable that brands with an interest in youth cultures would eventually want to stake a claim in the conversation. Enter Scion, a division of the Toyota Motor Corporation, whose virtual iQ Project Museum, launched in 2012, includes an exhibit entitled “LA Chicano Punk,” which contains photographs of the Chicana/o presence in the Los Angeles punk scene of the late 1970s and early 1980s, as well as video interviews with several participants in the scene. Also enter the Vans shoe company, whose #LIVINGOFFTHEWALL documentary film series launched in 2014 with Angela Boatwright’s *East Los*, which documents the more recent East Los Angeles backyard punk scene. To some extent, East L.A. or “Chicano Punk” scenes seem like a natural fit for these brands: since Scion first entered the market in 2003, its marketing team has focused significant energy on linking the brand to hip, inner-city youth cultures; for its part, Vans has a long-running connection to punk, first through the historical relationship between punk and skateboarding, and later through its sponsorship of the Warped Tour, an annual traveling punk festival. Thus, attempting to create a link to East L.A. punk or “Chicano Punk” may be seen as a practical extension of the brand image each company wishes to foster. However, the intervention of these brands into the ongoing conversation about the presence of Chicana/os in the Los Angeles punk scene

raises a number of questions. I introduce some of these questions here, but only preliminarily; these are sites for further research.

Launched in June 2003, Scion's marketing team defined their target market from the beginning as urban youth, between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four. Prior to launch, posters with slogans such as "Ban normality," "No clone zone," and "Bland is banned" were put up near nightclubs in San Francisco, Sacramento, Los Angeles, and San Diego, Scion's initial markets. Jim Farley, Toyota's divisional vice president at the time, describes the marketing campaign in this way: "[Pre-launch] marketing has to be dirty and in the streets, because that's where our customers are [...] It would have been riskier to go mainstream" (qtd. in Jeffers 6). Appeals to individuality and non-conformism in Scion's early marketing campaigns are indicative of a desire to target a niche audience. Brian Morrissey makes this desire explicit in his October 2007 profile of Scion for *Adweek*, stating, "Toyota actually aims to keep the brand on a niche scale to maintain its underground appeal. It sold about 170,000 Scions last year and wants to repeat that this year" (12).

Scion Audio/Visual is just one of the projects through which Scion's marketing team attempt to engage their target demographic. The "About" section of the A/V blog describes the project in this way:

Scion Audio/Visual is a creative enterprise of Scion devoted to the discovery, nurture, funding and distribution of compelling music and arts programming. Scion A/V has created and championed projects for over 100 underground musical artists, supported tours and special events, created film documentaries, curated art installations, and produces a collection of 'zines. Additionally, Scion A/V executes the annual Scion Music(less) Conference and operates 17 broadband radio stations via Scion A/V Streaming Radio.

This description suggests that Scion's creative team imagine themselves not simply as creators or providers of content, but, more grandly, as patrons of the arts. Ultimately, though, this patronage of arts and culture remains a strategy to sell cars. As Jeri Yoshizu, sales promotions manager and head of Scion's "music strategy," states, "It's about

awareness and familiarity. We let people know that Scion exists and that Scion sells cars” (qtd. in Hampp 9).

Scion’s “LA Chicano Punk” exhibit is part of the virtual iQ Project Museum, initially launched in March of 2012, and its mission statement reflects Scion’s desire to be recognized as a patron of the arts. The statement reads:

The Scion iQ Project Museum aims to spotlight influential and under-recognized musicians, movements and musical communities. A living site, the Museum will evolve over time with new material added to existing exhibits along with the unveiling of new exhibits. Through historical storytelling, criticism, commentary and the archiving of rare artifacts the Scion iQ Project Museum aims to serve as an inspiration for all generations and a resource for the study of contributions to art and culture that might otherwise be lost to time.

In addition to the “LA Chicano Punk” exhibit, the iQ Project Website also contains exhibits dedicated to rappers Biz Markie and Big Daddy Kane, hip-hop producer Prince Paul, and Detroit jazz and funk label, Strata Records. This selection of subject matter reflects Scion’s desire to appeal to a niche market of discerning urban youth.

The introductory page of the “LA Chicano Punk” exhibit focuses the discussion of Chicana/o involvement in the Los Angeles punk scene around the eight-month existence of the Vex at Self-Help Graphics, and, like other accounts of the L.A. punk scene, hints at a narrative of the Vex as a site of cross-cultural exchange. It states:

The Scion iQ Project Museum tells the story of Los Angeles Chicano Punk in a new exhibit. Centered around The Vex, the upstairs hall of a community arts center in East Los Angeles, that for eight months in 1980 became a hub for bands including The Gears, The Stains, The Brat, and Los Lobos. It also drew visitors including John Doe and X, Tom Waits, and Black Flag, whose riotous show at The Vex led [to] the venue’s closure.

The story of The Vex and the roots of LA Chicano Punk are told in the Scion iQ Project Museum exhibit through vintage posters, images from photographers Ann

Summa and Gary Leonard, as well as new video interviews with key players including Richard Duardo, Louie Perez of Los Lobos, and David Reyes and Tom Waldman—co-authors of the book *Land of a Thousand Dances: Chicano Rock ‘n’ Roll from Southern California*. What’s revealed is a vital story about a sound and time that still intrigues and inspires today. (“LA Chicano Punk”)

The exhibit was originally made up of a network of hyperlinks and hash tags directing viewers to the images and videos mentioned in the introduction (though a slideshow or simple directory page may have made navigating the exhibit a less frustrating process). However, in the spring of 2014, the exhibit, along with the rest of the iQ Project Museum, was effectively reduced to a Youtube playlist. While the home pages of the Museum and each of the exhibits can still be found on ScionAV.com, either by searching by title or by digging through the “Art & Film” archive, the hyperlinks, rather than directing to the images and videos previously contained in the exhibits, now all direct back to the Youtube playlist. Thus, despite the Museum home page’s claim to be a “living site,” it is now safe to say that the project is essentially dead, adding a layer of irony to the stated objective of being “a resource for the study of contributions to art and culture that might otherwise be lost to time.” As I discuss in greater detail shortly, this points to the limits of brands as mediators of cultural history: what happens to the archive when the brand moves on or their marketing strategy changes?

Among Summa’s and Leonard’s photographs were images of several L.A. punk bands with Chicana/o members, such as The Plugz, The Gears, and Los Lobos, as well as Mad Society, a band of preteens and teenagers that may have had Chicana/o members, but in an interview from a fanzine of the period, the band’s manager, Daphne Vendetta, states that brothers Steve and Louie Metz (singer and guitarist, respectively) were actually born in Puerto Rico (Mad Society). There was also a photograph of El Vez, the stage persona of Robert Lopez of The Zeros, although this entry seems somewhat out of place, since Lopez did not create his El Vez act until much later. If the inclusion of El Vez seems untimely, it also points to another issue with the exhibit: much of the information presented seems to be recycled from other authors and projects with no attribution given; El Vez, for instance, was included in the *American Sabor* exhibit, which was alluded to in

the iQ Project's El Vez entry, but without specifically naming *American Sabor*. This in turn points to an increased potential for decontextualization with the easy replicability of images in a digital age, enabling a simulacrum of "history" in service of the brand. The exhibit also included photographs and fliers from events such as the Punk Prom, held at Self-Help Graphics on May 11, 1980, featuring X, Hal Negro & the Satintones, and The Stingers (none of which were East L.A. bands, although there may have been East L.A. bands who were not listed on the flyer), as well as from a party thrown by Fatima Records, co-founded by Tito Larriva, Richard Duardo, and Yolanda Comparan Ferrer. There were also photographs of non-Latina/os with connections to the East L.A. scene and the Vex. For instance, one photo shows John Doe of X posing with a mariachi group and holding a *guitarrón*, a traditional Mexican instrument, while another photo features singer-songwriter Tom Waits with a caption indicating that Waits had attended shows at the Vex. These inclusions suggest a concern with validating a Chicana/o presence in the greater Los Angeles punk scene through associations with more widely recognized acts such as X and Tom Waits; in this sense, the Scion exhibit, despite its name, risks neglecting Chicana/os through its focus on associations to white musicians at the expense of actually talking about Chicana/o musicians, thus reasserting the dominant narrative of L.A. punk history.

The exhibit also included video interviews with Louie Pérez of Los Lobos (although he is identified in the video as Rudy Pérez) and his son, Richard Duardo, graphic artist and co-founder of Fatima Records, and a "guided tour" of the exhibit, narrated by Summa. In Duardo's interview, his focus is on Sister Karen Bocalero, the Franciscan nun who founded Self-Help Graphics and allowed Herrón and Suquette to host Vex events in the building. Duardo does not address the Vex, but instead focuses on his experience of setting up the first silk-screening studio at Self-Help, which he says remains the signature program of the center. In Louie Pérez's interview, titled "Chicano Convergence," he tells a story of attending a baptism in East Los Angeles where, mixed in amongst "the Mexicanos" could be seen Dave Alvin of roots-rock band the Blasters, John Doe of X, and Keith Morris of hardcore bands Black Flag and the Circle Jerks. While Pérez presents the story as a humorous anecdote, he goes on to comment on how it was representative of a mixing of cultures that was taking place within the punk scene. He

states, “It was a cool thing that we were sharing not only the music, but also our roots and our culture.” Finally, in the guided tour video, Summa recalls attending the Punk Prom at Self-Help Graphics and being inspired by the creativity and community that she witnessed. Reiterating the narrative of cross-cultural exchange present in many accounts of East L.A. punk, she concludes by stating, “Punk wasn’t just a Hollywood phenomenon, it was also happening in East Los Angeles, and the music allowed the two disparate communities to collide and create great bands.”

The picture of “LA Chicano Punk” painted by the iQ Project Museum raises a number of important issues. For instance, conspicuously absent from the exhibit are photographs or videos of “the four major bands [...] out of East L.A.” (Vargas 185), Los Illegals, The Brat, Thee Undertakers, and The Stains. The names of the Brat and the Stains do at least appear on the homepage of the exhibit, but Los Illegals and Thee Undertakers are never mentioned in the exhibit at all. The absence of any mention of Los Illegals is particularly noteworthy since the exhibit takes the Vex at Self-Help Graphics as its focal point and members of Los Illegals are directly responsible for the creation of the Vex. This begs the question of why none of the core East L.A. bands—with the exception of Los Lobos—were discussed in any detail, particularly Los Illegals. Were members of any of these bands approached by the creators of the iQ Project Museum? If they were approached, why were they not included in the exhibit? Did members of these bands refuse to participate, and if so, why? These are important questions to consider in further research. As indicated above, questions about authorship also arise from a reading of the exhibit, since it appears to draw from previously published or presented accounts of the scene without acknowledging the authors and creators of those projects. The iQ Project Museum thus not only obscures the labor of previous authors, curators, etc., but also usurps ownership of the knowledge produced in collaboration between these authors/curators and East L.A. musicians and artists. As I will discuss shortly, this is exacerbated by Scion’s greater financial resources, which grant the iQ Project Museum greater visibility than academic studies or exhibitions in small, independent galleries.

Finally, there is the question of whether or not the exhibit provides a meaningful critique of racial discourses and inequality, or a meaningful space for others to engage these

issues. I will also discuss this in greater detail shortly, but my initial instinct is to say that the exhibit does not provide or provoke meaningful discussion of race at the time of the Vex or in the present. Though race is acknowledged in the title of the exhibit (an important difference from the *East Los* documentary, as I will soon address), questions of race are not pushed any further than a watered down recycling of a narrative of cross-cultural exchange, which can be described at best as an ineffectual multiculturalism. Without pushing a critical conversation about race, there seems little opportunity to provoke meaningful conversations among viewers of the exhibit. The few comments on the YouTube videos, which range from uncritical acceptance of the narrative in the exhibit, to kneejerk reactions against the mere acknowledgement of race, to outright trolling, lend support to this reading. Citation of the exhibit in Nicholas Pell's thoroughly ahistorical, decontextualized *LA Weekly* trend piece on the East L.A. scene also supports my reading.

Vans' recognition of the current East L.A. backyard scene in the *East Los* documentary raises similar questions. Vans began as a retail shop and shoe factory in Anaheim, CA, founded in 1966 by Paul Van Doren and partners, with the intention of manufacturing shoes and selling them directly to consumers (Ragas and Bueno xl, 61-2). Ragas and Bueno note that in the mid 1970s, skateboarders began to wear Vans shoes, and, "[u]nlike any other shoe manufacturer at the time, Vans accepted these customers and actually began catering to the desires and needs of the, then, renegade skateboarding crowd" (62). Responding to skateboarders' desire for unique shoes, the company released a red and blue shoe designed by professional skateboarders Stacy Peralta and Tony Alva (62), and, as Peralta notes, Vans actually allowed customers to bring in their own fabric with which they would make a custom pair of shoes (63). Thus, as Ragas and Bueno state, "these skateboarders found Vans shoes, Van Doren didn't target or 'find' them" (103), a noteworthy difference between Vans and Scion, who actively pursued a particular demographic from the start. Vans' early relationship to skateboarders has contributed to a long-running connection to youth markets; according to Ragas and Bueno, "Vans has enjoyed an incredible lock for decades now on the ten-to-twenty-four-year-old demographic, particularly among skateboarders, BMX bikers, surfers, and participants in other extreme sports that Vans refers to as 'Core Sports'" (xl). Because of a long history

of crossover between punks and skateboarders,⁵³ skateboarding also provides something of a natural connection between Vans and punk music, a connection that Vans formalized in 1996 by becoming the title sponsor of the Warped Tour. Kevin Lyman, a Southern California punk promoter, was inspired to create the Warped Tour, a traveling festival that combines musical performances with demonstrations in 1995 after organizing a successful benefit show that combined extreme sports with punk music (Hiatt 28). After the initial tour in 1995, which included bands such as Sublime and pre-fame No Doubt, failed to break even, Lyman accepted Vans as the official sponsor of the festival in order to finance the following year's tour, and Vans remains the title sponsor into the present.

Considering this history, Vans' sponsorship of a documentary on the East Los Angeles punk scene seems like a natural progression. Angela Boatwright's *East Los* documentary was released in February, 2014 as part of Vans' Web-based #LIVINGOFFTHEWALL documentary series, which initially launched in January of 2014 (the series can be viewed at livingoffthewall.vans.com, offthewall.tv, and in a playlist on Vans' YouTube channel). The "About" page of the #LIVINGOFFTHEWALL Website describes the series in this way:

Off the wall is a state of mind. Thinking differently. Embracing creative self-expression. Choosing your own line on your board and in your life. Since 1966, Vans has sought to inspire boardriders, musicians, artists and anyone for whom creativity matters as they inspire us and every product we make.

#livingoffthewall was built to progress that dedication, enlisting some of our favorite story-tellers to share people, places and things that best illustrate such a commitment to originality. Using words, images and motion pictures,

#livingoffthewall is a testament to the power of our global imagination, as explored through a surfboard, a microphone, a paintbrush and all tools of the creative trade.

⁵³ David Ensminger provides a detailed list of punk bands with connections to skateboarding dating back to the late 1970s (108-11). See also Konstantin Butz's study of Southern California skate punk, *Grinding California*.

Watch and be entertained. Explore and interact. But also take #livingoffthewall and make it your own. We welcome you to inspire us with your own story of creative expression and thank you for being part of the Vans family.

In addition to Boatwright's *East Los* documentary, which was the first in the series to be released, other early entries include: Patrick O'Dell's *Upstarts*, which showcases the "DIY entrepreneurs" behind Burger Records, a record label and store, Clara Cakes, a vegan cupcake store, and Power Plant Choppers, a motorcycle customization shop; Grace Ladoja's *The Us in Russia*, which focuses on Russian youth engaged in alternative sports, such as skateboarding and pit biking; and Leong Zhang's *Off the Wall China*, which introduces two up-and-coming Chinese skateboarders.

East Los is divided into five episodes, each ranging from just under four minutes to just over five. The first episode, "Intro," begins with the singer of an East L.A. band inviting the cameras into a backyard show, where he joins the rest of his band who launch into their first song as an appreciative audience forms a circle pit. As the music fades, a young woman's voice comes in to say, "When people think of Los Angeles, they think of wealth and glamor. But L.A. is bigger than that and beyond that. We are L.A., we live here, too. This scene is L.A., punk rock is L.A." This is followed by a number of scene participants explaining how and where shows operate, where they are from (a range of locations, including neighborhoods of East L.A., South L.A., San Gabriel Valley cities such as Covina and El Monte, and Sylmar in the San Fernando Valley), and why they are interested in punk music and the East L.A. scene (a reason to get out of the house, a place to party, and, most frequently, an outlet for anger and frustration and a sense of family). The episode concludes with the same young woman stating, "I genuinely believe punk rock saved my life." The final episode, "The Show," presents brief clips of a number of bands performing at a backyard show to give a sense of the diversity of sounds, then cuts to an interview with Gilbert "Jack" Rivera, the original drummer of the Stains, who talks about East L.A.'s long history of backyard parties (called "stoner" parties in the days before punk), and ends with the police arriving to the show to shut it down.

In between are three episodes that focus on the lives of individual scene participants: Anthony, a 23-year-old from Boyle Heights; Lauren, a 14-year-old from El Sereno; and Nekro (born Alejandro), bassist and vocalist of East L.A. band, Proyecto Makabro. In Anthony's and Lauren's episodes, the focus is on the absence of parental figures in each of their lives, and their interest in punk as an outlet for resulting feelings of frustration. In Anthony's case, as a result of fraught relationships with his parents, he was raised by his grandfather from the age of fourteen until his grandfather's death, which left him without a strong parental figure, whereas Lauren has a stronger relationship with her parents, but her father was serving a two-year prison sentence at the time of filming. Nekro's episode focuses on his desire to be a rock star and the energy he feels while performing (so much energy that he often vomits mid-set), as well as his interest in punk shows as a temporary escape from the sadness he feels over his grandmother's failing health—the film follows him to the convalescent home where he visits her on a regular basis, and shows him playing an acoustic guitar while she sings a *ranchera* (misidentified in the video's description as a "ranchero"). An additional episode, "From the Backyard to the Stage," released in September of 2014 focuses on Tony Voltage, lead singer of Underground Alliance and resident of Voltage House, a punk house in City Terrace, who states that one of his primary goals for the band is to play at major punk festivals. The episode then cuts to Kevin Lyman, founder of the Warped Tour, who brings Voltage and the rest of the band to his office to surprise them with an offer of a slot at the Pomona date of the 2014 tour, and ends with footage of their performance.

On the surface, both the *East Los* documentary and the "LA Chicano Punk" exhibit may seem beneficial by bringing knowledge of punk scenes predominantly populated by Chicana/os and Latina/os to a larger audience than bands from these scenes might otherwise have access to, with the potential for expanding conversations about issues facing Chicana/o and Latina/o communities, as well as punk's relationship to race. While this may be true to an extent, these projects also raise a number of important questions. For instance, what does it suggest about the present historical moment when brands become key mediators of popular cultural history? While corporate sponsorship of cultural projects is not a new phenomenon by any means, the Scion and Vans projects mark a turn from, for instance, Ford's sponsorship of the *American Sabor* exhibition, as

these projects exist primarily within the branded spaces of Scion's and Vans' Websites. Further, to what extent do these projects actually facilitate meaningful conversations about historical and continuing racial inequality? Do these projects pose critical challenges to the racial status quo, and do these branded spaces offer a meaningful platform to engage such questions? Why engage these particular racialized scenes?

It may be tempting to read the "LA Chicano Punk" exhibit and the *East Los* documentary as "inauthentic" corporate incursions into punk scenes (a quick glance through the YouTube comments sections of the *East Los* videos demonstrates that many do read the project this way). However, such a reading is unproductive from my perspective because the binaries upon which it relies—authentic/inauthentic, commercial/non-commercial, corporate/independent—are to a significant extent imagined. Although it is therefore too simplistic to reflexively dismiss these projects as "inauthentic" and the participants in them as "sell-outs," the profit motives of Scion and Vans still raise important questions. On the one hand, the use of music and visual art produced by Chicana/o and Latina/o punks in projects that ultimately contribute to the image of a brand raises questions about labor and exploitation. Todd Taylor, co-founder and executive director of *Razorcake*, speaks to this issue in response to a question about the benefits that these projects might convey to musicians and artists through increased recognition:

[T]wo things. One, and it's the sad one, is that if DIY and DIT—doing it together—culture was stronger, and could support these bands, and financially support them, and emotionally and creatively support them, people wouldn't even be entertaining this. So a part of it is a failure, and that's something to work towards. The other part is that, I wish they would stop trying to bait people with recognition, and you know what, just pay them. And have it above board, you know? "Your band, we're gonna pay your band \$10,000 to do this." And it's always really hazy and really shady if you try to get into the nuts and bolts with anybody about this. I think recognition is a losing currency. (Second Interview)

On the other hand, there is the question of the archive, of what happens to the knowledge produced through these projects once they outlive their usefulness to the brands sponsoring them. Taylor speaks to this issue, as well:

[Scion is] not part of East L.A.'s past. And there's a huge possibility, if East L.A. is not as profitable as they need it to be, they're gone tomorrow. [...] I distrust Scion particularly because [...] I just get the feeling that it's a huge tax write-off, that if something changes in their quarterlies, that it'll just disappear, there will be no trace of it whatsoever. Because there's no legacy, there's no deep roots, it's all surface. (*ibid.*)

The fact that most of the content of the iQ Project Museum has disappeared during the course of my research, despite the claim to be a "living site," lends weight to Taylor's assessment of the project. Without slipping into the language of "authentic" vs. "inauthentic," it is at least fair to say that Scion has not followed through on its promise to make available "contributions to art and culture that might otherwise be lost to time." This suggests that branded spaces may not be reliable locations for popular cultural archives, as the archive is liable to disappear from view when making the knowledge contained within it accessible is no longer profitable to the brand (though the reliability of more traditional sites for these archives, such as libraries and university humanities departments, are also threatened by neoliberal economic policy that encourages disinvestment in public services).

Sarah Banet-Weiser offers one possibility for considering the implications of brands as mediators of popular cultural history beyond simplistic understandings of authenticity through her notion of "brand cultures." She defines "brand" as "the intersecting relationship between marketing, a product, and consumers," and extending from this definition, she uses "brand cultures" to describe "the way in which these types of brand relationships have increasingly become cultural contexts for everyday living, individual identity, and affective relationships" (*ibid.* 4). While branding is often understood as an economic tool through which marketers attempt to attach meaning to a product to make it more resonant with the individual consumer, Banet-Weiser argues that brands in the

contemporary era “are about *culture* as much as they are about economics” (4, emphasis in original). Branding is about telling a story to the consumer: “When that story is successful, it surpasses simple identification with just a tangible product; it becomes a story that is familiar, intimate, personal, a story with a unique history. Brands become the setting around which individuals weave their own stories, where individuals posit themselves as the central character in the narrative of the brand” (*ibid.* 4). She thus draws a connection between brand cultures and Raymond Williams’s notion of a “structure of feeling,” “an ethos of intangible qualities that resonate in different ways with varied communities” (*ibid.* 9). Arguing that productive discussions of brand cultures must account for the affective relationships between brands and consumers, she states, “It is through these affective relationships that our very selves are created, expressed, and validated. Far more than an economic strategy of capitalism, brands are the cultural spaces in which individuals feel safe, secure, relevant, and authentic” (*ibid.* 9). This recent development in the relationship between brands and consumers is a serious concern for Banet-Weiser, since, she argues, “When individuals invest in brands as ‘authentic’ culture, it privileges individual relationships over collective ones and helps to locate the individual, rather than the social as a site for political action (or inaction) and cultural change (or merely exchange)” (10).

This last point is crucial to a reading of the “LA Chicano Punk” exhibit and the *East Los* documentary, and ties Banet-Weiser’s arguments to those of Omi and Winant. Rather than simply decry these projects as “inauthentic” corporate appropriations of formerly “authentic” cultures, following Banet-Weiser I suggest that the more pressing concern is the way in which these projects may work to hamper collective action toward social change by privileging “individual relationships over collective ones,” and the marketplace as mediator of social and political relations. Returning to Omi and Winant’s notion of racial projects, I read the “LA Chicano Punk” exhibit, on the one hand, as contributing to a discourse of multiculturalism and the *East Los* documentary, on the other, to a neoliberal colorblindness, both of which function to uphold the racial status quo by steering conversation away from collective grievances and toward individual relationships. The “LA Chicano Punk” exhibit, for instance, reiterates a narrative of exchange between the East and West sides of Los Angeles, but strips this narrative of

much of the cultural and political context necessary to understand the historical divide between different parts of the city. The history of Chicana/o involvement in the Los Angeles punk scene is thus reduced to an ineffectual celebration of multiculturalism that obscures historical and ongoing racial and class inequality in L.A. Scion's financial resources also work to make the exhibit more visible than many other previous accounts of the L.A. punk scene; for instance, Pell links to the exhibit in his *LA Weekly* article, crediting Scion for "attempting to address the untold story of East L.A. punk." Taylor also notes the greater visibility of the exhibit, stating, "it's disappointing, and kind of depressing, that a car company—a car company, not even under the pretense of being a music company—has much more impact than hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people who have been working hard for decades" (Interview). As Taylor suggests, the visibility of the exhibit over other accounts obscures the labor of musicians, artists, and scholars working to draw attention to the scene, as well as previous discussions of the scene that provide more nuanced and critical readings (many of which the exhibit borrows from without giving credit). The impact, then, is to draw attention away from ongoing conversations about the racial dynamics of the scene, and what these dynamics can tell us about historical and ongoing racial inequality in Los Angeles and the U.S. more generally.

Whereas the "LA Chicanao Punk" exhibit suggests a celebratory multiculturalism by acknowledging the contributions of Chicana/os to the Los Angeles punk scene and recognizing the Vex as a site of cross-cultural exchange, the *East Los* documentary suggests instead a contradictory colorblindness in its refusal to name race. Although the majority of participants in the documentary are identifiably Chicana/o or Latina/o, at no point is this fact directly addressed. Further, in an interview with director Angela Boatwright, Boatwright suggests that her motivation with the film is to challenge preconceived notions about participants in the scene, to demonstrate that "[t]he characters are human beings. They're just people—like the viewer, they're just people." However, while she suggests that some viewers may "watch the program with some opinions already formed," she never actually states what opinions she believes viewers may hold about participants in the scene or why they may hold those opinions, nor does she acknowledge the racial makeup of the scene. This is precisely what I mean by a

contradictory colorblindness—while there is a refusal in the documentary and in Boatwright’s interview to speak race, the film relies upon the visibility of racial difference to mark the East L.A. scene as different from other punk scenes, and Boatwright’s statements suggest a tacit understanding of this fact. Although Boatwright expresses a desire for the viewer to reconsider preconceived notions they may hold about East L.A. residents, implying a desire to challenge racial prejudice, racial prejudice seems to be understood here as a problem of the individual. This recalls Imani Perry’s argument that “[r]acism, in the minds of many, is a question of blame, what is in someone’s heart, and the impoliteness of race altogether” (15). Ultimately, then, Boatwright fails to offer a meaningful critique of existing racial inequality as she reproduces a discourse of race and racism that places the onus of change on the individual and obscures ongoing systemic racial inequality.

My analysis of the “LA Chicano Punk” exhibit and the *East Los* documentary is only preliminary, but it suggests that, rather than contributing to a critical conversation about race in the United States, these projects instead participate in discourses of multiculturalism or colorblindness that ultimately serve to reinforce the existing racial status quo. Divorced from historical context, these projects obscure the impact of racial and economic marginalization on the scenes they attempt to document. Without addressing the importance of the historical and ongoing racial inequality that shaped/shapes these scenes, there can be no meaningful discussion of the position of Chicana/os and Latina/os in U.S. society—this in turn raises serious questions about the limits of the market place as a space for meaningful engagement with critical questions of race and racial inequality, questions beyond the scope of this dissertation but of increasing importance as the market place becomes more and more central to social and political life under the regime of neoliberalism. In other words, recognition of predominantly Chicana/o and Latina/o punk scenes that does not address the historical exclusion and marginalization of Chicana/o and Latina/o punks detailed in the pages of this dissertation is inadequate to contribute meaningful insight into broader conversations about the exclusion and marginalization of Chicana/o and Latina/o communities. Confronting the marginalization of Chicana/os and Latina/os in U.S. popular culture and national identity is of the utmost importance, though, as Latina/os have come to represent

the largest minority population in the United States. Hopefully this dissertation offers a significant contribution to a very urgent discussion.

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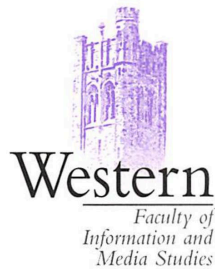
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Appendices

Appendix A: Ethics Approval and Extensions



Office of the Dean

Ethical Review of Research Involving Human Subjects

All non-medical research involving human subjects at the University of Western Ontario is carried out in compliance with the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Guidelines (2010). The Faculty of Information Media Studies (FIMS) Research Committee has the mandate to review minimal-risk FIMS research proposals for adherence to these guidelines.

2012 – 2013 FIMS Research Committee Membership

- | | |
|------------------------|------------------|
| 1. R. Babe* | 7. H. Hill |
| 2. A. Benoit (alt) | 8. A. Quan-Haase |
| 3. J. Burkell (alt) | 9. D. Robinson* |
| 4. E. Comor | 10. C. Whippey |
| 5. A. Hearn (alt) | 11. L. Xiao |
| 6. P. McKenzie (Chair) | |

Research Committee member(s) marked with * have examined the research project **FIMS 2011-12-027R** entitled:

Citizenship in Chicana/o Punk: 1980-Present

as submitted by: Norma Coates (Principal Investigator)
Richard Davila

and consider it to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects under the conditions of the University's Policy on Research Involving Human Subjects. Approval is given for the period 3 April 2013 to 31 August 2013.

Approval Date: 3 April 2013

Jacquelyn Burkell, Assistant Dean (Research)
FIMS Research Committee Chair



**Western
Research**

Research Ethics

**Western University Health Science Research Ethics Board
NMREB Amendment Approval Notice**

Principal Investigator: Norma Coates

Department & Institution: Information and Media Studies\Faculty of Information & Media Studies, Western University

NMREB File Number: 103837

Study Title: Citizenship in Chicana/o Punk" 1980-Present

Sponsor:

NMREB Revision Approval Date: October 23, 2014

NMREB Expiry Date: August 31, 2015

Documents Approved and/or Received for Information:

Document Name	Comments	Version Date
Revised Western University Protocol	Revised end date (31Aug2015)	
Revised Study End Date	Study end date extension (to 31Aug2015)	

The Western University Non-Medical Science Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the amendment to the above named study, as of the NMREB Amendment Approval Date noted above.

NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the NMREB Expiry Date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMREB Continuing Ethics Review.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario.

Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB.

The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Ethics Officer, on behalf of Riley Hinson, NMREB Chair

Ethics Officer to Contact for Further Information

<input type="checkbox"/> Erika Basile	<input type="checkbox"/> Grace Kelly	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mina Mekhail	<input type="checkbox"/> Vikki Tran
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**Western University Health Science Research Ethics Board
NMREB Annual Continuing Ethics Approval Notice**

Date: July 31, 2015
Principal Investigator: Norma Coates
Department & Institution: Information and Media Studies\Faculty of Information & Media Studies,Western University

NMREB File Number: 103837
Study Title: Citizenship in Chicana/o Punk" 1980-Present
Sponsor:

NMREB Renewal Due Date & NMREB Expiry Date:
 Renewal Due -2016/03/31
 Expiry Date -2016/04/03

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed the Continuing Ethics Review (CER) form and is re-issuing approval for the above noted study.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), Part 4 of the Natural Health Product Regulations, the Ontario Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA, 1990), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario.

Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB.

The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Ethics Officer, on behalf of Prof. Riley Hinson, NMREB Chair

Ethics Officer to Contact for Further Information

Erika Basile	Grace Kelly	Mina Mekhail	Vikki Tran
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Appendix B: Interview Transcripts⁵⁴

Interview with Tony Abarca

Los Angeles, CA, 8/9/2013

DAVILA: The first question is what first interested you in punk, and what does it mean to you?

ABARCA: For me, the first thing that interested me in punk was when I was younger, I was really into rock ‘n’ roll and all that stuff obviously. And growing up here in the hood, it was kind of different because a lot of people were into other stuff, they were more into gangster stuff. I know a lot of the people in the scene here in South L.A. are still into that kind of gang mentality, but for me I feel like punk rock might have saved myself, you know? Because with that music—I was always anti-gang—so instead of being sucked into that kind of lifestyle, instead it showed me something different. And so that’s why to this day I’m not really into that. Even though I live in this area, which, statistically I would be part of a gang. Because I’m Latino and I live in South L.A.

DAVILA: So that’s another question, you do identify as Latino?

ABARCA: Yeah. Well, I identify myself as Chicano more. Some people say Mexican, or American. For me, I don’t see myself as either one. Because honestly when I go to Mexico, I’m not really accepted over there. And when I’m here in L.A. I’m not really accepted as one either. Not accepted as an American or Mexican. In Mexico, I’d be referred to as a *pochó*, like, “Hey, you don’t belong here, go back to where you came from.” So I don’t identify myself as either one.

DAVILA: Okay. So when did you first start to play an instrument and what made you want to do that?

ABARCA: I started playing an instrument when I was about eleven years old. My mom wanted me to play guitar, but I wanted to play drums. And she was like, “Well, you’ll be

⁵⁴ Transcripts are presented in alphabetical order by interviewee’s last name. Transcripts have been edited for clarity and relevance, but all words are the interviewee’s own except where indicated by brackets.

playing drums after you're done playing guitar." So I was like, "All right," so I started playing guitar and just got into it.

DAVILA: And did you take lessons, or did you kind of learn on your own?

ABARCA: I took lessons for about a year.

DAVILA: When did this band form, that you're currently in?

ABARCA: This band formed about two years ago, like in late-winter, 2010. That's when this band first formed. And I started it with another friend when we were both in another band called Rayos X. And my girlfriend, she was learning how to play drums, so I wanted her to play a show with us. And the first show was pretty bad. It was in the basement at the [...] House. That was pretty much all I remember, I just remember it being kind of [...].

DAVILA: And who would you say some of your influences are in this band?

ABARCA: Well, some of my influences for this band would probably be Masshysteri, The Vicious, Ramones, a lot of early '70s punk mainly. We wanted to do something like that more because a lot of the scene here is more like d-beat, crust, hardcore. Not really a lot of people play in that style any more.

DAVILA: On the Facebook page you describe the band as "Spanish punk." When you say Spanish, is that just to signify that you're singing in Spanish, or is that to in some way kind of identify with some of your influences, or is it just...

ABARCA: It's more to signify that we sing in Spanish. I know a lot of people think like Spanish punk, they think from Spain, you know, Spanish punk. I mean, we do have that kind of influence also, like Eskorbuto and all that stuff. We love all that stuff too, but when I say Spanish punk I mean more like we sing in that language more than anything else.

DAVILA: Okay, so what motivates you to sing in Spanish? Is that a political decision, or is that...

ABARCA: I think what motivated me to sing in Spanish was, well, for one thing, for me, when I sing in English I don't think I have a great English voice. I think my voice is not

as good. It's not really a political thing. Definitely it closes a lot of doors to us because obviously when we go tour the West Coast, not everyone, but there are some people who don't really get into it because they don't understand. People want to know what it is you're singing about. So for a lot of people once you leave L.A., because L.A., obviously there's tons of people, Latinos and everything here, that they're super into it. But once you leave L.A., there's a lot of places where obviously there are like white people and other race kids that don't really understand. So that decision that we sing in that style, it helps us, but I guess in a way it may hurt us. Depending on what we want to do, obviously.

DAVILA: So what do you want to do? What are your objectives for this band?

ABARCA: Well, for one thing, we're not political in any way, we're not trying to get a message across or change the world in any kind of way. I think we're just playing music. I guess similar in a style like how I said punk saved my life, I would hope that some day some kid would be listening to my record and be like, "You know what, I don't be to into this." It would save someone else's life in that way. And not necessarily shove my political ideas onto someone else, and be like, "Hey, the government's no good. Listen to me."

DAVILA: You say you're not political, but I think some of the songs do have a little bit of a critique to them. For instance, pardon my pronunciation, "Metralleta" is sort of critiquing police violence in a way.

ABARCA: I guess, yeah, that one would be political. But I would assume that's more political but in a small scale. Because when I write it, I'm thinking more like here in my area. I wasn't thinking more outside police brutality all across the U.S. Obviously I'm aware of all that stuff, but I wrote that song because right here, in the hood, the police are extra tough on everything, you know? Right here they don't think twice before beating you, arresting you, and in some cases even killing you, because right here, since you're from here, people are gonna be like, "He must have deserved it," you know what I mean? So, I when I say political I don't mean political, like government this, government that, but on a small scale, yeah, I guess it would be.

DAVILA: Yeah. Would you say that a lot of your other songs are also sort of focused on issues within your own community here, or is that kind of...

ABARCA: Yeah. I would say that a lot of our music is very personal. A lot of my lyrics that I write are really just however I'm feeling at the moment. I don't think I write lyrics the way other punk bands do, where they write in a third-person perspective. I write more personally, this is actually happening to me, this is how I feel at the moment. We write love songs, for example, in other punk bands, that's like taboo for them. So, we could write a love song, we could write the obvious stuff, like about cops, about suicide. Whatever you may be feeling, you know?

DAVILA: So those are some questions about the band specifically, but I thought I would kind of switch gears a bit and talk a little bit more about the bigger scene. So, I'm coming at this from the outside so a lot of this is my own perceptions of the scene. I just showed up here like a week ago. But one thing I've noticed, and one thing that interested me in it as a Chicano, as well, is that there seems to be a strong community here of Chicano and Latino punk bands. And I'm wondering if there was a conscious effort on anyone's part to try to form this network, or if it was just kind of a by-product of "this is who our neighbors are, this is who our friends are."

ABARCA: Well, it's an interesting story, and kinda long, but all right. I can start from the beginning. When we first started doing what we do here, it was actually much bigger, more—I want to say—connected than it is now. See, a long time ago we all used to... I need to gather my thoughts, because the thing is, there's a bigger picture behind all this. A long time ago, there used to be I want to say a bigger group of people, and everybody was really connected, and the whole idea behind it was... well, for them at least, was that they wanted to make kind of like a Latino empowerment movement, you know what I'm trying to say?

DAVILA: Yeah.

ABARCA: Like that. They wanted to do something kind of similar to that where they were super political, they followed a lot of the ideas of, like, Malcolm X, they wanted to be more like that. And that's okay with me, I don't have anything against that, but me personally, like I said, I'm not really a political person. So we kind of started falling out

with, well, mainly with me. We had a falling out. And they still organize shows in the L.A. area, but they're like a different piece of L.A., and we're like our own piece, also. It's kind of hard to really describe unless you know what I'm talking about. Basically what was happening is there is this group of Latinos that do their own stuff over here, and there's a group of Latinos that do their own stuff on this side, also. You understand what I'm trying to say?

DAVILA: Yeah.

ABARCA: And the thing is that, the way I see it, for them is a lot of the original Latinos that started doing this movement over here, they kind of left already, and all that's left there is like some white-washed people. And I feel like that's kind of weird in it's own way. It's kind of hard to describe without getting into too much detail. I just don't want to be letting that all out there.

DAVILA: Yeah, yeah, I completely understand.

ABARCA: So anyway, the point is, if there's a big Latino scene here, yeah, there's a big Latino scene here. There's tons of punks that just get together. And we get along with a lot of people... I don't know if you know, the people from Riverside, like Mark?

DAVILA: Yeah.

ABARCA: He's pretty good. He helps out with a lot of stuff, he puts out his own releases. There's a lot of Latinos here that do their own thing also. You'll be seeing a lot of them later today. So, yeah, there's a big Latino scene here. Huge.

DAVILA: Yeah. And to some degree that's just a demographic inevitability?

ABARCA: Yeah, demographic. I mean, I've heard some people say, like some white people say, "Man, I really wish I was Mexican so I could be more a part of what's going on," because it's a huge movement, you know what I mean?

DAVILA: Yeah. But on that note, do you think that it's a movement that tries to keep to itself, or do think that it's... Well, you've said that it's kind of split into different scenes a little bit, but do you think that, in either instance, do you think that anyone is trying to keep it strictly Latino, or is it always kind of open to others from the outside?

ABARCA: I think when it first started it was very exclusive, and that was actually something that I didn't like, either. It was very exclusive. They would book shows, and they would get no outside bands, so it would always be the same bands. They wouldn't let anything that was visible, any shows that were visible to the outside punk community, it was always their bands. In a way it's still kind of like that. So it's very exclusive, that scene, it was very exclusive. And they kind of wanted to show the outside punk scene that this is how L.A. rolls, and this is what L.A. is controlled by. So, right now, though, the way it kind of is, is a little bit more inviting, at least for us. We kind of invite bands from outside of the place because we don't want to deny the people from here cool bands just because of their race or whatever.

DAVILA: Maybe we can talk a bit more about the DIY aspect of the scene. So, I guess I'm asking you personally what motivates you want to approach music in a DIY sort of style?

ABARCA: Well, I think the thing is what motivates me is the idea of people saying you can't do certain things. And I like to be, like, "Well, yeah, we can," you know? Because, obviously I don't have the resources to do silk screening, or pro-tapes, something like that. That's all handled by other people. Luckily for me I'm starting to meet lots of people who know how to do all that stuff. And I think it's pretty cool that we can get together, and just say, "Hey, I want to do this," and to see these ideas kinda come to life. And people dig it, so that's even better. I mean, we used to do all kinds of things. We used to do zines, which I still have copies of.

DAVILA: Is that the *Fronteras Desarmadas*?

ABARCA: Yeah. We have stuff like that. A lot of that DIY stuff, it's just like, well, I grew up liking all that stuff, and I thought it was pretty cool the idea that you can do it. Because a lot of that stuff seems hard, but really once you get past the first hurdles, it's actually not that difficult.

DAVILA: Some people would call something like Radiohead releasing their albums online themselves for pay-what-you-can, some people would refer to that as DIY, but I feel like that's kind of in a different realm altogether from the DIY sort of scene that's

happening here.

ABARCA: Well, yeah, I guess people may see... When it comes to money, I think people see things as kind of like, evil, you know what I mean? Let's say your band makes it, and you're a DIY band, people see it like, "They're sell-outs." But really, the way I see it is if your band somehow makes it, depending on what you mean by "make it," if your band is suddenly getting paid to play, I don't really see that as a bad thing. Because for myself, that I'm in a band, I'm broke like a hundred percent of the time pretty much, like I struggle to do tours, to travel. I do it because I like it, but it stresses me out because I have no money. So I don't really see it as a bad thing when people say, like, the band is getting paid. It may be a good thing because you're supporting that band. So you're helping them get to do what they do. I mean, obviously with Radiohead, that's very kind of different because they started off already as a commercial band.

DAVILA: Yeah, exactly. So do you think, I mean even comparing this scene to something like Olympia, like the K Records scene, something like that, I feel like there's sort of... Well, maybe it's not my place to say, so maybe I'll just ask you, do you think that there's a different significance to DIY in a place like this that's possibly, I hope it's okay to say, like racially or economically sort of marginalized?

ABARCA: What do you mean by that, like do you mean is it okay for there to be a DIY scene or...

DAVILA: No, I just mean I don't want to assume anything about you or your life.

ABARCA: No, you can go ahead and assume whatever you want. To be honest, I'm never offended.

DAVILA: Okay, so what I'm asking is do you think DIY has a different meaning or significance here, in South Central, than it would in a place like Olympia?

ABARCA: Oh, all right. I think DIY, probably, I would assume not, actually. Between here and Olympia, for example, Olympia, that is, I would say it probably means the same thing to the same people and everything. I mean, we went to Olympia once, it seems really cool. I would assume that they have the same mindset. I would assume that we do have the same mindset when it comes to DIY stuff.

DAVILA: Okay. And when you first were talking about DIY and what motivates you, you mentioned something about people telling you that you can't do things. Who would be an example of someone who would tell you that you can't do things?

ABARCA: Well, when I say you can't, I mean people who don't really believe in you. Because there's a lot of band out here that they start playing and they say, "We're gonna make this release, we're gonna release this tape, we're gonna release this zine," and then nothing comes out of it. And the reason why is a lot of them kind of give up, and people don't really take those people seriously. They kind of take them like, "Ah, whatever, yeah, sure, you guys do that." Because it's true, you hear a lot of people talk, "We're gonna do this tour, we're gonna do this, we're gonna do that," and nothing ever comes out of it. I don't know why that it is. I'm assuming because here, people work a lot, they're tired, so you need to have that little extra stuff to do it. So, I think that's what I mean by when people say, "Ah, they're not going to do anything," that's what I mean, and people saying you can't do it. I like to be able to be like, "Yeah, we can, and we did it." It's hard work, but I like to show off my hard work.

DAVILA: Do you think that people who want to be in bands, punk bands or otherwise, from this area, do you feel like you got support from your parents, or teachers at school or whatever?

ABARCA: For me, I have support from my parents, I know that. I mean, they live next door. For my girlfriend, she plays drums in the band, I know her mom always tells her, or sometimes tells her, "When are you going to stop messing around with that?" So it just depends for some people. I know I've had other band members that they get a similar thing from their parents or families members, like, "Hey, you gotta grow out of that." Because the way they see it is if you're not making a living off of it, you're just messing around.

Interview with Jimmy Alvarado

Telephone, 10/18/2012

DAVILA: Where were you did you grow up?

ALVARADO: Well, I was born in the city of Lynwood, but I grew up, approximately two days after that and for a good the majority of my life I've lived in areas in East L.A. and the West San Gabriel Valley. I grew up in City Terrace, which is the next little area over from Boyle Heights and just north of East L.A. proper, and over by Cal State Los Angeles. It's like this little area right there.

DAVILA: And are you still in that area?

ALVARADO: More or less. I'm actually I guess you would say about two football fields east of City Terrace now. I'm on the border of Alhambra and Monterey Park, which is literally in walking distance of City Terrace at this point. I've never really lived more than four miles from City Terrace in my life.

DAVILA: And so you went to school there as well?

ALVARADO: Well, I went to high school at an alternative school in Highland Park, which is a little bit farther northeast. It's in the northeast section of Los Angeles, and I went to what was called an alternative school. It was a school that was founded by a bunch of hippies in the early 70s. For junior high school and most of high school I went there. For elementary school I went to school in City Terrace, I went to Harrison Elementary. But for junior high school I went to the alternative school, which is where I found out about punk rock. And for my last year of high school I went to Franklin in Highland Park, but I still lived in City Terrace. And then for college I went to East LA College, got an AA there in journalism, and then I got a bachelor's degree in film from Cal State, Northridge. But I've never left the area as far as living any kind of long-term period.

DAVILA: What do you do now other than writing for the magazine?

ALVARADO: I work as a business representative for an entertainment union. And that's,

I guess, my day job. But, I mean outside of that, I mean, I just keep myself involved in the punk scene. There's what I do and what I do to get paid, I guess.

DAVILA: Yeah, fair enough. And you identify as Mexican-American?

ALVARADO: I'm a Chicano, yes. My mother was Danish, and my father was a Chicano from born in El Paso, Texas, and raised in Boyle Heights.

DAVILA: Was he the first generation to be born in the U.S.?

ALVARADO: No, no. My family goes back in El Paso as far back as there was a border, and before there was a border. At some point they came from Zacatecas and Chihuahua, but that was well before there was a United States and Texas. And my dad said that when he grew up the border was either 15 feet, or 15 yards, from his backyard, next to the fence when they were in El Paso. But they had been there since before the Mexican American War. There's a band called Aztlan Underground from L.A., that their slogan is "We didn't cross the border, the border crossed us," but in my family's case that's actually true.

DAVILA: So now I wanted to talk a bit about your participation in the punk scene in East L.A. So if you could talk about when you were most active, or when you first became involved, and maybe some of the bands you've played in over the years.

ALVARADO: Okay. Let's see. Well, I've always been interested in music, I mean, there's pictures of me as a two-year-old holding a guitar and trying to figure out how to play it. And so there was always this kind of fascination with that. And then in the early '70s like most of the other kids I was very much into Kiss and Ted Nugent and Boston and all that shit, when I was in the third grade or fourth grade.

But there was always this kind of interest in a lot of other things, and one of the things I started getting interested in was a band called Devo, and a band called the Pretenders. And that would have been around '78 or '79, which would have put me in 5th grade, 6th grade. And I had no idea anything about them other than the fact that... I thought Devo were actually robots and the Pretenders were just really cool because the girl was really pretty, and they played this really weird music, and I just thought of it as rock music and I didn't know anything about it. But sometime in 1980 I picked up an issue of Creem

magazine, which was like this rock magazine, but it was like very snarky, they used to have these photos and they would put these really snide cut lines under them, and just kind of like a lot of really self-deprecating humor and kind of insulting. And they had a thing in there about the punk Woodstock. And I had absolutely no idea what they were talking about. And then there was other things in the magazine where they were talking about... There was a big fad in the '70s called the pet rock fad, you know, which was literally you had a pet rock that came in a box. And one of the offshoots of that was the punk rock where they took this rock and they put a Mohawk on it, and kinda glued a Mohawk to the top of it. And I was like, "well, what is this punk rock stuff?" And all of these ads about punk rock t-shirts in this magazine, and I had seen graffiti for Sex Pistols and stuff, but I was too young and too up to my neck in the hood to really know anything about that stuff. I mean, there really wasn't a lot of stuff out at the time that I would have known as a fifth grader what I was looking at.

And then I went to this alternative school where, again, it was founded by a bunch of hippies, these children of hippies were going there, and I guess, a lot of them, their rebellion against their parents was to get into this punk rock thing. And so I started hearing about other bands, and they told me about—this would have been 1980, '81—and they started talking about this radio DJ named Rodney Bingenheimer, who had a show called 'Rodney on the ROQ' on KROQ in L.A. And so I started listening to that and I started hearing about Black Flag and the Flesheaters and the Germs, and it just kind of blossomed from there.

And I had a friend named Shane White, who was very much into punk rock and the new wave. We were acquaintances at the time because he was really into Devo and I was really into Devo, and so I would kinda test the waters with him and see what he knew about these bands. And they would write this weird graffiti. I found out later they were titles to Bow Wow Wow songs. Like, they would write on their lockers "The Joy of Eating Raw Flesh," or "C-30, C-60, C-90, Go!", which is a reference to the length of cassette tapes. It was a song by Bow Wow Wow. C-30 was a 30-minute cassette, C-60 and so on and so forth. But they would write these all over the place, all over the lockers at school, and I just got really interested in it. And it was like a very secretive little club that nobody knew about, especially in East L.A. Nobody where I grew up was into that

stuff, we knew no one. I was just in the 7th grade by that time and my brother was in the 5th grade, and he had gotten interested in it as well. So the two of us for a long time were the only ones that knew about it. I mean, that we knew in our neighborhood that knew anything about it. This was like I said '80, '81. And we found out later there were other kids, but at the time we were the only two that we found or that we knew in the immediate neighborhood that knew anything about punk rock.

The first punk band I ever saw was a joke band called the Alperheads, who were named after a guy named Steve Alper, who was a classmate of ours, and was one of the writers for Ink Disease fanzine, which was at one point one of the bigger L.A. fanzines, and he was one of the editors. And they made this joke band, and they played in the recreation room of our high school. The thing with the alternative school, it was kindergarten through 12th grade, it was 500 students, we had a graduating class of twelve students average every year. So it was a very small school, you knew everybody, and the 12th graders interacted with the 7th graders and so on. So we had this one rec room where everybody would go. And then this one day towards the end of, I'd say May or June of '81, the Alperheads played. And they played three songs, and they were absolutely horrible. They had just literally just gotten together and practiced the day before, and I just watched that, I thought it was the most appalling thing I'd ever heard in my life, but at the same time, it was... Wow, it was like revelatory because you grow up and you're thinking that to be a musician you had to be Jimmy Paige or you had to be David Bowie or you had to be Ace Frehley from Kiss. You had to be a musician. That was an eye-opener for me, 'cause it was like, well, wow, anybody with a guitar can do this. And listening to "Rodney on the ROQ," and KROQ in general, you hear these bands like the Germs, who were just sloppy and messy, and you hear Black Flag, which was like almost like blunt force trauma, rather than music. And you just kind of sat there, and you said, "Well, fuck, I can do this."

And so we started our own band, and it was my brother and me, because again, I we didn't know anybody in our immediate area, and we were too young to go anywhere, or to drive or anything. I think was 12 or 13 at that point. And we started our own band. And we started the band before we actually had instruments, and then I borrowed an acoustic guitar and kinda went from there. And the first band that we had went through a number

of different names before we kinda settled on Butt Acne, as in acne on your buttocks. And again, we were 13, 14 years old then, and that was like the epitome of cool names. But we had different incarnations. Six Gun Justice, we were called Human Retch, but retch as in vomit instead of wretch as in wretched. I think we started off the very first name was Charles Manson's Army, and things like that, just the typical kind of punk rock names.

We started the band, I got an acoustic guitar, had absolutely no idea how to play it. So our band, quote-unquote, consisted of me taking the acoustic guitar... My dad was a gang counselor, he ran youth centers in East Los Angeles. And so we didn't have a lot of money, we couldn't afford a lot of things, but he did have access to audio-visual equipment. So my first electric guitar was an acoustic guitar, and we had taken one of the movie projectors that he had brought home, plugged the microphone into it, like a dynamic mic, wrapped toilet paper around the edge of the microphone, shoved it into the guitar hole for the acoustic guitar, plugged it into the movie projector and then turned it up full blast so it was just feeding back everywhere, and it sounded like two trains crashing. And I just ran a screwdriver or bottle up and down the neck while my brother screamed and that was our first band.

DAVILA: That sounds kinda similar to the story in your interview with Nervous Gender where they were talking about some of their early experiments with kind of making their own instruments.

ALVARADO: Yeah, to be honest, I think that's something that's kind of gotten lost in the generations of punk rock that have gone around—and this is I guess a bit of a digression—but now it's almost gotten to the point now where we're back to, to be considered a viable band, even in punk rock, you have to have some semblance of musical ability, whereas back then you decided to do something and then you figured out how to do it later. And everything that I've done in my life has been kind of on that theory. I wanted to start a band. Well, we started a band and then we figured out how to play the instruments. And so for the first two or three years of that band it was absolute chaos and noise, and with no semblance of melody whatsoever, and it was just learn by doing.

And the same thing with journalism. I started writing for fanzines when I was 13 or 14

years old, and didn't have a lot of education as far as the inverted pyramid or any of that other stuff that they teach you in journalism school until I'd gotten into college. And by then I'd already written for five or six different magazines. It's the same thing with filmmaking or anything else, it's just you just go out there and learn by doing. And I guess the DIY approach, the Do-It-Yourself thing, that was very much alive in that time. And you're talking about a time when there was no internet, there was no viable mainstream media attention in that sense, outside of bands like the Clash or maybe the Sex Pistols. You didn't have an overabundance of places like Hot Topic, or places where you could go in the mall where you could buy a t-shirt pre-made. You literally had to make your own, and in our sense we made them with food coloring or spray paint or markers, like Sharpie markers, and I think in one case we actually made a t-shirt with beef blood. My mother had made a steak, and she left the little tray on the side, and we made t-shirts with the blood because it stained the shirt. Just, you tried anything. So, in terms of that, that's more or less, I guess, where things kinda started. And then over the years we had Butt Acne, and Butt Acne, like I said had various incarnations at first, and then by '83 we had settled on that name. And I guess we established our ethos and aesthetics, and that band remained viable and active up until, I think the last show we played was 1994 or 1995. So roughly a period of about 13, 14 years, that band, in some form or another, existed. And in the meantime, I also played in a number of other bands, local bands. I played in a band called the Looters, I played in a band called Plain Agony, I'm still in a band called Our Band Sucks. I was one of the founding members of one of the Chicano Groove bands, called Ollin, which is Nahuatl for "movement." And that was in the 90s. What else was I in? I was in a joke band called Jimbo and the Bimbos, and another one called Plastica, which was a joke on Metallica. And there's a lot of little one-off bands and little joke bands that we just kinda put together for a gig or so, and kinda screwed around, and then went on to something else. I was in a band called the Black Jax for a while, for a couple of years. And I was in a band called the Tumors, which existed from about '94 to 1999. So with the exception of like a ten-year lapse from '99 to 2009, I've been musically active since 1981 in some way shape or form as far as being a musician. And as a writer I've been involved in the scene since '81, '82. And as, I guess a

documentarian or historian, I've been doing it since the late '90s into the present time. So, I've been around a while.

DAVILA: So, in terms of the bands, were most of your shows that you played happening in East L.A., or were you playing in other parts of the city, or did you go on tour or anything like that?

ALVARADO: Well, for the vast majority of the '80s it was literally backyards and living rooms and stuff that we played. In the early '80s I was too young to play places like the Vex and stuff, I mean we were kids. I remember we tried to get a gig at one of the Vexes in '83—and I found out later talking to Joe, it was probably him that I spoke to, Joe Vex—and I remember talking to him and asking if we could get a gig, and it was an all-ages club supposedly. He said, "Well, how old are you guys?", 'cause I guess I sounded young, and I said, "Well, I'm 15, my brother's 13," and he said, "No, you can't play here." So that was pretty much it.

We played show at a Hollywood club called the Cathay de Grande when we were Six Gun Justice in 1983. They used to have a night called Dollar Night, which was you showed up and you signed and you got to play a set. And we played with some bands that actually become rather well known, but we played that show in '83. We played a Mason's Lodge in the Looters in 1986. And then the next time Butt Acne played in Hollywood was 1991. And then other than that, every band I was in outside of those three gigs, every show we played was in East Los Angeles. It was in some area of East L.A., or Northeast L.A., or San Gabriel Valley, and it was predominantly backyards.⁵⁵

By that time, even as early as '81 there were little backyard gigs and things, but by my reckoning, it didn't turn into a full-fledged scene unto its own where we kind of didn't care about not getting those gigs, and those kind of gigs were not that important to us,

⁵⁵ Note from Alvarado: "The gist of all this is accurate, but I completely forgot that the band I was in from 89-90 (and am in again as of 2010, having released a second EP that year. We are still together, though we gig very sporadically at this point), Our Band Sucks, was gigging all over the place, from Pomona to San Diego to Hollywood, and had gotten ourselves summarily banned from places like the Anti-Club and Coconut Teaszer thanks to a stage show that included shaving cream, popcorn, Silly String and beer fights. This was also when I personally realized bands I was in could, in fact, play outside the 'hood, and bands like Peace Pill also got the same idea around the same time, and others like Resistant Militia, Bloodcum and others figured it out before us."

and our attention was primarily focused on the backyards, that probably kicked in about '85, '86, and it probably hit its apex at around '88, '89, for our particular scene. So, by '88, '89, that was when it was like there gigs every weekend, and we were going to a gig Friday night and Saturday night somewhere in East L.A. And there would be more than one, you had like your lion's share of pickings or whatever of whatever shows you wanted to go see. And it got so there were so many of them that we actually started blowing off the gigs that—they had Fender's Ballroom in Long Beach where you had the bigger shows with bigger bands, or you had the Olympic Auditorium at one point, which used to have the wrestling downtown, they started having punk gigs there. And you had these others places, and we ended up rather going to the backyards, and seeing bands and possibly even playing those shows that we didn't care about going to Fender's or to go see Dead Kennedys or something like that. So the gigs kind of became self-supporting, I guess, and it became the focal point for what we were doing and listening to. That would have been around '88.

DAVILA: And you mentioned that that was, it sort of peaked around '89 for your generation, or your sort of cohort, but it is still happening in some form?

ALVARADO: Oh, yeah, yeah. The thing is that punk rock in general is very generational, and the generations seem to last anywhere between three and five years. In our particular case, we finally started finding out about other places to play. It started with a band called Peace Pill, which was Scott from Butt Acne, our singer's other band. Him and his brother found out that there was this place just on the other side of the bridge from East L.A. to Downtown L.A., there's a place called Al's Bar, which has a long history of being like an underground club, and they had a lot of punk shows, and it was like CBGBs for Los Angeles. It was like this little hole-in-the-wall dive bar, just a shit hole, but it had great music. It was the only place that you'd get paid. But they had this thing, it was another one of those kind of dollar night things called No Talent Night. And Peace Pill found out about it, and they started playing, and they came back and they said, "Yeah, they'll let us to play." So we're like, "Well, fuck." So all of a sudden there was this influx of bands from East L.A. going over to that bar to play. And we started intermingling with bands from downtown and from the West Side, because it was right in the middle of the arts district. So that was kind of where our generation of East Side

punks kind of interacted with the artists and the bohos and all those other people from the West Side and from Downtown and started changing everything. And that's when we stopped kind of focusing so much on the backyards and we actually started playing club shows, and created a whole other different network with these different underground clubs, and that's how we kind of transitioned out of the backyards.

But at the same time, there were kids that—even when we were still in the backyards—there was a whole new generation of kids that was just starting. And so there was all these other bands like Subsist, and, oh goodness, Political Abuse, and my brother had a band called Fish Head that was playing around at that time. And then later on there were bands like Union 13 and Teenage Rage, and so by the mid-'90s there was a whole other generation that had taken over the backyards. And then they started to play these kind of outside shows, and stuff like that, and as they started kind of leaving out at the end of the late '90s and into the 2000s, there was yet another generation that came up of other bands, and then now there's a new generation again. So again, every few years the whole thing regenerates. Like punk rock in general in the United States it kind of ebbs and flows. You have these moments where there's a flurry of activity, and then it kinda waxes and wanes back and forth, and the whole thing kind of constricts and contracts into this small little tight scene again, and then it explodes again. And it keeps doing this, and it does it every few years. And then right now, in L.A. especially, I think it's starting to get a little bit bigger again. It had gotten smaller for a little while, but it's starting to get bigger, especially in a lot of the downtown area and the northeast area there's a lot of little clubs popping up around. And in the case of East L.A., the Vex is opening up, they're having a re-opening show this weekend, actually.

DAVILA: You mentioned Union 13. At least as far as my knowledge, they're one of the only bands who started in the backyard circuit who have in recent years managed to get kind of popular, with their albums on Epitaph. Do you think there was anything that sort of set them apart? Are there other bands that broke out of the scene a little bit, too, or are they kind of one of the only ones?

ALVARADO: Well, my memory of it is they were part of a much larger scene. There were a lot of other bands that were going on at that time. There was a band called Lester, there was Opposition, Social Conflict started around that time, Tezacrifico, and there

were quite a few others. And I think what set them apart is that they happened to be playing a backyard when Brett Gurewitz was there, and they were a good band, and he just kind of latched onto them, and said “this is a really good band,” and decided that he wanted to put something out by them. And that just happened to be right when Epitaph was kind of reaching its stride, and I think that kind of pushed them a lot forward. But Teenage Rage was out at that same time, and they ended up putting out a record on some other label, and they were just as good.

And the thing was that that particular scene had a very unique sound—not a unique sound, but it was a very typical sound each of the bands kind of did a variation on the same kind of thing—it was essentially a variation on thrash punk. The term thrash has gotten co-opted by heavy metal, but it’s a punk term, and it originally meant fast punk rock stuff, the stuff with the [mimics drum beat] kind of beat, like a polka beat. And they were one of those bands, and there was a lot of other bands that were doing that at that time. I’m not trying to take anything away from them, but I think it was just a matter of being in the right place at the right time, and they managed to have the chops to kind of back it up. But there were a number of bands that were coming out at that time, and a lot of them were really good. Social Conflict is still around, and they’re really good. There was the Convicts I think were around at that same time, too. They might have come just a little bit after. But there were a lot of different bands, and they just happened to be one of those bands that kinda hit their stride right there.

But, as far as popularity, there was another band that was around at the same time that was called Loli and the Chones who were based in Boyle Heights. In fact, they had a song that went, “We’re the kids from Boyle Heights, we’ll kick your ass, yeah, that’s right.” But they were more along the lines of the garage punk thing than hardcore punk rock. But again, you’re talking about a scene with a lot of different kind of substrata and sub-styles. They were just as punk rock as Union, but they didn’t play the same style of punk rock. And they also became a lot more popular in Northern California, and get lumped in with what for some reason they call it gunk punk, or gunk, which I guess is supposed to be like “garage punk” abbreviated. But they were from Boyle Heights, and those guys were amazing.

DAVILA: They do kind of sound more similar to a lot of sort of San Francisco bands.

ALVARADO: Yeah, and the funny thing about the San Francisco bands is that there was a book—I forgot who wrote it, I think it was one of the guys from Rocket from the Crypt or something like that—some guy wrote a book and that was where that term gunk came from. But what gets left out of that book is the connections to East Los Angeles that existed. And again, there was a lot of back-and-forth. There was a magazine that was put out and started in '89, and I think it lasted until '92, something like that, it was called *Pure Filth* magazine. And that was put out by Shane White, who again I was in a band with in the '80s—and I actually wrote for that magazine for a little while. But that started off as a magazine for East L.A. punk rock. And he became a fan of bands like Thee Mighty Ceasars, and Billy Childish, and Thee Headcoats, and all those bands, and he became friends with the Mummies, who were from San Bruno, which is in Northern California. And Shane also had a band called the Chainsaw Blues and the Fingers, who started playing that kind of garagey-er rock stuff, but they were from here, from East L.A. And they became friends with the Mummies, and they started going back and forth up to Northern California, San Francisco, and the Mummies would come down here, and so there was a lot of interaction back and forth.

And Loli and the Chones got thrown in with that as well, then they started going up north because nobody would pay to see those bands down here. So they would go up north where people would appreciate them. And what ended up happening is that Shane moved from East L.A. up to San Francisco, became a writer for *Maximum Rockroll*, kept *Pure Filth* going for a little while, had the Fingers up there until the Fingers broke up, and then he and his brother Jason joined the Rip-Offs, and then that guy ended up touring Japan and shit. But those guys all came from East L.A., and the thing was that there was a lot of interaction between L.A. and San Francisco at that time. A lot of those guys were very much involved at the very foundations of that particular scene, with bands like Supercharger and Untamed Youth and all those guys. I think Untamed Youth were at one point living in Glendale down here.

DAVILA: We're kind of getting onto the topic of unknown connections to East L.A. in terms of the punk scene and so, and so one of the questions I wanted to ask is about the articles that you've been writing for *Razorcake* and the series of interviews with East

L.A. bands. I was just wondering what was your motivation in starting this project, and maybe if there are other projects that you're also working on in relation to East L.A. punk? Maybe you could say something about those as well, and then maybe say something about what you're hoping to achieve through this work that you're doing now.

ALVARADO: Well, that all started kind of out of frustration. When I was in the Black Jax we were playing a show, and I was talking to a friend of mine who had a reissues label, and I was telling him that I wanted to put out like a compilation of East L.A. punk bands—and this would have been the mid-'90s, somewhere between '94 and '96. This guy had grown up in Glendale and he's an old punker dude, and I was telling him, "I'd love to put this compilation of East L.A. bands out." And he said, "Well, what East L.A. bands are there? There's like two, aren't there?" And I was like, "no, there's been more than that." And he said, "Well, what, the Brat and Los Illegals? I mean, what else is there?" And I'm, "are you serious?" And Glendale is not that far city-wise, it's like a bus ride away, and for this guy to not know of any East L.A. bands it was kind of just a shock.

So I started trying to look up things, and as I was picking up these books and reading these things that were being written, I could see where this illusion had been kind of built up that there was two or three bands. And over and over, the three bands that I kept reading about were the Brat, Los Illegals, and the Odd Squad. And there was a connection in that in that they were all related to an art group called Asco. In some way, shape, or form, they were kind of affiliated with Asco. In the case of Los Illegals, their lead singer Willie was a member of Asco. Teresa Covarrubias was involved with Asco in the '80s, and two of the members of the Odd Squad were original members of Los Illegals. And so, they were getting the lion's share of attention in the writing, and it kept saying that this was the only thing that existed.

And it's not something that's just an East L.A. problem, it's kind of endemic in punk rock scholarship in general. When you look at the scholarship on punk rock, depending on what they're talking about, usually it ends around 1979 or 1980, nothing happens, and all of a sudden magically out of nowhere, out of the absolute ether, Nirvana pops up. And so there was absolutely nothing between 1979 and 1991 when Nirvana popped out of nowhere, with no backstory or nothing. So, it's kind of similar with what's going on with

East L.A. They talk about the Vex, and they talk about the Vex existing for an eight- to nine-month period, I think it's March to November of 1980, and that's the only time that existed, and that whole time three bands existed. And it was like, "well, wait a minute, what about the Stains? What about Thee Undertakers, what about this band, what about that band?" And so I kept trying to kind of get people to talk about that, and they would say, "Yeah, but that's not important," or they would just kind of dismiss it, and so out of frustration I wrote my own article. And I wrote that in 2001, and then started working on a family tree, just to show that it was a little bit bigger than they had said. I had been involved in this thing since, like I said, since 1980, '81, in some way, shape, or form, and there was tons of bands that came out of East L.A. And these bands were not getting any attention whatsoever, and so I wrote this article, "Teenage Alcoholics," and I just included whatever popped up at the top of my head, just these bands, and I started listing them and giving a little description to say more to the story here, and nobody's talking about these things.

And as it went on, the underground punk community kind of acknowledged it, but the scholarship kept saying and kept perpetuating the same myth that there were only three bands and the Vex only existed for eight months. Which, if you know anything about the Vex's history, is patently false on its face because the Vex existed in numerous places over a three- or four-year period. It finally closed, I think, in August of 1983, and it became one of the more important punk clubs in Los Angeles as a whole. And it became like this bridge that other punk bands from other areas like Orange County, and the beach area, and East Los Angeles, and parts of the eastern San Gabriel Valley, and people as far as Pomona, were coming to the Vex, and they were using the Vex as kind of like this home base, and using it as a way to jump into the more established clubs in Hollywood. It was a thing that you could say, "Well, we played the Vex, we have club experience," and then you could go to the Whisky, and play the Whisky or the Roxy or something. But they were using the Vex as a springboard like that. And then you had bands that were touring from as far as the UK. The Slits played at the Vex, the Damned played at the Vex, UK Decay played at the Vex. You had bands from Vancouver, the Subhumans and D.O.A. that were coming to East L.A. and playing the Vex. And that story just has gotten completely lost in the muddle with this other story that keeps getting perpetuated by the

popular scholarship, which is essentially in its own wind tunnel now, and it's just kind of saying the same things over and over and over.

And then to top it all off, there was a book called *Land of a Thousand Dances*, which to be honest I thought was a great book until it hit 1980. I'm learning all this stuff about Cannibal and the Headhunters, and then they get to the part about the 1980s and they talk about the punk scene, and again, the Odd Squad, Los Illegals, and the Brat. And the thing that finally set it off was that there was a line in that book that said something like "after 1981," or something like that, "nothing really happened except for a band called Chicano-Christ," or something. And Chicano-Christ was actually a band from Long Beach, in part. I think their drummer was from San Diego, he was a member of Rocket from the Crypt eventually, and is now the drummer for Off!. And their lead singer was a guy named Ron Martinez who was from Long Beach, and previously sang for Final Conflict. Which brought up a bigger issue for me, which is kind of an aside with that particular book—I can't tell if that book is about East L.A. rock, Chicano rock, Los Angeles rock, or some combination thereof, because if it's any of those things then it's a failure on all levels. Because if you're talking about Chicano rock, why aren't you talking about Sam the Sham and the Pharaohs, or ? and the Mysterians? If you're talking about East L.A. rock, then why are you talking about Chicano-Christ, or the Plugz, or why are you talking about the Zeros or any of those bands. Because those bands are not from East L.A. That's another myth. The Plugz were not from East Los Angeles. They were based in Silverlake, which is on the west side of Downtown L.A., and they originated in El Paso, Texas. The Zeros were from Chula Vista, which is down by San Diego. But because they're Chicano or Mexican, they get lumped in with East Los Angeles.

DAVILA: And the same with Alice Bag as well.

ALVARADO: Well, Alice was actually from East L.A. She grew up in Boyle Heights. In her case, I mean, she went to Stevenson Junior High School, she went to school with the Gamboas who were part of Asco, and she went to school with Gerardo Velazquez and Michael Ochoa from Nervous Gender. All those kids, they were from East L.A., but like the article that I did with Nervous Gender, like Michael said, you didn't want to stay in East L.A. The first thing you wanted to do was get as far fucking away from this place as you could, because it was not a pleasant place to grow up. I mean, in some ways the

stereotypes about East Los Angeles are blown up, and they're just fabrications, and just, I would say, Caucasian nightmares, or whatever, nightmare visions. But at the same time, there's some deeper truth to that. It's a very rough neighborhood, and in some cases it's like growing up in an outdoor insane asylum. Because the things that you learn to deal with growing up in East L.A. are not normal in other standards. The way you assess people: it's not uncommon to say, to hear somebody say, "Yeah, it's sad that he killed five people, but you know he's really good with kids, and he's a really nice guy." Or, "Yeah, it's too bad he has such a bad drug problem, because he's a really sweet boy." And those kind of thinking where you have to put these kind of caveats on people because otherwise it ends up that everybody's got something going on, or some kind of problem, or something that's happening that under normal circumstances would probably make somebody else run away. And you have to kind of assess people on a different kind of plane because of the way things are in the neighborhood. You know, it's not uncommon to—well, I shouldn't say it's not uncommon, but it's not unheard of to have somebody just get shot right in front of you. I saw three or four people killed right in front of me before I'd even hit 15 years old.

So in some cases some people didn't want to stay here. So, people like Alice, I can't speak for her as to her reasons, I would imagine for her it might have been something along the lines of there was just nothing going on around here. But she went off to Hollywood, and she got involved with the Hollywood scene. She technically, physically was from East Los Angeles, but the Bags were a Hollywood band. The Bags were not an East L.A. punk band. And Alice herself will say she didn't know anything the East L.A. punk scene until some decade and a half later when she was working with Teresa from the Brat. So, to her it was news. And ironically she had played the Vex, but I don't think she was aware that there was a bona fide scene at that time, and I'm pretty sure that by the time the new one was getting up and going she probably was not even that interested in punk rock in that incarnation or that kind of mentality at that time. I think by then she was probably going to Nicaragua and she was going to college and stuff, and was pretty much outside of what we were doing, which was basically just causing chaos and putting a backbeat to it.

So essentially all of that stuff kind of was what kind of motivated me. Again, it's a very

dicey thing for me because the thing is is that I've been so active in it that I try really hard to kinda temper it so it doesn't seem like I'm trying to blow my own horn. But inevitably I was involved in some way, and I do try to kind of minimize my footprint in what I'm doing so that I'm not saying, "my band was the greatest band," because we definitely weren't. Butt Acne was a terrible band, and we intended to be a terrible band, and we had fun being a terrible band.

But at the same time, you had bands like the Stains, who were arguably the first punk band in East Los Angeles, nobody's ever heard of 'em. Other than this little cult group of like hardcore kids that ironically were from the Westside and stuff, they were fans of Black Flag, because the Stains were playing shows with Black Flag all the time. But on the Eastside a lot of the bands until recently—because the Stains have recently gotten back together—a lot of people haven't heard of 'em. Fewer people had heard of Thee Undertakers by the time the 2000s had come out until they finally got their album released some twenty years after it was recorded. There's a band called the Warriors that there's very little written about them. I'm trying to get a hold of their singer. They were an all-black soul punk band from Boyle Heights, which, again, you want to talk about a minority group within a minority group. 'Cause the way East Los Angeles, especially Boyle Heights... East L.A. has not just been predominantly Mexican American or Chicano or whatever, there's been these hubs of... Essentially that's where Los Angeles put it's quote-en-quote undesirables. It was a Jewish hub, you had Russian Molokans here, you had Italians, Japanese, Chinese, Jews, the first black neighborhood was in Boyle Heights, so it wasn't out of the ordinary to have some black kids from East L.A. have a punk band. But this particular group, apparently nobody's ever heard of outside of the ones who might have been at the Vex in 1980 at the time when they were active. My understanding is is that they—I think I read it somewhere online or something—that they were one of the primary influences for a band called the Busboys, who ended up recording songs for the Ghostbusters soundtrack with Eddie Murphy. So it's one of those things where it's like there's all of these bands and none of these people have heard of them, so I've been kind of trying to chip away at that kind of scholarship and just put it out there in writing so that somebody somewhere can just kind of grab onto it and just start running with it just to kind of change the tone. And to kind of open up the dialogue,

and to kind of open up the idea that maybe there was more that was going on. Because the other thing is is that the Chicano Groove stuff that was happening in the '90s is just like Nirvana, there was this period where, I guess, some of them were trying to kind of sweep under the rug or minimize their punk history. And again, to bring up this weird kind of alternate history where everything died in 1980 when Los Illegals and the Brat and Thee Undertakers and the Vex closed and all this other stuff, and then magically out of nowhere with no pre-history or no interaction in between, you had these Chicano Groove groups, when in actuality all of those bands had punk rock pasts, and they've played in backyards and they had bands with names like Bloodcum, and Iconoclast, and The Republic, and Fish Head, and Peace Pill, and Butt Acne and all those other things. So there was that history that wasn't being written about, either, and the same thing that happened with the Vex happened with the Chicano Groove history where they're trying to rewrite that so it's all focused around one particular club, and it's not true, either. So, it's kind of like my motivation is to kind of try to counterbalance and try to provide these histories for people that have never had any kind of history. In the case of the Stains, I think, to my knowledge, the article that I just wrote is the longest piece that's ever been written about them, that's ever been published. I think it might be one of very few interviews that they've actually had published, as well. And the same thing for Circle One, I think Circle One had a handful of interviews that were done back then. And I did the one for the Illegals and the Brat just to kind of, again, give them a longer interview space as well. Because, again, I don't want to minimized their importance, but I just want to make sure that I'm trying to help contribute to the knowledge that there was more than just those three bands that are always cited.

DAVILA: I guess I'm asking you to speculate, and so if you don't think you have an answer to this question, that's fine. But do you think there's a reason why no one talks about a lot of what was happening after the sort of Vex phenomenon, or why no one has expressed interest other than people like yourself who were there?

ALVARADO: Well, I imagine there's a number of factors. Part of it I think is laziness. I think part of it is just that nobody wants to really delve much deeper than the kind of surface things. Going to *La Opinión*, there's an article that was written in *La Opinión*, and they cite Los Illegals, the Brat, and the Odd Squad, and I think Thee Undertakers

were in that, as well. But so there was this article that was written around 1980, '81, that talked about the Vex and this little group of people. The fact that the people that were in those bands, were also loosely affiliated with the Los Angeles avant-garde art scene didn't hurt. And some of them were muralists as far back as the '60s and '70s, and were very well versed in their own public relations. In the case of the Illegals and Asco, those guys were masters of public relations, and I think that it's served them well. However, I think in some ways it might have been done at a disadvantage for everybody else because there were others who didn't have those skills.

You also have the lack of recorded material to access. The Brat put out an EP, Los Illegals put out an album on A&M Records. And ironically the Stains put out a record on SST, but again, you're talking about guys who didn't really have good public relations skills, and I think as a result, bands like them, the Stains and Thee Undertakers, and a lot of the bands later on, it was just lack of exposure and lack of access. There was precious little vinyl put out during the bands that we were in. I personally didn't go into a recording studio until 1989 or '90, which was nearly a decade after I picked up a guitar. By that time we'd already put out a cassette that sold 500 copies, stuff that we recorded in the bedroom. But any proper recordings, any vinyl, I never was put on a piece of vinyl or anything that would be considered a legitimate release until ten years after I started playing. And I think that was the case for a lot of those bands.

And the thing is if you don't have a lot of that kind of ephemera around, you don't exist. And a lot of scholars and a lot of journalists, and a lot of those people, they're not going to go looking through the back pages of *Flipside* fanzine or *Maximum Rocknroll*, or even bother to look through something called *Pure Filth*—let alone know it exists—to find out that there's all this other stuff going on. They're just trying to get their papers done. And I mean that as no insult, but I think that was what was going on a lot of the time. And so after a while you've got this cannibalistic kinda thing going on where one guy writes it, another guy cites it, another guy comes along citing the guy who's citing the other thing, and so on and so on and so on and so on, and I think that's how the party line has come along. And at the same time you've got people like the Asco group who've been very, very involved in keeping their name in the dialogue. And this has given them the opportunity to kind of set the agenda, I guess, so that certain people get written out or

certain things get written out. And maybe it's not intentional, and I'm not trying to imply that it is, but it kinda happens.

And again, by the time we had hit our stride in '88 or '89, by the time we hit our stride at that point as a scene, it was so underground. I mean, we couldn't have paid somebody to put us in things like that at that time, or those guys, they wouldn't have known us from Adam. They were on their own trip at that point, and they were all kind of doing their own thing. And in the case of Los Illegals, they had gotten themselves involved with Concrete Blonde, and all of that stuff. And the Brat had gone off on their own tangents, and all of those bands. And so by the time we were... We were just like these bratty little kids that were making noise and having the police come to the backyards. So there was no interest, and they wouldn't have viewed what we were doing as art, per se—even though we didn't even consider it as art, and it wasn't until after the fact that we could actually contextualize it that way, or conceptualize it as art, or as a movement, or as even something unto its own. Because we just thought we were East L.A. punks, we didn't really think of ourselves in terms of a scene. It was only kind of after the fact that we kinda realized, well, we had our own little thing going here. Because we were also going to Scream Club, we were going to Fender's, or the Palladium, or the Olympic Auditorium, or Cathay de Grande, or all these other places, we were always going to these other places at the same time. Until '88 when the backyards kind of became the focal point, and that was just, your friends are playing your backyard, and it's quicker and easier to get to your backyard or something that's literally in your own neighborhood than it is to go out to Long Beach. So we said, "well, fuck it, we'll just hang out here, and go see the Thrusters again"—who were like my favorite band, and I think I saw them like a billion times. But they were great, and I'd rather go see them than see somebody else. So it was just kind of one of those things, and so it just kind of divorced itself from any kind of over-ground attention, and I think that, again, it was just too easy for journalists and scholars to just kind of go back to what they knew and what was easiest to access. And so the things that I've written, like the Stains article, I don't know if you noticed, but what I was trying to do with those pull-quotes was I was trying to pull quotes from sources that nobody had ever gone back to get, and then use those as things that were cited. Like an article that was written by Dan Vargas, who was the manager for the Brat

and he managed Thee Undertakers at one point, and he wrote this article that ended up being called “No Cover”. Up until about a month ago it had never been published, it was written in 1980, it had never been published. I tried pulling quotes from that, I pulled quotes from the East L.A. College Campus News archives, from a book by Henry Rollins about his radio program that had a line about the Stains, an interview from a magazine called *Capital Crisis*—I’d never even seen a physical copy of that, I just found an interview with Black Flag online and I pulled that quote—just to kind of pull this ephemera that I could use as proof that there’s other sources out there than the same things that just keep getting quoted over and over again.

I just did an article, it just got published in *Aztlán*, the UCLA Chicano Studies journal, and I was pulling things out of old *Flipsides*. ‘Cause one of the errors that has been perpetuated over and over again is that Black Flag’s performance at the Vex on November 22nd—and the usual cited sources even get the date wrong. There’s a Scion Website right now, it’s a car company that’s trying to get its fingers in the underground, they have an East L.A. punk site up now, and they’ve got that the Vex location at Self-Help Graphics closed in October of 1980, when it actually closed on November 22nd, it was the JFK Memorial show. But the myth that’s been perpetuated is that Black Flag’s performance was the reason that the Vex closed down, because the punks rioted while Black Flag was playing. The actuality was that Black Flag opened up first, then the Stains played, then the Violent Children played, and what actually caused the riot was that there was an hour-long lag between the Violent Children and another band called the Mau Maus, who were notorious for kind of coming on late, and people got bored and trashed the building. But that was the actuality, and I included that information in that article. And again, going back to old *Flipsides*, the other thing was that there’s this myth that the Westside punks didn’t even mingle with East L.A. punks, and I got quotes from *Flipside* fanzine that were saying, “The Vex is God, you gotta come here, don’t worry about that it’s in East L.A., the people are cool. It’s better than going to this place or the fucking shitholes like the Whisky,” and yada, yada, yada. So again, there’s these myths that have been perpetuated over the years, and keep getting repeated, and they’re not true. They say that the bands from East L.A. couldn’t get gigs on the Westside, but the Brat opened up for Adam and the Ants, and they opened up for the Bauhaus. That the only shows that

they played were “East L.A. Nights,” but Thee Undertakers were playing the Starwood and the Whisky, and they were playing with X. And the Stains were opening for the Dead Kennedys and they played tons of shows with Black Flag. So there’s these things that have kind of come up, and it’s just trying to kind of change that dialogue, and saying, “Okay, well, there may be some truth to some of this stuff, but the larger picture is a little bit more complicated and a little bit more interesting than what has been perpetuated.” And that’s been my motivation: just trying to kind of open up that dialogue and actually give a little attention to bands that have not had that attention, like the Stains and like Circle One. And like Nervous Gender, who, again, were on that side of town as far as their music, but had roots in East Los Angeles, and it’s another one of those bands that a lot of people have kind of forgotten. And their connection to East L.A. was that Gerardo and Michael had a band called the Snappers with Robert and Jesse from the Stains, which is one of those bands that nobody had ever heard of. It’s just, again, one of those little things that you never kind of hear, and that was what drew me to go talk to them was the fact of that connection to the Stains. So, yeah, that’s it [laughs].

DAVILA: You were talking about people from the Westside coming over to the Eastside, and these quotes in the fanzines or whatever saying don’t be afraid because it’s in East L.A. A thing I think happens a lot when I read about East L.A. is that people tend to latch onto moments where they can kind of use the assumptions they have about East L.A. to make some point about something that seems out of the ordinary somehow. So when you read about people from the Westside going to the Vex, it always says something about how they knew not to mess with anything there because there were cholo bodyguards standing around making sure that the kids from the Westside didn’t cause trouble. Or you read about Mexican kids from East L.A. who are just rabid fans of Morrissey, or these other kind of little tidbits that people kinda latch onto because they think it’s somehow out of the ordinary.

ALVARADO: Human beings in general have this tendency to kind of want to categorize and stereotype, I think it’s genetic to do that, and I think that might be part of it as well. I don’t understand the Morrissey thing myself, I have to admit I’m a huge Smiths fan, but I have absolutely no idea why culturally or ethnically why I am, but I do acknowledge that that phenomenon exists.

DAVILA: It just seems people, it seems like people don't really want to talk about the Eastside or pay attention unless there's something happening that seems somehow strange to them, something that seems somehow phenomenal about what's happening. People don't want to pay attention to the everyday fact that there are people in East L.A., other than gangsters, who are doing things like playing in punk bands and so on. That's sort of the impression I've gotten, I don't know if you feel the same way at all?

ALVARADO: Right. Yeah, definitely. I think that was one of the things that might have had an effect on say a band like the Stains, or Thee Undertakers, or Circle One, or even Alice Bag in a way. Because I think in the case of bands like the—well, especially the Illegals, but also to a lesser degree the Brat—I think the fact that their connection to Asco and the whole Chicano art thing kind of work as a double-edged sword for them. Because on the one hand it gave them attention, on the other hand it set them apart as some kind of ethnic curio. Like, they weren't just punk musicians or new wave musicians now, they were Mexicans playing new wave. And we as a culture supposedly didn't listen to that stuff, we listened to lowrider music, we were supposed to play Mexican music, we were supposed to... It was kind of like the same thing as what happened to Linda Ronstadt. Oh my god, all of a sudden she's singing *rancheras* and *son jarochos*, and it's like, "Wait a minute, wasn't this that little white girl from Arizona? What's all this Mexican stuff?" That kind of attitude. And I think it kind of worked, in that kind of sense, both to their advantage and to their detriment.

So yeah, they ended up getting kind of marginalized and stuck in this little corner, and all of this weird shit started happening to them with producers, who were telling them that they wanted conga drums in their songs, and had lowriders pull up for photo shoots and shit, instead of just taking them as what they were, which was just a good band. And in the case of Los Illegals, they say themselves, they put their ethnicity at the forefront of what they were doing, they were trying to make a political statement, with just the name. The fact that the name is bilingual: Los, Illegals. It's not Los Ilegales, it's Los Illegals. And they did it consciously, and those guys loved to play with words. And they were trying very hard to kind of make a political statement, and it was based on their ethnicity; but the difference between them and the other ones is that they used that and they always find a way to use it to their advantage, and it works for them, and God love them, they're

great at what they do. The level of PR skills with those guys was something phenomenal to see. And I'm not trying to be facetious, I'm in awe of it. I used to work public relations and I'm really in awe of their ability to kind of control their message. But for a lot of the other ones, I think it made them the odd thing out.

And so, whereas a band like the Stains, who were the oldest punk band in East L.A., and they were the band that was actually up to their neck in punk rock at that time, and they were the first—and some would argue the only—of those bands that was truly a punk rock band, they just kind of got lost in the shuffle both in East Los Angeles and in the greater L.A. punk scene, because they just didn't really kind of impact people in the same way. They didn't push forward a Chicano identity or play on their ethnicity as a way to stand out or be unique. There's a uniqueness and a singularity of their music if you're listening to it, 'cause from what I've been able to read or from the conversations I've had with different people, they were such a primary influence on Black Flag—according to the book *Spray Paint the Walls*, the reason Black Flag began incorporating guitar solos into their music was because Greg Ginn heard Robert Becerra play guitar, and from that point forward, he tried to find some way to incorporate solos into Black Flag's music. And then, I would even go so far as to say that that whole period from *My War* on is Black Flag's attempt at recreating the Stains' sound. Because if you listen to the Stains' album, which came out two years after it was recorded, and then you listen to the stuff that Black Flag was recording at the same that that Stains album was finally released, you'll see that there's a lot of similarity between the two. That heavy metal undertow that's in Black Flag music at that point in their career is there in the Stains that was recorded in 1981, and that stuff was old by even then, by that time. The Stains had existed since '76, '77. So, I think they just kind of got lost in that shuffle, and even though their music was unique and very influential on a lot of key people, I think it just was a matter of just not enough PR skills and just kinda getting lost in the shuffle. So I think that is probably why a lot of that happens.

And I think that in that case, I think you're right. I think it was just that those guys happened to be unique in what they were doing. And they happened to be doing it, again, at the right place at the right time when people were trying to pay attention to what was then a new movement. And by later periods, and even now, I think a lot of those kids

kinda get passed by even now, the punk kids, because at this point punk rock is passé for a lot of people. It's a stylistic and cultural and artistic dead end for a lot of those older people. Whereas, it's a brand new thing for every kid. Every kid that comes along on and gets hooked into it, it becomes this kind of thing where it allows them to flower, and it allows them to kind of express themselves in ways that they didn't know were possible, and it gives them the freedom to do that. And I think for those that have gotten past it and actually gotten proficient in something or another, for them it's something that they did when they were a kid, and it never really kinda gets past that fad for them. And they've gone on, they've progressed, they've gotten artistic chops, and so they just kinda leave it by the wayside. For others of us, though, it was just as much an identity marker as being a Chicano. In my case, I was a punk before I even knew the word existed. I was always that kid always kind of stepped outside that line, and so when I came across the word punk it just happened to be the term that happened to fit at the time, when it's just been the name for what I do. But other people it wasn't that, and I think that that's kind of factored into it as well, why a lot of it has kind of fallen by the wayside.

DAVILA: I think another thing that happens in a lot of the writing is that when people talk about the Vex scene and when they reduce it to those few bands, they kind of talk about it as if there was this singularity of purpose. That Los Illegals and the Brat had similar goals or motivations, and it sort of falls under this heading of "Chicano punk." But I wanted to ask, in your opinion, do you think that East L.A. punk is synonymous with "Chicano punk," and do you think that there even really is such a thing as Chicano punk, meaning, is there sort of a shared aesthetic or shared politics or ideology that unites bands with Chicano members?

ALVARADO: Well, I think it's a little of both. I think that there are some people who would identify what they do as Chicano punk. I think the terms are not necessarily synonymous. I don't think that it's actually completely correct or completely incorrect. Just from my years in being involved in it, I think there's a lot of similarities between the cultures. And I've kind of tried to touch on it in different ways in things that I've written and some of the projects I've done. You know what *rasquachismo* is? Like, *rasquache* aesthetic, basically making something out of nothing, to not let a lack of proper training or materials hamper you and using whatever's available to make art. I think that that's

very much in line with the whole DIY aesthetic, again, becoming an artist without having some college or some professor or some art teacher tell you what art is and what you do is art, or becoming a musician without having somebody to tell you how to do it right. Or to become a photographer, or to do anything. To become a sculptor, you just kinda go out and do it. And I think a *rasquache* aesthetic is very much a punk rock aesthetic, and that is very much a part of the Chicano art experience and the Chicano art aesthetic.

For a long time, I thought that what we did in the backyards was very unique, and I think in some senses it was because of the fact that we focused so much attention on the backyards. But I think that there were also other places that did it. Chicago had—up until a few years ago, I guess it was—they had their own little basement scene that was going on in the Southside, up in the Pilsen area and stuff like that. And you had all of these other groups of people that were doing these things. And in the case of Chicano music, you had guys like Cannibal and the Headhunters and the Midnitters and all of those bands that were playing Salesian High School dances and the Kennedy Hall, and they were playing in the quad area of Ramona Gardens housing project. And so that whole backyard thing and the whole kind of aesthetic of taking places that normally wouldn't be used for quote-unquote “concerts” had already existed long before for us or before the bands at the Vex, that were involved in the Vex, because the bands that were involved in the Vex, before the Vex existed, those bands were playing backyards. Those guys were playing car clubs, car shows, and all that stuff, and at restaurants and things. So that whole aesthetic had already existed before we had even gotten involved and it existed before they had gotten involved. And you also had the backyard disco parties that had been going on, for decades that stuff was going on. Simultaneously to the punks, there was some interaction to that as well.

And the other thing, again, East Los Angeles is not homogenously Chicano. The area has a long history of different ethnicities calling it home—Jews, Italians, African Americans, Whites, Russian Molokans, Serbs, Chinese, Mexican, and more recently Central Americans, to name a few. You had Japanese kids in that neighborhood. That interview with the Stains, Gilbert was talking about his friend who he'd go over to his house, and his mom, the way he described her was full-on “arigato” Japanese; but his friend was this little Japanese kid with glasses who spoke like a kid from the neighborhood, with the

accent, “Hey, what’s happening, homes?”), he’d talk like that. And you had black kids in the neighborhood that talked like that, and you had black kids that were involved in the punk scene, and you had Japanese kids that were involved in the punk scene, and the white kids that were around. And so there was this intermingling of different groups of kids, that in some cases you didn’t even think about ethnicity as far as, in those terms, whether you were gonna cut bands out or classify them and group them because of this, or that, or the other. In our little scene, we had a band called Insurrected State, and they later turned into a band called No Church on Sunday, those were the only bands in the neighborhood that sang any songs in Spanish, and they didn’t sing predominantly in Spanish. Most of the stuff, almost to a band, every band sang in English, and in our case, it wasn’t a matter of trying to make some big statement of being a Chicano. Being a Chicano was what we were, punk rock was how you expressed it, you know what I mean?

DAVILA: Yeah.

ALVARADO: I guess that’s the best way to describe it. So we weren’t consciously trying to be Chicano punks, we were Chicanos, or punks that were Chicano. Or Japanese—in this case it would have been Nisei or Issei. Or Chinese kids, or Russian kids. We were just punks, and we all kind of interacted with each other and we all played shows together. We were friends, and talked shit about each other, and got drunk together, and in some cases, some of ‘em smoked PCP together, and all that shit. So, I don’t think it was really kind of a sense of trying to marginalize ourselves into this kind of idea of being Chicano, it was something that you were. Somebody asked me about it once before, I said it was kind of the like being conscious of that kind of thing would be kind of like being conscious of it at a family function—everybody else is just like you, so why would you be hyperaware about it? So to sit around and think about, “wow, I’m a Chicano,” in this room full of Chicanos, it was kind of redundant, and it was kind of unnecessary, you were what you were. I’m not sure if that answers your question, but that’s kind of like my take on it.

Again, there were anomalies. There were bands like Los Illegals who were trying to make a political statement in the midst of... Those guys swim against the stream, they’ve always swam against the stream. Asco was swimming against the stream, in the midst of

the Chicano art thing, where you had these perpetuations of Virgen de Guadalupe paintings, and paintings on black velvet of lowriders, and all of that stuff, and cholo writing. These guys were doing paintings of Joaquin Murrieta, and doing avant-garde things, and making the No-movies, which was photograph stills of movies that had never existed, and things like that doing these really avant-garde things, just swimming against the stream of the mainstream of even the Chicano art movement. And when they did the punk rock thing... Those guys insist that they're not punk rockers, and I'll give them that, but they were working within the context of punk rock as non-rock punkers, pushing an ethnic identity in the face, and rubbing the face of these people into that ethnicity, because again, culturally, in the greater macrocosm of Los Angeles, the Mexican or the Chicano is marginalized and shit upon, and for the longest time, we were looked at as this source of cheap labor. So they took their band and used it as a way to kind of rub it in the face of the greater society. All right? And so they would have been the kind of a band that would have been swimming against stream, whereas the rest of 'em, you really didn't think in those terms. You were aware of it, and it was something that was part of your identity, but it wasn't something that was to further marginalize yourself from the greater scene.

DAVILA: Yeah, it seems like there's sort of a difference where Los Illegals were trying to make something that was for a different audience to kind of challenge that different audience's way of thinking, whereas a lot what was happening in the backyard scene sounds like it was more of an in-group kinda thing.

ALVARADO: Yeah, and those guys had some twenty years of musical experience behind them, so they were already working on a different level from, say a band like us, where we sitting around running screwdrivers up and down the neck of a guitar singing about fucking dead people. You know, it was just an entire kind of different frame of mind. We were out to shock and offend and just learning that we even had voices, let alone how to express it, let alone learning how to express it. Whereas they came in pretty much fully formed with their identity and what their intention was already set, and having the chops and the skills to be able to put that hand grenade in the middle of the room and just wait to see what happens when it went off. Again, nothing but respect for those guys, it's just that they were working on a different level from us. For us we were working

from scratch, and we didn't have a lot of the advantages that they had. But that freed us to do our own thing, because we didn't have to sit around and look to hopefully win a record deal. There was no way that we were gonna get a record deal, and we knew it, there was no way that we were gonna get a club date, and we knew it, and we didn't care. We were street kids, we didn't care about those things. All we cared about was where's the next party, how do we get on the bill, how much trouble can we cause before the cops show up, and where's the beer afterward.

And within that context, lyrically, there were things that were statements against the government and questioning what we were being told, especially in the middle of the Reagan era, which was when we were growing up. There was a lot of questioning about the status quo and what we were doing, and to be a punk itself, just being punk was a very political act. And, you know, to sing songs, even songs about, you know, again, fucking dead people, even something like that was a political, I mean, even as ridiculous, and childish, and inane as it may have been for a fifteen-year-old to do that, it was still our way of challenging the status quo, which was Lionel Richie, and Toto, and all of that crap that was on the radio, you know, we were standing in open defiance against that, you know, in the same way that the Ramones would have been standing in defiance against bands like the Eagles, or any of that stuff, you know. I mean, it was just, that was the rebellion, and that in itself was a political act, and we were viewed with hostility within the neighborhood and outside the neighborhood. But, again, that was a bunch of Chicano kids being punk rockers and not being Chicano punk rockers. And I guess that speaks to my experience with it, I imagine there are others that might have a different opinion about it, and they might have been seeing something else, but that was my take on it. Now, when we got into the Chicano Groove thing, that was an actual attempt at using what we'd learned with punk rock, and basically expanding idea. I guess that would have been our equivalent of post-punk, if you want to use the allegory of the UK punk rock versus post-punk era. Once they had learned how to play their instruments they started playing stuff that was based on reggae and playing post-punk. With us, we started getting back and delving into our parents' record collections, and picking out like José Alfredo Jiménez and Cuco Sánchez, and Los Lobos and shit like that, and going back and learning about *son jarocho* and *cumbias* and all that other stuff, and then performing that

stuff with a punk aesthetic behind it, and then getting in touch with the culture that we kind of eschewed. Because you're fifteen, sixteen years old, you don't want to listen to your parents' music, fuck that stuff, your parents listen to it, so it's like poison. Like Gilbert from the Stains said, the last thing you wanted to do was listen to your parents' music. And that was very true, however, when you become proficient on your instrument after a while, or in your artistic expression you start to learn how to paint, or write a decent couplet or free verse or something like that, you start trying to expand on your ideas, and in our case it was a matter of going back and looking at where our roots were, and where we kind of go back and pay attention to the stuff that we kind of pooh-poohed and ignored through our youth. So, next thing you know, in our case, in the case of Ollin, you had seven, eight, nine, punk rock kids sitting on a porch with acoustic guitars trying to figure out how to play *son jarocho*, and that just sent us off on a whole new tangent. And now Ollin is—I'm not in the band, I haven't been in the band for over a decade—but those guys are playing fucking klezmer music now, they're playing punk rock klezmer music. And because of the fact that they're based in Boyle Heights now—we were originally from City Terrace, but they're now based in Boyle Heights—so they're trying to explore the history of Boyle Heights through music, so they're starting to incorporate klezmer and jazz and swing era music, and in addition to straight punk rock, and the traditional Mexican music that they'd already been kind of dabbling with for a decade earlier, or two decades earlier, 'cause they're going on twenty years now, I think they're at eighteen years now that band's been in existence. So in the later periods, yeah, we did get back and involved in that, but even then I don't think it was thinking in terms of becoming Chicano musicians in that sense, we were Chicanos who were musicians and we were playing music that came from our culture. But I guess for me it was always just a matter of just kind of experimenting and trying different things and thinking in different ways, and trying on different hats, and learn. Because you can't stay in a rut, you can't listen to the same stuff over and over again, because, again, you end up in a wind tunnel, and, end up no better than the people that I'm complaining about with the scholarship stuff. It just doesn't work that way. Well, at least for me it doesn't.

DAVILA: I think what you're saying about the difference between Chicanos who are punk versus Chicano punk really speaks to what I want to say in this work, which is that

as Chicanos we're Americans, that's part of what it means to be Chicano, is to be Mexican and American at the same time, and so we're engaged in American popular culture, not just Mexican culture. So, there are bands like Los Illegals who are doing something that's very explicit, and then there are bands like those who are playing the East L.A. backyard scene who are just doing the things that American teenagers do.

ALVARADO: Yeah, just giving the middle finger to the status quo and to the generations that came before you. The whole idea is to piss people off, that's what teenagers do. And in some cases, it was overtly political. You had bands like Los Crudos that were very much involved in their community and did a lot of amazing things. And in a lot of the ways that Los Illegals did, they made their ethnicity a part of what they were doing, but I don't think that they would have thought of themselves as a quote-unquote Chicano or Latino hardcore band, I think they thought of themselves as a hardcore band who were challenging preconceived notions about what that meant, to be Latino, and challenging not only the conventions of Latinidad, I guess, or Chicanismo, but also challenging what it meant to be a punk rocker.

And I think one of the things that's been a downfall for punk rock in general, especially in recent years, is this marginalization and this kind of cutting into these little corners and pigeonholing. So you have Afropunk now, and you have Chicano punk, and you have queer punk, and Japcore I think was one of the ones that they were using for a while, the Japanese hardcore bands. And you have all of these, and grindcore, and mincecore, and garage rock, and gunk, and shoegazer, and all this other crap. There's so much trouble, and there's so many kind of pigeonholes that have gone out that you end up isolating each other so often that nobody's talking to anybody any more. And for us, when I was kid, we were punk kids, but we also listened to Public Image, and we listened to Siouxsie and the Banshees, and we listened to the Smiths, and we listened to Wall of Voodoo, and Oingo Boingo, and all that other shit, and we listened to ska music. One of the biggest bands that the kids in the neighborhood listened to was the fucking Doors, and Led Zeppelin was another one who I've had a love-hate relationship for years with. Black Sabbath was another big one. There was always more than that. It was more tribal when I was a kid, but at the same time it was less stratified. You had goth kids going to punk rock shows, and you had goth bands playing at punk rock shows, and punk rockers at

goth shows.

But now it's like this group of kid only goes to see this type of music and this kind of show, and, again, that isolation of each other, personally I think it's ridiculous to sit around and try to identify yourself as a Chicano punk band, or a Latino hardcore, or Afropunk. I mean, you're either punk rock, or you're just placing yourself into a corner at this point. Now that's not to say that you shouldn't express your ethnicity or your reality via the music or via whatever vehicle that you're using for artistic expression, but I think to sit down and put yourself willingly into a pigeonhole and let somebody else identify you as such and help them marginalize you is a bit of a problem, and it's very problematic for you because that allows them to put you in a corner and isolate you, and I think it's very bad.

So, yeah, like you said, I think even in the case of Los Illegals, I think they would have been very reticent about being isolated solely as a Chicano punk band. I know that they are not fond of *rock en español*, which is one of the holes that they started trying to put us into as well. Because *rock en español* was an entirely different subgenre, substrata.

You're talking about Mexicanos and Sudoamericanos that are making that music, which is a whole different cultural milieu than Chicanismo is. The assumption is that Chicanos and Mexicans are interchangeable, and I think on some levels that may be true, but you're talking about two different cultural experiences. A Chicano is a Mexican, or a Mexican-American, that's born in the United States or raised in the United States and is isolated and doesn't belong to either culture—*ni de aquí, ni de allá*. Whereas a Mexicano is a Mexicano, they have that understanding, and they're coming from a different frame of mind. And again, it's not that it's better or worse to be either, but I think that it's important to understand that there's a distinction between the two, and that one is not necessarily synonymous with the other, in much the same way that you can't say that the Salvadoran cultural experience is synonymous with the Honduran one, or Chilean.

You're talking about similar, yet still very different cultures. There's similarities, there's similar bloodlines and blood traces, but you're also talking about people that are growing up in entirely different areas. It'd be like saying the New York experience is the same as the California experience. It's two different types of cultural experience. So it's a very, very kind of dangerous game to start putting people in these little pigeonholes like that.

DAVILA: I want to go back for a minute. You were talking about how when you were in Butt Acne, you knew that you weren't interested in major labels or signing a deal, but you also knew that, at the same time, that you never could have—I think you said something along those lines. Do you think that there is sort of a lack of interest in Eastside bands, or was this more because in this particular instance you just knew that the band wasn't a band that was radio-ready or something like that?

ALVARADO: Well, I think in my case it was both. There was no interest. Even within the punk rock scene, there wasn't really interest in the bunch of bands that was playing the backyards. In the case of Butt Acne, again, we were very rudimentary. I've included some of the stuff in those East L.A. podcasts, some of the Butt Acne stuff. It was very rudimentary, very early on, and then even when we actually learned how to play our instruments it was still very rudimentary and raw, and very hardcore, and it was obnoxious, and it was rude. I mean, you have these taglines that you use for advertisement or whatever, or slogans, and ours was "100% Noise". And it was just our inability to play, we just kinda hyped up on that inability to play, and say, "Yeah, we're a shitty band, and we don't care." And so, again, for us it was always a matter of trying to push that envelope and be a little bit different from everybody else, and to take our influences and one-up them. So, if you had a band singing about sex with dead people, and kind of using metaphor and simile and trying to kinda dance around the issue, it's like, no, we're going to be very direct about it. If this band is playing fast, we wanna play faster; if this band is playing slow, we're gonna play slower. If this band has a thirty-second song, we've got a one-second song. And it was kind of like that kinda thing. And it was always about, these guys are singing about how Reagan sucks, we're gonna write a love song for Woodsy the Owl. It was the anti-pollution character that they used on television, "Give a hoot, don't pollute." We wrote songs about that, we wrote songs about Felix the Cat, who was a cartoon character, these really stupid songs. Sex with dead people, sex with hamsters, sex with dogs. It was what we did, and it was just partly to mask the fact that we couldn't play, but also just trying to be as obnoxious and pushing the envelope as far as we could. And, again, when you're fourteen, fifteen years old, these things are shocking to people. And especially in 1980, '81 when you're in the midst of the Reagan revolution, where they're trying to put Jesus back into schools and things

like that, to go around with... Oh God, I think I had a jacket that said “You don’t belong” written across the back of it, and I had “Shit”—literally the word “Shit”—shaved into the side of my head, into my hair. You did these things, and it was just to shock the status quo, especially in a conservative area like East Los Angeles. So, in that sense, we were very well aware that what we were doing was not going to be something that was going to interest any kind of label, of any sort, punk rock or otherwise. Honestly, a friend of ours—who moved to Chicago—put out a cassette tape that was a split cassette with us on one side and a band from Glendale called Lowest Authority. Damn thing sold 500 copies. We started getting fan letters, and we just sat there, and we’re like, why? How could you possibly want to know more about this band, you know? We had a review in *Maximum Rockroll* where they dismissed us as “just another noise band and nothing else need be said,” and that was the whole review of it, and it was accurate. And we would laugh. And I remember, being a reviewer now, writing for *Razorcake*, I write a negative review and I get this flurry of emails and letters, and, “Fuck that guy. How can you possibly say that? You didn’t listen to my record.” And I remember when we got that negative review—and we got a number of negative reviews, but that particular negative review—it wasn’t about, “Wow, that guy didn’t really listen to us,” it was like, “Wow, that guy actually noticed us.” We got attention, somebody paid attention, and somebody cared enough to actually write something about us, and we were so grateful for that and so happy that somebody’d actually even acknowledged our existence. And, on that level, with regards to that band, that was the intention, we were out to cause as much kind of hassle as possible, and to be ridiculous and dumb and silly, that was just our thing, and we were just having fun, we were kids having fun. And it was our political statement to be very apolitical.

But in the case of the greater scene, I think it was just, there were a lot of bands in the neighborhoods, but nobody was really interested in what they were doing either. I was, I loved ‘em, we had so many great bands that came out that I loved, and I couldn’t understand why they weren’t getting bigger gigs. And I guess if I played armchair quarterback, it could be again, just the lack of the proper skills and understanding of how PR works, and the fact that they could have honestly conceived of playing a bigger show, a lot of those bands. But there was a band called the Thrusters, I adored that band. That

band was so good, just frighteningly good, and they were funny, and they were like a punk rock Ramones, like a hardcore version of the Ramones, and they were in the midst of East L.A., and they were just funny. They had a song that started off really slow, and it was about a little duck that got run over by a semi-truck, and as the song went it got faster and faster and faster, and it was like a two-minute song, and it started really slow, and by the end of the song it was like a thrash song, and it was hilarious. And they had songs about Oompa-Loompas, from *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*, and they were just a fun band. And their bass player, he was left-handed, so he didn't have a bass that could carry a strap, so he'd be sitting in the middle of the floor with his bass flipped over, somebody standing in front of him, and he'd be sitting cross-legged on the floor in the middle of the slam pit with some guy holding a microphone in front of him because they couldn't get a mic stand low enough, so there'd be another guy holding the mic, and people would be flying over him because they were slamming and diving over him, and he'd just be sitting there playing and singing these songs, and it was absolutely hilarious. And you had bands like Conscientious Objector, or later on there was Media Blitz that became popular, and they were a great band, and they were actually one of the few that actually started getting records out. You had the Chainsaw Blues with the garage rock stuff that they were doing. And there was a band from South Gate called Latch Key Kids that I think actually starting playing some of the clubs and stuff like that very early on, but those guys were amazing. And a band called Klowns Gone Bad, and we had a backyard party, those guys showed up out of nowhere, they were from like Huntington Park or something, they showed up at a backyard party in Boyle Heights that we were throwing, they said "Can we play?", and we said "Sure, take your equipment in there." They came in, they had a guy holding an axe handle to keep people away from fucking up the guy's drum set, and he was standing there ready to hit somebody with it. But those guys were amazing, and I only saw them one time. They just popped out of nowhere and disappeared into nothingness, I never saw them again. And there were so many bands that were coming and going around that weren't getting any attention. And I think it was just, at that time punk rock in general was kind of underground. You had these bigger shows and you had the Goldenvoice shows that were going on where they were bringing bands from the UK, so you got to see bands like Conflict or the

Subhumans or any of those bands, and they would play these huge club shows, but punk rock in Los Angeles in general, the hardcore scene especially, it was very underground in a lot of ways. So, I think it was just a matter of there wasn't a lot of attention going around anywhere, and add to the fact that you're talking about a bunch of kids that were from East L.A., and, yeah, there were some kinds of prejudices I think that were going on a lot of times in a lot of things. I don't think that it was a systematic, wholesale, blackballing of any band from East L.A., but I think that if a band went in there with a certain accent or a certain way of looking it might have been a little bit more difficult for them to be taken seriously. But, I don't think it was a blackballing thing, because there were other bands, there was a band called Terrorizer who became very, very influential in the whole grindcore/speed metal thing. That was Tony, he used to have a band called Resistant Militia who are now huge in the crust punk scene, they've changed their name to Resistant Culture, those guys have been around for almost thirty years, they were an East L.A. backyard band called Resistant Militia, and those guys were one of the few that actually show that they could play bigger shows. So again, I think it was just a matter of in general they really didn't have much interest in what we were doing. And that's okay. We didn't care.

DAVILA: So in that respect, a lot of what's written about punk—and not just about the East L.A. scene or whatever—a lot of what's written about punk within the academy, there's always this emphasis on DIY, but the way they frame it is always that it's this kind of intentional and purposeful rejection of the major labels, and possibly even of capitalism as a whole. And I was wondering if you felt, I mean you're talking about East L.A., the scene as being very much a DIY scene, but do you think that this was a conscious thought that people were having, like were a lot of people in East L.A. sort of anti-capitalist or anything like that, or was this in some senses just what was necessary?

ALVARADO: To be honest, I think that that kind of attitude towards it, or that kind of painting of punk rock and the DIY aspect of it as being some kind of conscious thing that was being done by—my understanding of what you're saying is that the belief is that it's some kind of middle-class conceit to kind of eschew capitalism, and it's like they're turning their back on capitalism and doing this as a conscious choice—I think that may have been true for some kids. I think that for punk rock as a general rule, especially at the

inception, I think that that was very much a fallacy, that's a fallacious kind of way of thinking. To my remembrance, the first punk rock record that was released as a DIY kind of thing was the Buzzcocks' first EP, the *Spiral Scratch* EP, and that was because they didn't have the label interest, and they found out how cheap it was to put out a record. I don't think it was a conscious attempt—especially considering that they had signed to a major label, like, within three years—I don't think in their particular case it was a conscious attempt to give the middle finger to this privileged access. I think that for some it may have been that kind of thing, especially if you're talking about kids that were actually rich, and yes, there are trust fund punks, and a lot of them are involved in the anarchist scene, and they've always been. You've got guys that were singers in very prominent anarchist bands who are now stock traders, which is ironic.

But I think in a lot of cases, though, you're talking about... Again, when you talk about punk rock, especially prior to 1994, which Nirvana was kind of like the shot across the bow, Green Day and Offspring was when it became a cash cow. I think prior to 1994, DIY was pretty much the only way you were gonna get shit done. And unfortunately I would say the vast majority of punk kids, especially when you're talking about places like East Los Angeles, or Southside Chicago, or even in the Bowery in New York, or any place else, these are kids that are not gonna have ready access to disposable cash. The thing that's happened in recent years is that you have things like compilation albums now, which are now essentially synonymous with label samplers, okay, where these labels pretty much destroyed that as a way of getting music across. Now it's just a way for a label to put out some kind of cheap crap to let you know what they have for sale, "These are our wares, you can listen to this and you can buy whatever you like from our catalog." Very early on, the compilation was, in some cases, the only statement that a band could get, bands like, say, the Guns, who were from the Midwest, or the Mydolls in Texas, or even the Butthole Surfers at one point, or, in the case of D.C., with Dischord Records, they had *Flex Your Head*. That was the definitive statement of Washington, D.C., and a lot of the bands on that label, that was the only thing that they released, like a band like the Untouchables, or Red C. So even in L.A., you had bands that you put out this compilation, and that was the definitive statement, and that was all you were gonna get was that one shot. And you had to pool up your money and put it in with your friends,

and everybody got together and all these bands put their money together to put out a record, and in a lot of cases that was the only way around it, to get anything out. And, so, and in our case we went ever further, where we were just recording shit on boom boxes and then trading them off on cassettes because cassettes was like an easily cheap medium, so that was our equivalent of a release. And to make compilation cassettes, you would just take a bunch of friends' cassettes of their bands, and then pick a song from each one of them, put 'em on another cassette with a tape-to-tape recorder and then you handed those out as a "compilation." And even in the greater punk scene, you had things like the Code Blue cassette, or, there was a tape label called B.C.T. Tapes, which was out of San Diego that was putting out music in the United States, and they were the only company that was putting out music in the United States by bands like Raw Power and I Refuse It, and bands from Italy, and Mob 47 from Sweden, and Solucion Mortal from Tijuana was on one of their compilations. And they were cassette compilations, a cassette company, and it was literally, you paid \$3 to them, they sent you like a 90-minute cassette with all these different bands from all these different places.

And so, again, I don't think it was a conceit, a middle-class conceit. There's no denying that punk rock in general has an anti-capitalist strain up until, again, I'd say 1994 is the benchmark. Prior to that, I would say that it was, overall, it's not necessarily anti-capitalist, but anti-systematic, an anti-system kind of mentality. Because any time you buy and sell something, that's a capitalist move. But I think it was kind of more against kind of the corporatocracy or corporate mentality for a lot of that stuff. Because a lot of that stuff... SST Records was one guy, and then he had some friends and he hired them and it became this kind of company. And Frontier Records, which put out the Circle Jerks, and TSOL, and all those bands, that was one woman that put out that stuff, and she did it at a loss. You had record labels like Play Gems that put out one or two records and disappeared after selling maybe 500 copies, and then you had bands that put out their own records. The Rotters used to put out their own records, 500 copies of this, 300 copies of that.

I guess to go back and round-robin the answer, I would say in the vast majority of cases prior to 1994, I don't think it was an intentional attempt at subverting the record industry so much as it was trying to create an alternative to it out of necessity, because bands like

D.I. or Septic Death were probably not going to be offered a major label deal. In our particular case, it was just, that kind of stuff was so out of our scope of possibility that we didn't even give it any thought. There is no label that's gonna call me, so I'm not going to sit around and hope for 'em that they will, and try to do what I'm gonna do to try to do everything possible to try to get them to be interested in me, because I won't, you know, I'm not interested in that. I just, I wanna go out there and I wanna make music, and I just wanna make, or raise hell, or do whatever the hell I want to do, or write poetry that I like, or that makes me laugh, or whatever that I'm... and I'm not looking for that kind of acceptance from the major system. And, you know, I mean, and, again, you know, when you're fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, even twenty-two, twenty-three years old, and you got no money, and you've got no prospects, and you've got no hope in hell of even being able to conceive of anybody even paying attention to you in that regard, in that sense, it's not something that you're trying to rebel against, it's just a reality, you know.

DAVILA: On a totally different note, I was looking through your East L.A. Family Tree, and one thing that I noticed when I was going through it is that I think there were maybe like five women on the list of musicians in these bands, so I just wanted to ask if you could say a little bit of what you saw as the gender dynamics of the scene, so like if there aren't that many women in the bands, were there a lot of women who were active in the scene in other ways, like were women showing up to shows, or contributing in other ways to what was going on?

ALVARADO: Yeah, there were, and the thing about that family tree is, and I think I even put it in the title of it, it's a partial tree. And that tree is very much limited to what I had available at the time, which was essentially my history with bands, and whatever friends I could actually get to come across with the fucking information I needed for that tree. So, it's very limited in its scope. There were definitely women that were involved. I mean, it's no secret that hardcore in general, hardcore punk in general, has essentially been a sausage fest since time began. It's very male-dominated, and it was very testosterone-driven. Again, a lot of sweaty little boys trying to come to terms with the way that they felt in their awkward teenage bodies, and girls were icky in some cases, and some of 'em I imagine were at some point gay and just didn't know it. But it's teenage stuff, girls are icky, boys are icky, that kind of thing. So there was a lot of that. It was very male-

dominated, but there were women that were involved.

And there were women that were involved in the punk scene, in the earlier scene, as well. In the earlier scene, you had Teresa, of course, singing for the Brat, but you also had Angela Vogel who—or I think her last name is Flores now—but Angela Vogel who was in Odd Squad, she was also in a band prior with her sister called the Clichés, which were more like a poppy punk, punky pop band, I guess, is the way to put it, more like the Go-Gos kind of thing. The Illegals had a girl in their band for a while. You also had the visual artists and poets and things, like Marisela Norte, and Diane Gamboa, and her sister Linda Gamboa. And there was other people that were involved. Angie Garcia, who ended up playing bass in Insulin Reaction, and she was also involved in the early East L.A. scene, she's married to Tracy from Thee Undertakers, but she was involved in the early scene as well, both as a participant and documenting the scene as a photographer, and as a musician—she played bass in Insulin Reaction, and she was in Knucklebone, and she's also been doing shows with Alice Bag now, too. She was in Punkoustica with Alice at one point, her and Teresa from the Brat. Teresa, Angela Vogel, and Alice that were in Las Tres for a while as well. So she's been around forever, too, and she's been involved in the scene in various ways for years as well. And then in the hardcore scene, there were girls that were promoting shows, they were artists, they were writers, a couple of singers in bands here and there.

But if you're looking for like a demographic, it was overwhelmingly male. That's just the reality. Hardcore was very male-dominated, and it wasn't just unique in East Los Angeles, it was endemic in the greater scene as well, it was essentially a male-dominated culture. There was no shortage of women, but as far as being out front singing or actively performing in a band or anything like that, it was a bit rare. It wasn't unheard of, but it was rare.

DAVILA: And that's something that Alice has talked about a lot is that's sort of when she fell out of punk a bit was when the sort of more testosterone-driven hardcore scene took over...

ALVARADO: Yeah, again, it was a double-edged sword, especially for the Hollywood kids, because they basically got run over. They had kind of put in this scene, and then they started kinda getting a little more esoteric in their music, and a little bit artier, and

they started expanding their ideas. You had X starting the Knitters, which was their kind of like bluegrass kind of side thing, and the Screemers were getting a lot more visual in their presentation, and you had a lot of those bands doing that stuff. And then all of a sudden, again, you had a whole new generation of kids—‘cause like I said, it’s generational, and punk rock generations are a lot shorter than, say, within the greater society. You’re not talking about generations of twenty, thirty years, you’re talking about generations between three and five years. And so by 1980, the punks in Hollywood had already started to kinda move on to other things and trying to expand their ideas and what they were doing, and you had this influx of high school kids, literally high school kids, from the beaches, and from Orange County. And, in one sense, yeah, those kids were all testosterone-driven, and in some cases they were psychopathic pricks, just malevolent creatures, that were very, very violent, and they brought a lot of violence. But at the same time, they brought an entire, like, breath of fresh air to the music, too, and they revitalized the punk scene in that way. Because whereas those the Bags and all those bands were kind of winding down, all of a sudden you had the Adolescents, and you had the Screws, and you had the Descendents, and you had Der Stab, and you had Wasted Youth, and all of those bands. And then along with all of those bands, you also had a whole group of bands from Pasadena and other areas that were coming out, like BPeople, and Non, and Savage Republic, and Monitor, and up in Torrance Sin 34, and all those guys that put out *We Got Power* fanzine, and in Lawndale you had Redd Kross, and Black Flag was coming up. And so, again, it’s like a double-edged sword. It became a really, really violent scene, and it became very dangerous to go to those shows. I remember reading, I think it was the book *Hardcore California*, they talk about how there literally would be ambulances parked outside some of the clubs because it was so fucking violent.

The other thing that kind of changed things and made it dangerous for us in East L.A., especially very early on for us, was that, at the same time, you had the cultural wars had started against punk rock. At first it was like, “look at the kooky little kids,” and then the next thing you knew, by 1979, 1980, ’81, you had TV shows like *Quincy*, and *CHiPs*, and all of these other shows that were showing punk rockers as these icepick-wielding, homicidal-maniac-arsonists. And then I think at one point, there was actually some

politician in Northern California that declared that punk rockers were a threat to society, okay, and so it became like open season. And at the same time, you also had these jocks that said, “Ooh, wow, it’s this violent little scene, we can go down and we can play, put all our cool football moves on these people and we can start fights with people,” and the music became like a soundtrack for fighting. So it became like this double-edged sword, I mean, you got this crazy, creative music, and it provided a creative infusion into the scene, but at the same time, you had all of these dickheads that came with it. And very early on, it got very violent to even leave your house. I can’t even tell you how many times I had problems. Standing on the corner in City Terrace, my brother had his head split open on the sidewalk by a couple of cholos that just decided that this 11-year-old kid with a Mohawk presented some kind of threat to them, I guess. I remember sitting in a restaurant in Highland Park, I was sitting with my girlfriend, I got up to go get something, and these women in the booth next to her—‘cause I was mohawked and all this other stuff, but my girlfriend at the time was very normal looking—they leaned over to her, and they said, “How could you be with that kind of trash? You’re such a nice-looking girl, how could be with that kind of trash?” I had an aunt that told my father, “If that was my kid, I’d beat the fucking shit out of him,” and my aunt didn’t cuss, but that’s exactly what she said. You were dealing with that on the outside as well, so it created a whole different dynamic, and it became a very violent thing, in the scene and outside the scene, so it was like you were getting hassled inside and you were getting hassled outside.

And a lot of those first-, early generation kids, that wasn’t what they signed up for. They were all creative kids, the first group of kids, Alice Bag and all of them, those guys were all very much into David Bowie and the New York Dolls and a lot of that stuff, and kind of being interested in creating something unique for themselves, and to kind of expand their creative expression, their artistic expression, and living this kind of bohemian, artistic life, I guess. And they were also play-acting with this violent stuff, and somebody came along and decided that that spoke to them, the violent aspect spoke to them, and that’s not what they signed up for, and they started getting hassled at their own gigs for having their hair too long. And so a lot of that stuff kind of happened, and it created a whole different kind of world for them, and that’s not what they wanted. And for us, it

became a situation where, for the punks after that, you really had to be dedicated to what you were doing, and you really had to believe in what you were doing, otherwise you were just begging to get beat up for nothing. Because it was very hard, it was very hard to kind of establish yourself, and no matter where you lived in the area—East L.A. or whatever, it especially created some serious problems for us because of the gangs and stuff like that—but in the greater area, to leave your house was a dangerous thing, you never knew what was going to happen to you. And you can read stories about the guys from the Adolescents living down in Fullerton, where they were getting chased by trucks full of heavy metal kids wanting to beat the crap out of ‘em. Or up in Montana, where they were getting hassled by guys in cowboy hats and trucks trying to beat them up. It was just the way things were, and it wasn’t pleasant, and the music reflected it. Black Flag was a reflection of that existence, they were being constantly hassled by the police because they were viewed as a threat to society.

And that’s one thing that also has gotten taken away from the punk rock thing is it’s lost its teeth in a lot of cases. To me the last great political band would have been Los Crudos, that was the last band that actually was really creating a threat to the status quo in that regard. Because after that you had that slew of pop punk and all of these kids singing about being bored, and their girlfriends’ tits, and snot, and burping, and just fart jokes. And I know it’s ironic coming from a guy that was in a band called Butt Acne, but, again, it’s different when you’re the only game in town doing it then when you have fifty billion bands doing the same thing, and instead of trying to do their own take on it or trying to be different, they’re all pushing the sound exactly the same, and that is the difference. I’m not saying that they’re not punk rock, it’s just, I don’t think that way, and so I think that’s kind of gotten lost. In that aspect of it, I think that punk rock has lost its teeth a lot in that sense.

There’s still a lot of really great bands out there, a lot of groups doing a lot of really good things, inside East L.A. and outside of East L.A. But even in East L.A. it’s become like a costume in some cases. To them punk rock means one thing, and it’s a very limited kind of an idea. You have to look a certain way, you have to have a certain kind of haircut, you have to listen to certain kind of bands, and if you have a band, you have to play a certain style of music, and you have to fit within the parameters of this. So, if you had a

band like, say, the Butthole Surfers coming out of East L.A. now, or even out of some areas of punk rock, they wouldn't know what to do with it, whereas with us it was just another great band. So now it would be like, "where do we put these guys, they're just too weird, they can't possibly be punk 'cause they don't sound like the Casualties, or like Black Flag or the Circle Jerks, they don't sound like that, so what do we do with them?" And I think that, even in East L.A. punk rock it's gotten that way, it's gotten very stratified. And even now, there was a club called the Boulevard, I think, and some groups of kids would go to what they call punk bands, punk shows, but they won't go to shows at this other place because that's where all the hardcore kids go, and then the hardcore kids won't go to this club, or see these bands because that's the goth kids. And each one of them says that they're punk rock and each one of them says that the other one sucks, and it's like, again, you're pushing yourself into these little holes, and you're losing your teeth.

DAVILA: Yeah. Certainly, when I was playing in punk bands, there was no danger or no real edge to it.

ALVARADO: The thing about punk rock shows is that, especially very early on—and again, you know, I hope to god I don't sound like some old, boring fart guy sitting around saying, "Oh my god, back in my day, it was like this," 'cause that's not my intention. Again, there are a lot of great bands, and there's a lot of really great things going on. The scene is definitely a world's difference from what it used to be. And I think in a lot of ways it's a lot better, but one of the things that's a very big difference is that very early on, to go to a show felt dangerous. You didn't know if the show was gonna get busted up by the police, and if they were gonna bust your head in the process. And even in the backyards, you didn't know how long the gig would last, it could be two songs into the first band's set, and the cops would show up, and they would be in riot gear, and you'd have to get chased down the street. Or it could go on all night, you never knew, and there was always that kind of sense of danger. And even in the greater punk shows, you didn't know what was gonna go on, and it was very dangerous, but it gave it an air of electricity. Each show was unique, and each show was an event, and it was always kind of like a little bit scary. And now in a lot of cases that doesn't exist anymore. And to be honest, thank God it doesn't, because I think it's even nicer to be able to go to a show and know

that I'm gonna come home in one piece.

But at the same time, you've got these amazing bands that are still out there. The Marked Men are great, Rumspringer—and these are bands not from East L.A., but Rumspringer from Arizona, they're amazing, the Marked Men, and the Potential Johns, the Epoxies. And then there's the slew of hardcore bands like the Bill Bondsmen, and the stuff that was coming out of Chicago, No Slogan and all those guys, great bands, a lot of great stuff out there. And so I'm glad to see that in a lot of ways it's evolved. There's some things that, yeah, I kind of haven't been around and seen it as long, and gone, seen all the different permutations. I think that there's been some wrong steps in some places, but it evolves, it does what it does, I can't control it, and I don't want to. So all I do is just sit back and watch it and enjoy it.

And these kids right now that are in East L.A., they're all thinking in this kinda little pigeonhole, and eventually one of them is going to get bored, and I can't wait for that to happen because the minute one band gets bored and starts trying something different, that's when shit gets interesting. And its actually kind of started to happen, there's a band from here called the Shag Rats right now—who ironically had Jesse Fixx from the Stains playing guitar for them before he died of throat cancer, which is funny 'cause we're talking about a fifty-five, fifty-four-year-old man that was playing literally '60s twang, garage rock stuff with a bunch of fifteen, sixteen-year-olds, so it was like a difference of about forty years in age. But up until he died he was still out there, and he was the one, I guess they started off as a hardcore band, and he said, "No, no, no, no, here's what you want to listen to. Here's some David Bowie, here's some T. Rex. Here's some Rolling Stones." And he got them to make—he's dead now, but they've gone on—and they're putting out some really amazing music, and it's just so off the beaten path that it's one of those things like, where do we put them? They're not wearing mohawks and leather jackets. And I can't wait for another band to do that because that's when things start to get interesting, and that's when a whole new substrata of groups is just gonna come out and just really make a difference in the way people think, and question the things that they're listening to, and that's what's important. That to me is more punk rock than playing fast and screaming about how bad Obama sucks, or how bad Romney sucks, or whoever sucks this week. It's more punk when you challenge somebody at the very, very

core of their belief system, at their own belief system, the things that you take to be reality, when you take something and you learn something that just kinda shakes that foundation and makes you question everything that you believe in. That to me is more punk rock than any kid screaming with a guitar, and I love when that happens.

DAVILA: I think that the backyard scene, and the East L.A. scene, it's gotten a bit of attention lately. There was an article in the *L.A. Times* about it, and they had a bunch of pictures and stuff, so looking at the pictures...

ALVARADO: The *L.A. Times* or the *L.A. Weekly*?

DAVILA: Oh, I think it was the *L.A. Times*, but it might have been *L.A. Weekly*.

ALVARADO: Okay, is it the one where I was quoted in there saying something about it ebbing and flowing, or something like that?

DAVILA: I can't recall.

ALVARADO: That might have been the *Weekly*.

DAVILA: Okay, yeah.

ALVARADO: No, I won't argue with you. It may well have been the *L.A. Times*. And again, I think in that particular case again, it's this interest—in the case of the *L.A. Weekly* article, that was written by a guy named Javier Cabral, who's a kid from the scene, and that was a big coup, because again, the *L.A. Weekly* has paid little attention to East L.A. punk rock altogether. *L.A. Weekly* has paid little attention to East L.A. outside of it having great places for fucking burritos, or fish tacos. So it was a bit of a coup that he got that in there, and god love him for it, man, 'cause that was really, really cool. But I think that the attention that's coming out of it is, again... A few years ago there was a movie called *Wassup Rockers* that came out, and it was about a bunch of kids from South Central that had punk bands and stuff, and I remember there was some attention on that, and it was like, "Oh my god, look at this, a bunch of Latin kids playing punk rock, how novel." And it's, in some cases—not in the case of Javier's intent—but I think a lot of the attention that has come from it has been along those lines, it's like, "Oh, how novel, these ethnic kids playing this type of music." 'Cause again the fallacy is that it's "white boy" music. And that has been a long-standing fallacy without anybody realizing how neck-

deep Latinos have been involved in it. Just like the way that they view hip-hop as kind of an exclusively black thing without acknowledging the puertorriqueños, and the Cubans, and all those guys, and the Latinos in New York, the Dominicans and all them, that were involved at the very inception of hip-hop, in the b-boys and all those guys. There's that fallacy.

And I think that in the greater Los Angeles kind of viewpoint, it's like, "Oh, wow, look at that, a bunch of Mexican kids playing punk rock in East L.A., who would have known?" And again, that's where it comes back, "Well, as a matter of fact, it's been going on for thirty-some-odd years." There was an article in there about skinheads, and Latino skinheads, and again, it's like the, "Wow, go figure, a bunch of Latino skinheads listening to reggae music." Ummm, that's been going on for another thirty years, that whole scene, rude boys and all that shit that was going on. And the Latino mods that were going on, the Mighty Mod Mafia, that was out of Pico Rivera, as I recall, and all that stuff. So, I think that's been—and it could be my own cynicism—but I think that that's kind of like what drives that reaction and that interest. I mean, Javier's very much about trying to hype his scene, and that's good, because the whole intent is to hype your scene, that's what you do, you know? But I think the reaction has been a lot more along those lines, and I think that's why it's been getting the attention is because it's like, "Oh, wow, how novel." And it goes back to what you were saying earlier, it's just, this to people outside is a very unique thing, and they don't know the history. I think it ties into the gentrification somehow that's going on in Los Angeles as well, because a lot of areas east of Downtown now are being gentrified. Boyle Heights, they're trying desperately to gentrify Boyle Heights, and they're gentrifying Highland Park, they've gentrified Eagle Rock. And then points west that were traditional Latino neighborhoods like Silver Lake and Echo Park have been completely gentrified and are overrun with hipsters and people that work in Hollywood. So, again, there's this interest in certain areas that were originally kind of considered taboo, because now they're starting to realize that they can't afford a place in Silver Lake. So now places like City Terrace, with its beautiful hills and views of Downtown Los Angeles, and "scenic views of the hills and the valleys" and all that shit starts to pop up in realty things, and there's articles that are being written in New York about how great Highland Park is. And this "sleepy little area" that was

traditionally Latino, or had a very strong Latino presence, that is now being gentrified because those areas are now affordable and they're trying to make them look nicer. So, I think that kind of plays in indirectly as well. "There's a punk rock scene here in East L.A., go figure, it's just like every place else," and it's safe, and it's not a bad area for all of those alternative, bohemian types, hipsters types, that would love to come into these neighborhoods, and kind of find cheap rent, and find houses that are affordable because all those other places now, that used to be hip and cool, are now overpriced. I don't know [laughs].

DAVILA: Well...

ALVARADO: I didn't mean to step on your question there, it just kinda set that off.

DAVILA: Yeah, that's fine. It doesn't matter to me if we get a little bit off topic because a lot of good things come out of these, what maybe seem like digressions, but it seems like a lot of productive things have been said in that course, so no, it's really no problem.

ALVARADO: I know a lot of this stuff has been more about punk rock than—it might be just my own view of it—it was more about punk rock than, say, being a Latino in punk rock, I guess. But I hope I gave you enough that you needed for that because, for me, I guess it's hard for me to differentiate because, again, for me they're kinda synonymous. I am what I am, and I'm both, and to me one is just as important as the other. It's a self-identification thing, and again, punk rock is a word that just happens to apply to my worldview, I guess, and being a Chicano is what I am, based on my ethnicity, upbringing and worldview. My mother was Danish, grew up in Montebello. My dad, like I said, he's Chicano from El Paso, whose family came here in 1936, they've been in Boyle Heights, in East L.A. since 1936, so even if I was like full-blooded Japanese or something like that, I couldn't be any less from East L.A., you know what I mean? Culturally, it is what you are, and the fact that I am a Chicano by blood, and by name, my last name, is—how do I put this—it's not something that I can say that I'm proud of because I didn't have anything to do with my birth personally, other than just being born, "Yay me, I survived childhood." But it's something that I appreciate and I respect, but it isn't the sum total of what I am, any more than being a punk rocker is, it's just, it happens to be what I am, but it's not the sum total of who I am, you know?

DAVILA: Yeah. And I think that this is kind of the argument that I want to make is that, in a lot of ways, like with a lot of what's going in Arizona or whatever, Chicanos are kind of treated as being this alien population who can't assimilate into an American way of life or whatever, but the truth is that we've been involved in all of these different parts of American popular culture and American culture at all moments. I mean, there have been Chicano punks as long as there's been punk.

ALVARADO: Right, exactly.

DAVILA: And there have been Chicano kids who like metal, and...

ALVARADO: Exactly. But when you're talking about something like Arizona and Texas and things along those border states, I think the deeper issues that are going on there are not so much about Chicanismo, as it is a bunch of white people that are very much, I think subconsciously at least, feeling very guilty about the fact that Polk's war literally stole the land, and the whole theory of Manifest Destiny. And I think there's a lot of subconscious guilt that goes along with that that is ingrained into the greater culture because anybody outside of Polk, and anybody that believes in Manifest Destiny, can take a look at it at its face and realize that it was a theft. They attacked a country that they didn't have any business attacking, and they did it with the intent of stealing the land. President Polk was intent on stealing the land, the whole concept of Manifest Destiny was about theft. And I think that ever since then there has been this constant fear that Mexicans are gonna someday come back and take it back. And so, there's been this constant fear.

And at the same time, the greater Caucasian, or Western European culture has been under the impression that everybody needs to fit into their way of thinking, it's their country. The Indians are a problem for them because they will not fit into their country. The Chinese, they physically cannot fit into their culture because they don't look like them. African Americans, there are so many problems that they have with them that they just don't even know where to begin with them. And same thing with Mexicans and Chicanos and Latin Americans. How do you even begin to address, when you can't even accept the fact that you've stolen the country from a bunch of different people, not just Mexicans, but a whole number of different people, you've stolen an entire northern half of a continent from a number of different people, how do you even get into the fact that not

only did you do that, but you're responsible for a lot of terror and violence against people that don't even live near you? I mean, in the case of Chile or South America, or Central America, the whole Central American region, the United Fruit Company. Augusto César Sandino was not fighting against the United States Marines because he was bored, he had a very legitimate argument, and that was that they were taking over his country and they were creating a lot of problems for the people that were there. And when you have these people that are essentially displaced, and have to come to the United States because they're no longer safe in their own country because your country did this, how do you even come to terms with that, let alone trying to get them to fit in and accepting them on their terms?

And I think that a lot of that is what happened, is happening with Arizona. And you're also dealing with an entire group of people that think that "it's my way or the highway," and don't want to think outside of that, and they can't see the irony in living in a state that's named Arizona and has names that are in Spanish. Their street names are in Spanish, and they can't... Or Texas, Amarillo, Texas. Or New Mexico. They can't even fathom the irony in that fact that they're saying that Mexicans don't belong in those areas, and that they've never belonged in those areas, and in some cases they don't even see it past those terms. And again, I think it's just this weird subconscious kind of fear that's fueled by guilt, and they probably at this point don't even realize it.

So again, Mexican Americans in general have been very, very involved in the American culture. And going back as far as the Revolutionary War, when Spain was giving arms to the rebels that were fighting against England and George II, Mexico helped with that war. There's a book that just—I don't if it's come out yet—but there's a guy, a doctor at UCLA, he's writing a book about the fact that Cinco de Mayo, which all of these states are trying to get rid of, they're trying to say that it's a foreign holiday; it's not a foreign holiday, it's a Civil War holiday, a United States Civil War holiday [The book is called "El Cinco de Mayo: An American Tradition," by Dr. David Hayes-Bautista]. He did a whole book on that, and the fact that it was actually originated in California, and how it was actually something that was part of the greater response to the Civil War, because the French were supporting the Southern states and Mexico was supporting the Northern states. And so, when the battle in Puebla happened, and the French were defeated by this

little group of ragtag Mexicans that were not well-armed, and they staved off one of the greatest military powers in the world at the time, it was kind of like symbolic of the Northern resistance to the South, or it was viewed as a Northern victory against a country that was sympathetic to the Southern cause, which was based in slavery. And so it was essentially an American holiday, and there, again, they don't see these things, and they don't understand that we are ingrained, and we are people of this continent.

And to say that you don't belong in a place that—I mean, it's been happening since they signed that treaty in 1848, that they've been saying that you don't belong here. Yes, you've been living here for decades, and we're gonna steal the land from you either by, hook, by crook, or by lawyer, but you don't belong here, so go back to where you came from, even though you've been living here for five, six, seven, eight, twenty generations. They did it to the Indians, how dare they, how dare the Sioux have the temerity to live on the land where the United States had their gold and didn't know it? And to add insult to injury, they take Paha Sapa, which the mountain that the Sioux considered one of their most sacred sites, and they put four presidents on it. So in those particular terms, I think it's more about that than I think it is about anything else. I think that some people just can't accept that this is a country built by immigrants, and founded by immigrants, and in some cases those immigrants actually were here before the other immigrants came along, and they don't like change, they don't accept change, and I think that that's, and some people are a lot more stubborn about it than others. I don't know. [Laughs.]

DAVILA: You mentioned earlier that you sort of think of yourself as a historian in some sense, with the stuff you're doing for *Razorcake*, and you're also working on a documentary, right?

ALVARADO: Yeah, yeah. The things that I've been doing for *Razorcake*, those longer interviews are actually transcriptions of interviews that I've done for the documentary. The Stains one, that was six years' worth of interviews that I'd done, and just kind of put together in a four-month period after I couldn't get their guitar player to talk to me. So, yeah, there's been that. I've been working on that very kind of slowly but surely. But I'm also hoping that I can use a lot of the transcriptions to try and create some kind of an oral history, because again, the idea is to kind of give a broader picture. And again, I don't have the conceit to think that my version of it is the only version of the history, because

again, there are so many subtle nuances, and there's so many different bands that were going on, and so many sub-scenes that I have no knowledge of, let alone any exposure to, that were simultaneous to what we were doing, that what I say is very limited to what I know, and I'm the first to admit it. I'll put it's a *partial* history, it's a *partial* family tree, *A* history, I never put *THE* history, I always say *A* history. And that's very important. I use the term historian because it's about the only description, I guess, I can come up with that somebody will understand. I'm just a guy that's trying to up his scene, and just trying to get some attention for people that I think are important, and trying to set some very stubbornly entrenched myths right. Or trying to create some ability so that somebody else can come along and just pick up on that and say, "Well, here it says this, and you've been saying this band has been quoted as saying this, however in this interview they say that that's never been true." Or something like that, so I can create some kind of a counter, or at least some kind of discussion. So I guess in that sense that is true, I'll cop to the word historian, but that's where that is.

DAVILA: But from that perspective—maybe you've said as much as you would want to say about it—but from that perspective of a historian, do you have anything more that you would say about Arizona's ethnic studies ban, which in some ways is trying to separate Chicano teens from their own history?

ALVARADO: I think it's absolutely asinine. And I think that, again, it's a *movida* that's being done by a bunch of people that cannot, and will not, accept that their version of history, or their version of reality, is not based in truth or fact, and that not everybody's experience is gonna be the same as theirs. I think that any time you try to isolate yourself in that way, whether you're a Chicano, or a white person, or Jewish, or anything else, and you try to put yourself into this little pigeonhole, and say that your way is the only truth, you're gonna run into problems. And I think that it's very backwards thinking. And it's not surprising, it's been going on for thirty years now, and probably even longer in some situations. If you look at *Occupied America*—a book on Chicano History by Rodolfo Acuña, which is also one of the books on Tucson's "banned" list—it's been going on since that border was put up. They've been trying to rewrite the history, and, again, it's really hard to rewrite a history when you've got living, breathing human beings staring at you in the face to refute every word that you put out. And I think that all they're gonna do

is they're gonna end up creating a worse situation than they already have, and it's absolutely appalling. It's not surprising, I grew up like everybody else reading about how Columbus "discovered" America, which is about as ridiculous as the concept of Adam and Eve being the first people, and not being able to explain where their son found his wife, it's about as ridiculous as that. Unfortunately, it's American as apple pie, they've been doing it from the beginning.

You always hope that you slowly progress, but the United States, it's like, they progress, but they do it fighting, kicking, and screaming every step of the way. It's like the minute there's any kind of movement forward, they gotta take a step back and look back for some kind of idyllic time that never existed. In the '70s they were looking back fondly at the '50s, now they're looking back fondly at the '90s, and it's like that idyllic life never existed, and this was never a country that was filled with strictly white people. And they've done it to every single ethnic group that has come into its borders. They did it to the Jews, they did it to the Catholics, they did it to the Polish, they did it to the Germans, they did it to the Irish. They did it to the blacks, and they brought them here. They did it to Japanese, they did it to the Chinese. At one point in Los Angeles, after they built the railroads, they did the same thing to the Chinese that they do to the Mexicans, "they're taking our jobs," and they started hanging them from light poles to make them go away. That's why you have the ethnic Chinese and the ethnic Japanese and Germans in Mexico was because they fled the United States to get away from these people going after them. It's just endemic in the culture.

And unfortunately, again, it's our turn. And again, I think it goes further back into something that goes back to the whole concept of Manifest Destiny and the theft of the northern half of Mexico, because it got really, really bad as soon as 9/11 happened. Now how many Mexicans were on those planes flying into buildings, you know? But the first thing they did—supposedly, a lot of the terrorists that were coming through were coming through the Canadian border. Why did they block off the Mexican border, not the Canadian border? First thing they did was shut down the Mexican border, and say that's where they're all coming from, and it's like, are you serious? It's just the way this country works, it's one of the dark sides of the American culture, and unfortunately it's becoming very manifest in its politics now. And you can hear it in all the code words that

are being said. We have a “socialist” president? I mean, if he’s a socialist, he’s the worst socialist I’ve ever seen. But they can’t say he’s a black president, they can’t call him the names that they want to call him, so they call him a socialist, and I think it’s just kind of endemic in the greater culture. And I think that Arizona is just a symptom and it’s an example of what that is, of that dark side of American history. And the fact that it continues in this “post-racial society”—because we elected Obama, that we’re now a post-racial society—I think it’s just one big glaring black eye. And Texas, what’s going on in Texas.

DAVILA: Are you referring to the high school textbooks, where they’re trying to write certain things out of them?

ALVARADO: Yeah. That’s exactly what I’m talking about. That they want, again... And it also speaks to Phyllis Schlafly’s son, who is part of some organization that’s trying to take the “liberal bias” out of the Bible. You know you’ve got some serious problems when your own “savior” saying things that you disagree with, that you feel you need to take his words out of a book that you say is literally the gospel truth and supposedly the product of divine inspiration, because what he’s saying is so “liberal” that he can’t possibly have said it. That speaks to where these people’s minds are. They don’t want people to disagree with them, they don’t want people that counter their reality, they want to live in this weird Disneyland fantasy, where everybody looks like them, they all think like them, they all came from where they came from.

And again, going back to the punk rock thing, it’s like this is the fly in the ointment. And that is the core of punk rock, is to be the fly in the ointment, to be that person that sits in the middle and says, “Yeah, that’s not the way things are.” So as a historian, or as a punk rocker, Arizona is a bad joke, it’s a very bad joke. And I’m horrified that those poor kids have to be treated like that. I thought this was what the whole ‘60s stuff was all fought to stop, and now you’ve got an entire state doing it, and other states using it as a model, that’s appalling. And again, it shows that in this “post-racial society” how little things have moved forward. I remember growing up in the ‘70s, and they talked about the Chicano Movement, and all the things that had been achieved. And I remember sitting there as a kid, and my father was involved in that movement, and I grew up with Brown Berets and Chicano Liberation Front people in my house. One of the earliest memories I

have is of the Moratorium where we had the *campesinos* that came from Delano and from Central California to come to the Moratorium, and they were sleeping in tents in our backyard, playing guitars and singing, and we had a small backyard, but then we were back there. But I remember those things, and I remember thinking as I went through elementary school, and having to deal with the farce that that was, that the irony in everything was that all of the fighting, all of those people that got hurt, and some of the people that got killed for all of the things, and all we got were pita-pocket tacos out of the whole deal, for lunch.

Again, those strides that everybody likes to kind of point to, and everybody has their token person that they can point to, whether it is Henry Cisneros, or Oprah Winfrey, or Barack Obama, or Dan Inouye, who's the representative for Hawaii, or the guy down in Congress now that's a Muslim, they can point and they can say, "Look, that's how much things have changed, how different our society is." But then you hear about the Sikh guy that got murdered because he had a turban, and they didn't realize that there's a difference between a Sikh and a Muslim. Or the countless Mexicans that are getting attacked, or the countless Chinese still having to put up with the shit that they have to put up with. So, again, Arizona, and what's going in Texas, and what's going on in other states, they're just embodiments of the same stubbornly entrenched crap that the United States continues to have painted.

I guess you can look at it in a very pessimistic sense like that, but admittedly there's a lot of good things, and I think in some ways things are a lot better in a lot of ways. But I think the fact remains that there's still a hell of a long way to go, and to sit around and pretend that there's this idyllic society, that all of this stuff doesn't matter anymore, and that anybody can achieve, and getting rid of the Civil Rights legislation, and allowing the reinstitution of Jim Crow laws, and all of that stuff, we can now get rid of all those things is a complete folly. And I don't think it ever will, until the United States comes to terms with its own past and accepts the fact that it is responsible for a lot of pain and a lot of misery for a lot of people, including people that are considered citizens, who are never really citizens. Terms like Latino, Hispanic, and Mexican-American, and African American, those were terms that were given to us by the Nixon administration. They wanted to identify you. The Census, they don't ask you whether you're American or not,

they ask what your ethnicity is, because again, you may be American, but you're not really, and you're not quite. And again, going back to "*ni de aqui, ni de alla*," we're not Mexican, we're not American, we're something in the middle. Gustavo Perez Firmat, I think, has a book called *Life on the Hyphen*, and that I think is the embodiment of most minorities' situations—we live on the hyphen, we are that space between the two: both, but neither. And Arizona is just an example of that. I honestly don't think that will ever change, at least in my lifetime, I don't think it'll change.

DAVILA: The funny part about it is that I was, when I was reading about the ethnic studies ban and the reactions to it, and one person was talking about how the University there has a Chicano Studies program, or something like that, and they're extending it to also include a PhD program in the next year or two. And my immediate thought was, all the terrible things that are going on in Arizona, I see that and I'm like, "Well, there's a job I could maybe have when I graduate," so all of a sudden I'm thinking of potentially moving to Arizona, which seems kind of kind of funny in a way.

ALVARADO: Yeah. Again, you go down there and you become the fly in the ointment. But you're also looking at putting yourself in a very dangerous situation, because those guys aren't playing. So it becomes a cause more than a job. And again, they're so quick to forget why those ethnic studies programs were put in place, which was essentially, you're talking about groups of people that have been marginalized and treated like garbage for generations, and they were put there to teach them, and others, that they did have a history, they did have a place here, they had a reason for existence, and that they were important, and to the story of America, as well. And in the case of Chicanos, or Latinos, that we have a history that goes back tens of thousands of years on this continent, and that when they tell you that you don't belong, it's just not true. You belong here just as much as any Indian. And to tell you the truth, that is the very embodiment of being Mexicano, or being an American—and I mean American as in North, Central, and South—being an American, it's to be somebody of the land, you are part of one thing, and you're also part Native American. We're talking people that have been here for tens of thousands of generations. "Mestizo" means being half European *and* half Native American. So, to say that somebody doesn't belong when their ancestors have been here for tens of thousands of years, that's heavy stuff.

So those programs were built to kind of teach them that there is an alternate history and that there was a difference in reality, and the intent was to say, “You know what, the history that you’re teaching my children, or teaching us, is flawed and incorrect, and we want these to counter that so that we have a place in this dialogue and this history.” And now they want to get rid of it. And so, again, they’re looking back to an idyllic time before all of the hippie stuff happened in the ‘60s, and all that commie, liberal, socialist, whatever -ism you want to throw in there, didn’t exist, and everybody was all white, and everything was all homogenized, and it’s not a reality. But that’s what they’re looking for, because they’re afraid. And with the news things that they put out where they’re saying that by X date, the majority of the population will be comprised of historically minority groups and whites are gonna be the minority, or the majority is gonna be Hispanic, or this, or that, and the other, and they don’t even take into account that when you’re talking about Chicanos, Hispanics, Latinos, or whatever word you want to talk about, you’re not talking about one “race” of people, you’re talking about a group of people, a culture that is made up of a number of different ethnic substrata. You’ve got Chinese Mexicans, you’ve got Jewish Mexicans, you’ve got genetically German Mexicans, you’ve got light people, you have got dark people. My dad was really dark, and he had a lot of Indian features, but on his birth certificate he was identified as “white.” So how is it that he’s not... how would you not count him? And again, when you start trying to pigeonhole, when you start trying to cut people up and put them in these little corners, it gets really hard to differentiate. I mean, am I white? Am I Latino? Am I Indian? My mother’s Danish. My dad was a mestizo, which means that he’s half Spanish, half Indian. My mother allegedly might have some kind of Cherokee blood in her. Where do I fit into that? Am I Asian? You know what I mean? And it gets to become problematic, and I think that, again, it feeds into those fears that they have that they’re gonna one day not have any power, and that they’re not gonna have any voice, and that there’s some kind of retribution from all these people that they’ve looked down upon, as if judgment day’s gonna come for them, and I think that they’re afraid of that. They’re afraid that, to quote Malcolm X, that the chickens are gonna come home to roost.

First Interview with Billy Branch

Email, 7/17/2013

DAVILA: When and how did you become interested in punk? How do you define punk?

BRANCH: 1982 – El Sereno, CA. Me and my best friend (Manuel Pena) met a kid in junior high who was into the scene through his older sisters/brothers. They were into the Clash, TSOL, Germs, DOA, Social D., Adolescents etc..... They would take us to gigs sometimes. Then in 8th grade my best friend's Dad started letting him take the car to gigs. In 8th grade he let him take the car! And, it was a stick shift! So, we started hitting as many gigs as we could. Then the last phase of the infamous VEX club came to El Sereno. We went there a lot and saw tons of bands..... We would walk or ride skateboards there.

Punk to me is just my sorta outlook. I like what I like and handle shit myself. If you don't like it, I don't give a fuck.....and, don't try to help me 'cause I don't need it anyway etc.....

DAVILA: What bands were/are you a member of? During what time periods were each of these bands active, and who were the other members? What was your role in each band? How would describe each band in terms of sound, lyrics, politics, aesthetic, etc.?

BRANCH: 1. No Hello – '84/'85. Me on guitar, Manuel Pena on drums, Tito Campos on vox. No bass. Sound was kinda adolescent/social d – ish.....mostly we did covers....the only three originals I remember were 'Joey', 'Change Today', 'Blow my Top' Joey was a tune about the singers cousin who moved to the bay area and came out. 'Change Today' was about the politics of the time and how they had to change. 'Blow my Top' was about having a bad day. We only played a couple backyard parties. One was opening up for Peace Corpse.....so, to us that was special 'cause we looked up to Tracy (undertakers/insulin reaction).

Lyrics to 'Joey'

I didn't see Joey for a year

Now I see him and he's wearing a brassiere

He's wearing earrings in his left and right ears

I didn't think Joey'd make it as a queer
 (chorus)
 Oh, Joey how could you?
 You broke your Mommy's little heart
 Now Joey why did you?
 To set yourself apart?
 Older brother thinks your just acting
 Younger sister thinks your disgusting
 Friends all think your crazy
 I think your probably experimenting
 Oh, Joey how could you?
 You broke your Mommy's little heart
 Now Joey why did you?
 To set yourself apart?
 Joey needs to get away from this town
 Here he looks just like a stupid clown
 He's leaving now and not making a sound
 Joey no longer is messing around
 When I asked Joey what made him turn gay
 He told me that he took a trip to San Francisco Bay
 Trip out and open your eyes
 Check out and see all the other guys
 Oh, Joey how could you?
 You broke your Mommy's little heart
 Now Joey why did you?
 To set yourself apart?

Many other bands.....too many to list all the players and such.....1900 and Hurl
 were a couple.

2. Trash Can School – 1987-1989 for me - the band went on long after that– Andy Seven

on sax & vocals, Buck Sandefer on guitar, Manuel Pena on drums, I played bass. TCS was an off – kilter punk band.....me and Manuel were about 18 or 19 when we joined. The other guys were older Hollywood punk dudes and had been in a lot of bands.....Andy had been in Arthur J. & the Goldcups and a other bands like that.... Songs were all written by Andy for the most part. We played ELA backyard party gigs as well as Hollywood gigs.

No real politics that I recall. Songs were stuff like ‘Satan’s Favorite Groupie’, ‘One eyed Car’, ‘President Junkie’ etc.....

They went on to release a few CD’s and open for band like Helmet, Ethyl Meatplow.....TCS was also part of the Jabberjaw club scene.

I got kicked out for kicking the singer in the head (on accident) –He would sit on the floor at practice and sing as I went nuts jumping all over the place while we practiced and well, his head was in the way one day.

3. Los Traviesos was a fun one.....Kenny Priesig from Ollin and Little Man & the Giant on Bass. Jimmy Alvarado from Butt Acne, Six Gun Justice etc...on guitar. Jeremy Goff from Bladder on drums. Me on trumpet. Emilio Pesquiera on a 2 string bass. That was late 80’s/early 90’s. We played only one gig at a storage facility a friend of ours was living in. It turned into a many riot w/the owners of the storage space’s stuff getting thrown everywhere and smashed to bits.

DAVILA: In what other ways were/are you active in the East L.A. punk scene? Did you organize or promote shows? Make or write for fanzines? Other types of activity?

BRANCH: I just played in bands and went to shows.

DAVILA: What types of venues did your bands play during the 1980s? Did you often play outside of East L.A.? Did you ever encounter difficulties finding venues to play outside of East L.A.?

BRANCH: backyard parties, living rooms, empty lots next to houses where we could run electricity from, basements etc....

the only way I played outside of ela was with Trash Can School because those guys were older and had connections elsewhere.....

DAVILA: Would you describe your approach to music-making during the 1980s as DIY (and did you describe it in that way at the time)? If so, what does DIY mean to you? What types of practices did you engage in that you would classify as DIY? Do you think that DIY takes on different meanings in areas like East L.A. that are—to some degree—racially and economically marginalized?

BRANCH: Yes, DIY. No, did not describe it that way. It was just the only way there was to do anything.

We just made cassettes in the garage and passed them to our friends.

There are probably less chances of having someone else do it for you or offer to do it for you in ELA, yes.

DAVILA: Did you record with any of your bands? Where/how did you record? What formats did you release music on? Did you ever work with labels?

BRANCH: Mostly just cassette recordings. Released some 45's w/Trash Can School.

DAVILA: When people talk about the history of L.A. punk, do you think East L.A. gets its fair share of attention? Why, or why not? When people talk about punk in East L.A., do you think the 1980s backyard scene gets enough attention? Why, or why not? In general, do you find that the ways people talk punk in East L.A. are accurate to your experience? Why, or why not?

BRANCH: No, not really. It's starting to get some now with the work that people like Colin Gunckel, Jimmy Alvarado, Javier from the L.A. Weekly and the like are doing.....but, back in the punk heydays the ELA punk bands just didn't get any breaks like the OC & LA bands.....I mean look at the Brat.....they fucking kicked ass and got a lot of support from Exene and X but that didn't even help..... Shit, if bands like the Stains, Undertakers and the Brat got as much of the spotlight back then their tunes would be punk 'standards' like the circle jerks/adolescents/social d's etc.....tunes.....those 3 bands in particular were fucking killers.....deadly bands.....they tore shit up. Great tunes, killer musicians, stage presence etc..... As far as the backyard scene goes, well not many of the backyard bands got beyond the backyard so I guess the backyard scene is an afterthought.....sure, there were some great fucking bands.....No Church on Sunday, Peace Pills, Butt Acne, the Thrusters

etc.....but, a lot of times the bands didn't last long or had massive member changes or the members were just too wild and crazy to get it together enough to really move beyond the backyard.

DAVILA: When you weren't playing shows, what kinds of shows did you most often attend during the 1980s? Did you regularly attend shows outside of East L.A.?

BRANCH: Punk/New Wave/Metal/some Jazz - Places like Perkins Palace in Pasadena, Fenders in Long Beach, Santa Monica Civic, Palladium in Hlywd. The VEX, T-Bird Roller Rink in Whittier etc..... We pretty much went where the bands were if we could get a ride/car, take a bus or skateboard it.

DAVILA: Do you feel as though there was one particular sound that dominated the East L.A. scene in the 1980s? If so, how would you describe it? If not, what types of different sounds existed?

BRANCH: No particular sound. Rockish type punk ala Social D. Furious type black flag stuff. Metal/Punk stuff. Oi type stuff . Art punk w/keyboard type stuff.....etc.....it really was all over the place.

DAVILA: Many people have described 1980s hardcore music as very masculine, leading to the scene being very male-dominated. Do you think this was true of East L.A. as well? Would you describe the scene as masculine or male-dominated? If you can generalize, would you say that the scene was accepting of homosexuality?

BRANCH: I think it was kinda masculine in ELA. But, that's just ELA....there are mostly Mexicans and it's kind of a macho and anti-gay due to Catholicism for the most part. I don't think the punk scene there was overtly or openly anti - gay or anything like that.....I don't recall it ever coming up.....but, that could be because of the whole catholic thing where homosexuality is really shunned and is/was viewed as shameful...etc....especially back in those days.....there was always girls around.....hanging, getting in the pits etc.....not many in bands though. don't know the scene as a whole was accepting or unaccepting...just don't think it came up much....and in a lot of cases it was and still is on an individual basis.....the people I ran w/didn't' gaybash or hate gays or anything like that.....I knew two brothers

really well that had an older brother that was a new wave cross dressing musician.....so, we were just used to that kind of stuff I guess.....

DAVILA: Are there any misconceptions about East L.A. punk, or East L.A. in general, that you think should be challenged? What are some examples?

BRANCH: This is a tough one.....have to think for a while on it.

Second Interview with Billy Branch

Los Angeles, CA, 8/10/2013

BRANCH: [Flipping through collection of flyers and clippings] I used to cut out all the clippings from *LA Weekly*, and that stuff.

DAVILA: Do you have many clippings that were related specifically to the East L.A. scene?

BRANCH: There wasn't many clippings for the East L.A. scene. [Laughs] That's the whole thing. There just wasn't a lot on the East L.A. scene. There was a little bit here and there. This used to be a column in the *LA Weekly*, kind of like a gossip column. If there was a riot at the punk gig, they'd write about it, and stuff like that. Troy Café was a spot downtown that opened up maybe in the late-'80s, early-'90s, and it was this guy, Sean Carrillo, who was good friends with the guys from ASCO, like Willie Herrón, and all them, who turned into Los Illegals. And he had a café with his wife, who was the mother of Beck. Do you know the story of it?

DAVILA: I know they had it, but I don't really...

BRANCH: Yeah. Well, a lot of bands would play there. People that came out of the punk rock scene were kind of developing their political thoughts about their heritage and all that stuff, getting *chicanismo* or whatever, this was a place where all those type of bands, like Ollin, Sol. Bands like [...], Quetzal first started playing there. Yeska was one of them. You get the idea. It was all of this kind of stuff in the late-'80s, early-'90s, it just got kind of like that. This is actually a set list from the Tumors, Jimmy's old band. When he found out I had this, he tripped out. He was like, "What? I can't believe you got that."

[Equipment failure]

DAVILA: So Jimmy's house you said was a...

BRANCH: Yeah, Jimmy's house, they would have gigs. Butt Acne would play, just local bands. That was in City Terrace. A lot of gigs were kind of over there. There were some in El Sereno, as well, some in Montebello, some in East L.A. proper. But a lot of them were in City Terrace and Boyle Heights.

DAVILA: And you mentioned a few from here that were kind of the big ones, a few houses.

BRANCH: There was Velasco St., Booboo's Pad, the Dust Bowl was another one. And like I said, Jimmy and Johnny's house—they're twins—and they had a lot of gigs there.

DAVILA: And I know that Jimmy mentions in the article that police would show up and shut down shows.

BRANCH: Oh, yeah. Especially back then, 'cause it was kind of new. And there used to be TV exposés, and they would show kids getting crazy at gigs, and the cops didn't like that. And that was at the time of Black Flag, and all those kinds of bands were playing, and the cops would always show up. My friend Manuel, his dad lent him the car when we were in 8th grade—that was crazy. And it was stick. I couldn't believe it. But we would go out to, there was a place... You know roller derby? Ladies going around beating up each other?

DAVILA: Yeah.

BRANCH: There was a place in Whittier called the T-Bird Roller Rink, and on the weekends they would have punk gigs there sometimes. And we would go, and when you walk out twenty cop cars would always be standing there waiting. So we would always—'cause we were little—we would always leave early, and get in the car and split before the whole crowd came out so we didn't get in trouble.

DAVILA: Were there other difficulties of having those backyard shows?

BRANCH: Just if the cops would come. Difficulty maybe in getting equipment, no one really had that much equipment, everyone shared. When you get over there, you're going, "Move this stuff out of the way, people might get crazy and fall on it." And there was maybe one extension cord. It wasn't the best, optimum situation. Equipment breaks, someone breaks a string, no extra strings.

DAVILA: That's still the case now, I went to a backyard show last night...

BRANCH: Where at?

DAVILA: In South Central.

BRANCH: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I'm sure it's the same. When you're that young, you don't have a lot of money, just scrounging by, trying to borrow...

DAVILA: So was it mostly a teenaged scene when it started out, or was it kind of a mixed crowd?

BRANCH: No, I would say more so teenagers. The gigs we went to. Sometimes the parents would be there, but for the most part it was teenagers. There might have been some late-teens, early-20s hanging around. But we didn't really notice too much.

DAVILA: When did you first start playing an instrument, and what made you want to.

BRANCH: I took piano lessons...

[Equipment failure]

DAVILA: Would you say that it was difficult to find financial support if you were looking to buy equipment?

BRANCH: Yeah, you just had to borrow stuff. I got a job when I was fourteen, and I was able to buy some stuff. But not everyone could do that, I just got lucky. It was a weird phone sales place where you went in at four o'clock in the morning, and you would call back east and try to sell them tools. So I would make money that way. Or I would mow lawns and stuff. Like Manny would pick me up, we would go to a gig, and his dad would lend me the money, and then the next morning I would go mow lawns and go back and pay him.

DAVILA: Would you say that there was much support for the East L.A. scene from the larger L.A. scene? Like, did bands from other cities come in to play the backyard shows?

BRANCH: Yeah, other cities like maybe Southgate or things like that. But big bands from Orange County wouldn't play East L.A. backyard parties. Once the Vex opened—I never went to the original one 'cause we were too young—but when it came to El Sereno, that was our neighborhood, so we would go to gigs there all the time. Everyone played there, Black Flag, the Damned even played there. A lot of bands came through there, but that was an established club.

[Equipment failure]

DAVILA: So you wouldn't have kids from other parts of the city coming...

BRANCH: Unless it was close, like kids from Montebello, El Sereno, Monterrey Park, Boyle Heights, East L.A. of course, Cudahy, Southgate, places like that, maybe Downtown. Not kids from Orange County or Hollywood. Unless it was maybe a scattered few, but it would be a very, very few, if it was at all. We were kind of oblivious, we were just doing our own thing, we didn't really pay much attention to everything else.

DAVILA: And it might have been just as much that they didn't really know it was going on.

BRANCH: Yeah. 'Cause a lot of 'em, you find out a day before, call up and invite your friends that have a band, they come down, make a flyer. It wasn't like there was Facebook and all that so we could spread the word. It was like word-of-mouth, and the word-of-mouth didn't travel that far.

DAVILA: The last question I asked in our previous interview, and you said you'd have to think about a while, was about attitudes toward East L.A. And I was just wondering if you think people from outside East L.A. have assumptions about it in terms of...

BRANCH: Oh, yeah, if they've never been there. Even at my work, I'm white, so they talk loosely around me sometimes, and the things they say, it's just like, psssh. They think Montebello's East L.A., they think all Mexicans ride the bus, eat burritos, you know what I mean? There's a lot of stupid assumptions. They think it's crazy, they think it's gangs everywhere, they think you're gonna get shot if you drive through there. Not everybody, but there are a lot of people who think that. There's definitely a lot of stereotypes about it, assumptions.

DAVILA: And do you think that a lot of that is perpetuated by media images of what happens?

BRANCH: Yeah, totally. It's the same thing about South Central. "Gang shooting in East L.A., two Mexicans," or "Latinos," they usually call 'em. I think so, yeah, definitely.

DAVILA: Do you think that that has improved at all over the years since the days when you were playing shows?

BRANCH: Maybe a little. I wouldn't say that much. It's pretty much the same, East L.A. just has this air around it, when you hear it, they go, "East L.A., it's crazy over there." Even if they do drive through, they see graffiti—or maybe they see a mural, and they think, "Oh, that's graffiti," they don't know the difference, in some cases. There are some parts that are worse than others, but whatever. I grew up here, so I don't see it.

DAVILA: So those were the big questions I wanted to ask to expand on what we talked about before, but if you have anything you want to add about the scene...

[Equipment failure]

BRANCH: ...didn't really go outside much. Maybe sometimes they were [...] or there just wasn't a chance. We were lucky Manuel's dad would lend him the car. Or his mom would drop us off half the way to the Palladium, and we would take the bus the rest of the way, like to go see PiL or something. But I know some didn't get out as much as we did, we were just lucky in that respect. Yeah, it was just a crazy scene, good times, a lot of crazy people. There was this one guy, Sergio, he was so crazy, like we were in El Sereno at a party, and I was driving home, he was so crazy I had to put him in the trunk of my car to drive him back to City Terrace. It was just fun, crazy, it was wild. It was like the Wild West. Nowadays... I guess it is the same, but I just don't see it because I'm older. But like you were saying, the South Central gig you went to was the same type of thing.

DAVILA: Yeah, I ended up leaving early because people were drinking from glass bottles, and there was a pit, which is a bad combination.

BRANCH: That's how it was back then. That's why Jimmy wrote his article, it's called "Teenage Alcoholics," it's like we're always carrying cases of beer, getting smashed, slamming, jumping all over the place. I guess it really doesn't change. But nowadays, I went to a gig at the House of Blues about three years ago, and I got onstage and jumped off the stage, and I felt it for about a year after that. I just can't go to gigs, I get the energy, the feeling, and I go nuts. I'm too old for that.

DAVILA: I feel like I'm too old for it, so yeah.

BRANCH: I guess by the time we were in our early- to mid-20s, we were already playing in mellower type bands, Chicano type bands. So the punk rock scene never died, but we just didn't really play it as much. We didn't play gigs like that. It wasn't as crazy.

DAVILA: You mentioned that when it started to move toward the Chicano Groove thing, that's when people were starting to look deeper into their heritage...

BRANCH: Yeah, they were getting consciousness and all that kind of stuff. A lot of artists came out of that scene, a lot of poets. Just all forms with art, all mediums, whether you're a musician, artist, poet, painter. There was even some guys, like there was this guy, Carlos Duran, he was like a mucky-muck who would hang around us, smoke weed, get drunk all the time, and then later in life, he became an artist, I buy paintings off of him. It's just weird, he does murals in City Terrace, East L.A. Some people don't get there, they get a construction job, or they're a meathead forever.

DAVILA: So would you say that there wasn't that much consciousness...

[Equipment failure]

BRANCH: ...like the kids who drew the flyers, maybe they became Chicano artists. Again, not everybody. There's still guys from the scene that are on the corner every weekend, getting drunk, falling asleep. There's still guys like that. They just never really changed.

DAVILA: Sorry, this thing keeps cutting out. I hope everything's still there.

BRANCH: Well, you get the gist of it. If you have any more questions, just call or email. But I'll definitely make you copies, these would be cool for your collection.

DAVILA: Yeah, I'd love to have this stuff.

BRANCH: Yeah, this is a total classic, "For the People of East L.A." Plain Agony, Chainsaw Blues, No Church on Sunday. This one's from Velasco St., there were a lot of gigs there.

DAVILA: You don't see these online. You see lots with the Vex, but...

BRANCH: Oh, yeah. You don't see these.

DAVILA: So it's cool, I've never actually seen most of these bands on flyers. I've read about them in Jimmy's articles, but...

[Equipment failure]

BRANCH: ...[Los Illegals] could give you their version, or their idea of what punk rock was in the '60s, bands they listened to that were like OG punkers, like the very beginning of the punk rock style. They have a ton of information.

DAVILA: 'Cause they were a little older than even the Brat and the Stains.

BRANCH: Yeah, they're probably almost 60.

DAVILA: 'Cause Willie had been doing the ASCO stuff.

BRANCH: And Xiuy was playing in bands. I think they were doing it at least as early as '77, the band thing. Xiuy's super cool, real good dude. Those are good guys. And you could talk to Rudy.

DAVILA: From the Brat?

BRANCH: Yeah. I was playing in a band with him, La Bestia, but that was a couple years ago.

[Equipment failure]

BRANCH: ...but the Vex was a trip. In one of Henry Rollins' books, he talks about it. Because it used to be at an old discotheque that was called the Copa Cabana, and the dudes who ran it, I guess Joe was part of it, but the security guards they had were like big Mexican dudes. [...] But that's where we saw all the bands. Tons of bands there. There'd be seven bands Friday and Saturday night, each night. T.S.O.L., Social D., Black Flag.

DAVILA: And people talked about the first Vex being this important site for crossover, but...

BRANCH: I think that it was, maybe...

[Equipment failure]

BRANCH: ...the Weirdoes were more like keyboard, trippy, I don't know how to describe it, I don't know what it was. But the styles were very varied. There would be some that were kind of doo-wop punkers. There was a group called the Shades, this guy Brian Quall, he was like one of the only black dudes that lived in East L.A., and it was almost like R&B, punk, new wave. So it was kind of all over the place. But yeah, I hear what you're saying. But at the other Vex, that's where zillions and zillions of, when you think of punk rock, bands played there. All those T.S.O.L., Nip Drivers, Nig Heist, stuff like that.

DAVILA: That's sort of what I was saying is that it sounds like the other Vexes, the later Vexes, were still a really important spot, a really important venue that was having these big shows.

BRANCH: Yeah. The first Vex, they were kind of breaking the mold, finding their way, especially on this end of town. 'Cause over there, you had all those Club 88, the Starwood, they could have punk gigs all the time. All those bands played over there, all those L.A. bands. X, Alley Cats. But over here, the Vex was the first real place that stayed for a little while, steady every weekend had gigs. And tons of bands from everywhere. Like I said, the Damned played there. That was nuts. Channel 3 was another band that I really liked a lot. Oh, and Perkins Palace was another place in Pasadena. All kinds of bands played there. The Dicks, the Big Boys, Channel 3 played there a lot. We saw a lot of gigs over there. [...]

DAVILA: No, that's okay. I think this stuff should be on record, and it's not really.

BRANCH: Yeah. Because you have people from the Hollywood that were writers, like Pleasant Gehman wrote a lot about the punk rock scene. And it's really, really well documented, all those bands, all the flop houses, the B.Y.O. house, stuff like that.

Oh, what I thought was kind of interesting, a little side-note, B.Y.O., the Better Youth Organization, they produced a compilation of all—well, not all—but of the Chicano bands, like Ollin was on there, Blues Experiment was on there, Quinto Sol, Ozomatli, Aztlan Underground were another one. That's another dude you should talk, too. Yaotl from Aztlan Underground, 'cause he was in a big punk band called Iconclast...

[Equipment failure]

BRANCH: ... 'cause that's a pretty cool collection, as well.

DAVILA: So that's cool that B.Y.O. would take this interest in that scene.

BRANCH: Yeah, yeah. They came and saw the bands, there was a lot of great bands. And what was interesting in that era, it was kind of the same as the early scene, all the bands were different. Quinto Sol was kind of like reggae-ish. Aztlan Underground was real, how would you say it, they had traditional, indigenous flute sometimes. But still they were hardcore. They had those, I don't know what they're called, but those big drums. But they also had a regular drummer. But they really brought a lot of a Native American element into it. And then bands like Ollin were like real Chicano, traditional instruments from Mexico. And then you had Blues Experiment were kind of funk and a little punk, more on the conscious, everybody get along together kind of tip. Whereas Aztlan Underground was like, "Fuck the white man, he stole our shit." So everyone kind of went a different direction, but all playing together.

DAVILA: So would you feel alienated by an Aztlan Underground show?

BRANCH: Oh, no. They're cool guys. I don't give a fuck, I grew up there. I'm sure there were people who would go to the gigs and say, "What the fuck?" I grew up there, so I don't get upset. It doesn't bother me. But just 'cause I know those guys, I grew up with them. If I take my cousin there, he'd probably [...].

DAVILA: You were saying they were more, "F- the white man," but they wouldn't necessarily on an individual level...

BRANCH: No, no, no. They were more towards the system, not individuals. There was a handful of white people in the scene. Very few. But I know those guys. But I could see how people from outside would feel alienated or uncomfortable. One time I was wearing an Aztlan Underground shirt, and I was in Pasadena, and there was this Chicano dude, and he was talking to his friend, and I could hear him saying, "What the fuck is that white boy doing wearing that Aztlan Underground shirt?" Stuff like that. But whatever. I know what I'm doing wearing it.

Interview with Sean Carrillo

Email, 11/14/2012-1/21/2013

DAVILA: In your archive at UCSB, there are many artifacts from the early East L.A. punk scene. How would you describe your involvement in that scene? For how many years were you active in it?

CARRILLO: Like most music scenes, the East LA music scene that developed in the late 70's and early 80's began very small. The difference perhaps, in East LA anyway, is that it stayed small. Although, after only a little consideration, I might also conclude that the "Hollywood" scene was born, lived and died under similar conditions. It was small too. What eventually evolves and becomes more well known, with millions of followers worldwide, often has little resemblance to what began as an honest, inspired and completely organic movement.

Sometimes the most difficult part, is going back and re-tracing those steps. Where did it begin? When did it end? Is it over? Were the NY Dolls punk rock? What about David Bowie? Did, these artists play a role in the East LA punk scene I knew?

One thing I am sure of is that geographical proximity and limited opportunities for expression, breed camaraderie. This is what held the East LA scene together even though the types of music and ethos of each band may have been wildly different, one from another.

As a non-musician in a musician's world I was able to witness firsthand the series of actions that create bands, rehearse, gig, get signed (or not) and eventually settle into their place in history (or not).

Another thing to keep mind when interviewing people like me who "were there" during any cultural scene or movement is something my wife discovered while discussing her involvement with Andy Warhol's Silver Factory. What were the motives, intentions or agenda, at that time, of the person speaking and what are they now? Her impressions of Andy Warhol are often at odds with those of people at the Factory at the same time as her, but as a fourteen year old she had completely different expectations than say, a twenty five year old.

My involvement is best described as guilt by association. Therese Covarrubias (as she was known then) was my friend. We had attended eight years of Resurrection Grammar

School together and our families had known each other from the parish as well. We were never close friends in grammar school but we knew each other. In high school we went our separate ways. She to an all girls Catholic high school and me to an all boys, as was common.

In the summer of 1977 my friend Michael Resendez went to England for summer vacation. When he returned he brought me back a souvenir. It was the Sex Pistols single, "God Save the Queen." Simultaneously, although unbeknownst to each other, Therese and I had become interested in punk music. One day in 1977, I was walking west on Whittier Blvd near Lorena when I encountered Therese. We recognized each other and stopped to say hello as old school mates might but in that moment I also noticed something that changed our relationship immediately. She was wearing a safety pin as an earring. After the perfunctory small talk our conversation turned towards music and we both realized we were aware of and interested in punk.

The Hollywood scene was already in existence but we were not an integral part of it. We were spectators and fans of bands that played all the clubs. We read *Slash* magazine and all the local home made press we could get our hands on (some I still have). We went to stores like Poseur on Sunset Boulevard that was actually located in someone's apartment in Hollywood. We began going to gigs together and saw lots of bands over the next several years.

It was at one of these gigs, (The Jam at the Starwood⁵⁶) that Therese met Rudy Medina. They became a couple and then Therese and Rudy created The Brat, possibly from the remnants of The Blades, a pre-punk East LA band that included Rudy's brother Romy who was to marry soon.

It was Romy who was interested in bands like Bowie and The Sparks and the New York

⁵⁶ CARRILLO: In speaking about the Jam gig at the Starwood. I remember something else of significance that may help to put it in context. The Starwood was a huge club but only one portion of it was dedicated to live music. The rest of it was a discotheque. When the Jam took the stage there were maybe 50-100 people in the audience. I remember chatting up a girl that had merely wandered over from the disco. That is how small the entire scene was in Los Angeles at that time. They opened with "Modern World" so I believe this is the show: <http://punkturns30.blogspot.com/2007/04/jam-dickies-and-eyes-april-14-1978.html>

Dolls that fueled this interest in alternative music at a time when it seemed everyone we knew was listening to either Led Zeppelin or disco on endless replay. I attended Romy Medina's wedding reception. He was a bassist and played a big old Rickenbacker. I remember he and his friends played and many musicians jammed. Romy himself played and sang "Hang Onto Yourself." It impressed me.

As soon as I met Therese I began what I consider my musical education. Therese had excellent taste in music and introduced me to many bands like The New York Dolls, Mott the Hoople, Bowie, the aforementioned Sparks (another link between Therese and Rudy's record collection) T. Rex and many others. In addition she was not limited to pop music. She also liked classical music and often played Beethoven symphonies around the house. It was an education for which I am truly grateful.

As The Brat took shape, I went along for the ride. I am essentially a cultural voyeur. I love watching and listening to what I call "art in action." I attended countless rehearsals, sound checks and gigs. I served as soundman when no one else was around, and performed the most important job in all of music, save for that of the musician, roadie. I can't tell you how many times we loaded Lou Sotos' refrigerator sized bass cabinet in and out of clubs and back to Rudy's practice room behind his parent's house on Floral Drive. I think I still have muscles from that.

The Brat were good, really good. Whether or not the "music industry" was able to recognize that or not we can only speculate, but one thing is for sure, they were not signed by a major label.

Coincidentally, they also had people working desperately not to allow them to be signed since they were protecting their own exclusive contract with the band. Eventually the clock ran out. Unable to release a single or album through their own management and with said management actively preventing others from doing so, this ultimately killed The Brat, in my opinion.

By 1984 it was all over. Punk was a distant memory, new wave had mostly run its course and I believe the members of the Brat were frustrated and tired. I felt every bit of their pain. It is really difficult to watch hopes and dreams burn like an old firework, neither brilliant nor beautiful but self-exterminating anyway.

The one bright light in all of this is the EP released by Tito Larriva and Yolanda

Comparran Ferrer's short lived Fatima Records. It captured the band pretty well and it's only fault is perhaps that it is too short. Without the internet, indie label distribution was non-existent at that time and the majority of the copies printed are probably still in Rudy's garage (or maybe on ebay).

I would also like to mention that we also shot a video (on Super-8) for the song "High School." I don't know where or even if it still exists.

DAVILA: You were also a member of Asco for a time. Did you see any crossover between punk and the art that Asco was producing, in terms of aesthetics or politics, for instance?

CARRILLO: My involvement with ASCO began in late 1979 or early 1980. In the fall of '79 Daniel Villarreal and I were working at Lorena Street School as teacher's assistants. At the same time, Therese Covarrubias and I were attending Cal-State LA as were Harry and Gronk. Harry approached both me and Therese at Cal-State LA one day and we began talking and became friends. Soon after Gronk invited us to a lecture by Jerry Drevia at Cal-State LA. This was in April 1980. I know the date of the lecture because Daniel took photos and dated them. They are on facebook. I was nineteen at the time.

ASCO art was very exciting. Harry's photos all had a very noir feeling, dark and sometimes disturbing. This was punk to me. Gronk's art was full of smiling calaveras, and odd juxtapositions of characters and objects. I especially liked his painting, "La Verdad del Terror en Chile" an overtly political piece that spoke to me. He also used black and red a lot, two colors whose political significance we exploited often. In fact, it was Gronk who first told me that black and red were the colors of Socialism. Harry was also writing things that were dark and weird and seemed punk in nature. For instance, the play he wrote for Daniel and me called "Shadow Solo" that we performed many times. This dissonance with the popular culture and simultaneous rejection of traditional imagery like corn, cactus, Our Lady of Guadalupe and anything typically Mexican were hallmarks of ASCO art and very appealing to me. Maybe this was because I felt no kinship with more traditional forms of cultural expression. I was a punk. I was not moved by most of the murals decorating East LA at that time. Gronk and Willie's murals were different. This was obvious to me long before I met them. I lived near the "Black and

White Mural” in Estrada Courts and although I had no idea who painted it when I was growing up, I was fascinated by it and knew it was different from all the others. When we finally met and began to know each other and collaborate it all made sense. Gronk, Willie, Harry and Patssi were a generation older. They had participated in the walkouts and the riots in East LA while I was at home watching these events on television but we shared a common heritage in that we both knew we were a part of the same struggle. We understood (if not fully) the nature of our roles in this struggle. We talked endlessly and Harry and Gronk were very free with their ideas as we as their libraries. Harry shared books by Frantz Fanon and Régis Debray, but it was not all Marxist ideology either. Harry and Gronk also loved movies and we went often. They were also great students of the Theater of the Absurd. Harry lent me his copy of “Joko’s Anniversary” by Roland Topor which I still have somewhere and I’m sure I still have Gronk’s copy of “Godard on Godard.”

The political aspects of Punk were something we all understood, including and perhaps most importantly, the DIY aesthetic. DIY was a big part of what we did in both punk and ASCO because in DIY we refused to accept the limitations incumbent upon outsider artists (and musicians). Punk bands created their own venues (The Masque) or subverted others (Madame Wong’s Hong Kong Café). We did the same for our performances using spaces like the Hispanic Urban Center, Self-Help Graphics and art galleries to perform our work. We made work from inexpensive things like butcher paper and tempera paint and like punk we rejected the status quo and the idea that art, like music, should continue along its historical trajectory undisturbed.

In light of this it was easy to see why we should get along. In a way, we rebellious younger artists needed mentors and Gronk and Harry, and to an extent Willie and Patssi, could not have been more perfect. We were very lucky in my opinion.

DAVILA: What motivated you to donate your collection to a university library? Why did you choose the particular archive that you did (California Ethnic and Multicultural Archives)?

CARRILLO: I was approached by Sal Guarena at UCSB. They offered no money but were interested in my fliers and media related to ELA punk. By then I was aware that everything requires preservation and I did not have the resources to preserve and archive

on my own.

In exchange for donating selected documents and media from my collection I asked for a copy of the videotapes for myself. They were able to comply with this request and I made the donation.

Ultimately I was glad that the ephemera and media in my collection were preserved in order to make them available for others.

Currently I am trying to locate the original Super 8mm film that we shot to accompany the song "High School" by the Brat. I recently came across my original notes from the shoot. I would like to find the film itself. This may be the only "music video" produced in East LA from this period. I assume The Illegals made videos after signing with A&M but this was totally funded by the Brat. The budget had to have been less than \$100.

DAVILA: You also wrote a piece on East L.A. punk for the book, *Forming*. What was that project about, and what was your interest in it?

CARRILLO: I was approached by Susan Martin whom I had met during our collaboration on the book "Playing With Matches" published by Smart Art Press. At the opening of that exhibition, the Santa Monica Museum of Art had changed their mind at the last minute and asked us not to drop a piano off their roof. Tom Patchett at Track 16 agreed to let us do it on the day of the opening so I was very aware of their space and I liked Tom and Susan.

She asked if I would write something about the East LA punk scene as part of the catalog for their upcoming exhibition, "Forming." Having lived through the original LA punk movement and since I had a particular vantage point on the East LA scene as a result of being friends with the Brat, Thee Undertakers and the Illegals, I felt qualified to write something like this.

I thought the exhibition was a good way to take a look back at an important period in Los Angeles music history and I am very grateful to Susan Martin for having the foresight to suggest a section on East LA.

My essay was never meant to be all-inclusive and by no means definitive. My statement had to do with the relative lack of racism in the early LA punk scene that I personally witnessed and the subsequent East LA scene centered around The Vex.

Later movements especially those with an essentially suburban and white middle class

demographic were indeed more racist as well as more aggro and had little to do with the original Hollywood punk scene.

An easy way to establish or identify this demarcation point is simply to plot the trajectory of the dance accompanying the music. Hollywood punks would “Pogo” much like their European and UK counterparts. There was a feeling of camaraderie and if anyone should fall while dancing then a space would open up and others would assist the person who had fallen to stand up again.

“Slam dancing” and their accompanying violence ridden “mosh pits” were a manifestation of a more aggressive and male dominated (and in my opinion homo-erotic) strain that came into existence as Punk made its way from the cities to the suburbs.

DAVILA: A number of other books have come out recently that attempt to document the punk scene in L.A. Do you feel that the East L.A. scene has received its fair share of attention in these accounts?

CARRILLO: I’m sorry to say I don’t know what books you are referring to. I only know of one, “Live at the Masque: Nightmare in Punk Alley” by Brendan Mullen and Roger Gastman and as far as I can tell it is an accurate description of that club and its habitués. I *am* proud of the fact that the exploits and adventures of Alice Armendariz, Trudie Arguelles, Robert Lopez, Tito Larriva, Charlie Quintana, Gerardo Velazquez, Michael Ochoa, Hector Peñalosa, Eddie Infante and photos by Carol Torres and Margaret Guzman are documented in this well-researched book. I’m sure there are other Chicanos/Latinos in this book too.

I have also written about my relationship with Alice in other places but the short version is that our friendship goes back to high school. She and I took French together for two years.

Whenever I saw her in the pages of *Slash* magazine or on stage at the Whisky, the Hong Kong Café or the Elks Lodge it was a source of great pride for me. What I liked most was that Alice was a member of a musical movement and she was not defined by her race. It is a subtle point but a profoundly important one for me.

In her blog Alice states it very well when she says, “I also now know that being a Latina from East L.A. and fronting a punk band meant more to others at the time than it did to me.”

My nascent political development was just beginning. I identified primarily as a “punk” and I viewed Alice that way too. Punks were so few at that time in Los Angeles that when we saw one another on the street, we immediately felt a connection. Then, when I would go to clubs and see Chicanos/Latinos both in the audience and on the stage it really felt like we were an intrinsic part of an important international musical and cultural movement. The contributions of Chicanos/Latinos to the LA Punk movement are considerable and I am enormously proud and grateful to have been a first hand participant in that history.

I also felt a thrill when I saw Diane Chai of the Alleycats or Carla Mad Dog of the Controllers take the stage, not only because they were women but also because they were from backgrounds more often marginalized if not invisible in popular culture. Institutions like LACMA, PBS, and the Hollywood film industry may have been overwhelmingly Caucasian but one thing I know for certain is that the early LA punk scene was not. It would take another fifteen years before the term multi-culturalism was commonly used to describe this ethnic diversity but punk was always ahead of its time.

Interview with Austin Delgadillo

Los Angeles, CA, 8/21/2013

DAVILA: The first question is when did you first get interested in punk, and what does it mean to you on a personal level?

DELGADILLO: My family was kind of musical. My brother is ten years older than me, when I was five he was into reggae and traditional skinhead music and ska and stuff. So I think probably around that time I was starting to get exposed at a really young age to at least countercultural stuff, or people that were defining themselves and their style of music through dress. And probably just kept going from there, like fucking around with mainstream stuff, or getting a Minor Threat CD or a Bad Brains tape here and there, combined with whatever was happening at the time, like Offspring or Green Day or something. And, yeah, so I'm thirty now, I guess probably since I was ten or eleven I was starting to identify as a punk. And around eleven, twelve was when I kind of found out about political punk or radical punk or peace punk, stuff where bands were talking about social justice issues or animal rights or whatever else.

And what does punk mean? I see it as the ability to shape your own behavior and attitude, and experiment with being... Or fighting for what it means to be a liberated or free person, within what it means to you, what it means to your group of friends, or what it means to the people around the world who are also brought together through similar music. I see punk as kind of a like a straightforward or more raw version of rock 'n' roll or blues or whatever, rhythm & blues. And it's honest usually. I think punk's really important when it's a good window into a person, or into their community, or into the state or the country that they live in. So it doesn't necessarily have to be all on the same page, I think it's just more about being honest. So sometimes there's bands that I feel but don't necessarily agree with things that they're saying, and there's bands that I'm into what they're saying but don't necessarily like their music, so it goes back and forth.

DAVILA: When did you first start playing music, and what made you want to?

DELGADILLO: Probably also when I was like five, six, seven, because my brother was already playing music. And he was doing, they were probably called the Soul Rebels or something like that, they were doing reggae, ska stuff, and then he did a ska band in the

early '90s called Suburban Rhythm in Long Beach. So whenever my parents—he moved out really young, which probably made me want to move out young, which I did—and then when my parents would drop me and my younger brother off to stay with him for the weekends we'd sometimes go to his shows. It wasn't always... He's into different music, and I wasn't into the bands or the scene totally, as much as I was looking for punk, but just seeing that example, seeing my brother play music, he was a drummer, he was a keyboardist, he always had lots of music that he was collecting. So I think for me that had an impact on me, but it made me want to find my own kind of thing. While I'll liked some of his music, or whatever.

DAVILA: What instruments do you play?

DELGADILLO: All the basic, drums, guitar, bass, and vocals, and I've switched around with different bands. Mostly a lot of the bands I've played in here have been drums.

DAVILA: Was that the first instrument that you started to learn?

DELGADILLO: Guitar, I think. Guitar was the first, but I'm more into bass and drum stuff, like rhythm section, so I'm not so hot on the guitar. I don't like to spend all day trying to learn scales and get all crazy.

DAVILA: Did you take lessons and stuff when you were a kid, or just kind of self-taught?

DELGADILLO: Just picked it up. I mean, the same thing, it's like I learned a power chord, and figured that most punk songs or punk bands that I was into just played variations of that same chord structure. So I kinda developed a good ear, I guess, over the years, and then was able to start tuning after a few years, and then start picking up on the notes if they were easy enough songs for me to learn. So, yeah, I still don't really know how to, I probably have to be refreshed on how to do tablature for guitars, I don't even know how to read music. I just memorize stuff.

DAVILA: And when did you start playing the drums?

DELGADILLO: I don't know, I've played drums on and off whenever I'd been in bands with guitar once we'd take a break and someone else would rush to get on the drum set and practice on it. But I probably only really started playing more seriously for the past

seven years or something, eight years. But I've always played probably, but just never considered myself a drummer.

DAVILA: So was it just listening to punk that made you want to start to play as well?

DELGADILLO: Yeah, because it's accessible, it's like, oh, I hear that. I write poetry, I write lyrics, I fuck with art, I like graphic design. A lot of things I was already doing just because I saw my brother doing it, or because my dad's a graphic design artist, always had rubdown letters and exacto knives around, and stuff to cut-and-paste and make things. I was always producing these fake bands that didn't exist, just fucking around with tape covers, and making mixtapes all the time. I was growing up mostly in the mid-, late-'80s, early-'90s, so there wasn't a lot of Internet stuff still, so it was still taking me time to find access to bands. And back then it would be really special to be hearing about a band for a whole year, and then finally getting to hear them on a tape, whereas today it's easy to just look it up. So I think for me, being into a lot of that, it was a struggle, trying to learn all the secrets, and all the underground stuff.

DAVILA: And have you always lived in Los Angeles?

DELGADILLO: No, our family moved around. I was born in Long Beach, but then we lived in Long Beach, lived in Ocean Side, lived in Carlsbad, San Diego area, lived in Orange County, lived in Bakersfield, up going towards the Central Valley, back in Long Beach, back in L.A., like in L.A. all over. I've lived in L.A. mostly for the past ten, twelve years, something like that.

DAVILA: Did you have a lot of friends growing up who were into the same bands, or was it sometimes hard to find depending on where you were living?

DELGADILLO: There was always a lot of kids. The punk scene was a lot different when I was younger than it is now. I feel like when I was younger, you'd get dropped off at a show at noon, get home around nine p.m., and it was bands and workshops, and Food Not Bombs, and walking home with literature from all these different organizations. And I just had a lot of exposure to different ideas, and groups, and types of people. There'd be New Black Panther Vanguard people, or animal rights folks, or straight edge kids, or gang truce people, or Anti-Racist Action, or crusty punk squatters, feminist groups. All

that kind of stuff was really prominent, and a lot of bands—you were talking about Kontraattaque—they were a band, for example, that I use to see when I was younger that would speak a lot, or even have conversations with people in between their songs. Stuff like that doesn't really happen too much today. I think that could be a reactionary thing, or it could also just be the way that people grow up, or the culture of things, or the way people communicate is different. So while that might have worked the way shit went down in the '90s, I don't think it would apply today. That's not to say I don't think things could be political or consciousness-raising at shows, but it has to just be done in a totally different way. At least for the scene that we work with, or the kind of community we come from.

DAVILA: It seemed like those bands were responding to a really particular set of circumstances in the '90s, especially in California with a lot of the legislation about immigration. So it seemed like those kinds of conversations were really important to be having.

DELGADILLO: But I also feel like there's so much more fucked up things stacked on top of each other now, and information moves so fucking fast, and people, younger kids grow up a little more cynical, nihilistic, or hopeless about shit. And I think combined with all that, I think people know things can be fucked up, but they just expect it that way. They don't see things as broken, they see things as working as they're meant to be. Which, sometimes it's good to have that knowledge but not become a victim of it, and really, even though you know that there's oppression, to really move forward and break down walls and obstacles. But sometimes, too, it just becomes an excuse, because people are just used to fucked up things happening, or numb to kids getting locked up or killed or whatever the fuck. So I think there's a lot more layers to break through around getting people to be more amped about stuff, I guess. It's enough trying to pull themselves together, keep each other together, trying to make sure people aren't getting locked up. Or it's enough for people trying to hold their families down, or survive. Like, a lot of the punks that we are connected to all hustle, all work, all have families for the most part, still young.

DAVILA: Is that something you're interested in doing through this space...

DELGADILLO: What?

DAVILA: That kind of opening up conversations. I mean, not necessarily in the same way as was happening in the '90s scene, but is that something that you think is one of the missions of...

DELGADILLO: Well, I want that to happen. I think back then I had more of an ideology, I was an anarchist, I was more kind of like really dominating about views or answers, or what I thought would be right for other folks. And I feel like it's gotta be different than the kind of militant approach that was taken. You have to take the time to build relationships with people, and maybe not jump down on 'em at the first hint of ignorance that comes out of somebody's mouth. I think that people need to build trust with each other in order to really hear each other. You can challenge somebody for being homophobic, but it doesn't really do anything in the larger context if you haven't got a chance to get their respect or to build some kind of...

Sometimes that's not always possible right away, but I think with the way we do things here it's more like we try to create space for that to happen. Sometimes we'll facilitate, other times it happens on its own. And I think we're more about showing through our actions that if you do this, this happens, if you do this, this happens. So it's like hard work ethic is really important here, people that get respect in our community are people that are putting in a lot of work for it, for each other. So I think we're trying to build power, economically and socially, and then politically. I don't think we're trying to do it politically first, I think that was the mistake of... Not to say, everything's politics, but I'm just saying to just go out there and have this platform, organization, a certain kind of language that not everybody understands, it's really alienating.

So I think for us, we're just like, "Okay, we're a bunch of fucked up punk kids," everybody's coming from backgrounds where they've been abused or been abusers, and how do we turn all this negative shit that we have into something positive. And not push people away, either. There's all kinds of folks in our scene, not everybody agrees with each other, everybody knows where each other stands on certain things, but we know that we're all still here to do this music thing, this art thing. Having a space like this where we can eventually get screen printing stuff, or have computers to do art, or fucking cut-and-

paste stuff, whatever, any kind of resource, trying to get an embroidering machine, having bands practice or record, just having a space like that for L.A. is really important, and a good way for us to document ourselves and define ourselves and work for ourselves.

So that's kind of a big thing here, there's not a lot of bands that you'll hear saying, "Oh, we need to get signed to this label, or I want to get on that label, I want this fool to put us out." It's more like, "We're gonna do it ourselves, we're gonna support each other." So there's not a lot of celebritizing that goes on so much I feel like in our scene, either. You can be in everybody's favorite band and still do something that you'll get checked for later in the night. So that's the other thing that I think is cool is that people, while they may be into each other's music or this or that, I know that people don't have respect for anybody that feels entitled to a certain kind of status, or whatever the fuck. So I think things for the most part are pretty down to earth, and it's just that we move slow here. Everybody's a stoner, things are far apart, gas is expensive, so we get things done, but not as fast as I'd like to. It's hard when you don't have a car all the time.

But, yeah, we're trying to build power. Having a venue that's kind of under the radar is fucking important. There hasn't been a lot of backyard shows of late, there's no other DIY venues that would take on these shows that exist. The Smell, for example, is a place that used to do stuff, and they don't know how to handle, or mediate, or deal with younger punk kids or kids that are coming from certain neighborhoods. A lot of times those places are run by folks that are not from the city, coming from other places, coming from suburbs, coming from different class backgrounds. So I think there's real class and race and gender, all these dynamics that go on that people don't pay attention to as to why... A lot of these punk shows, they're like, "Oh, I don't want you to come fuck up our space." But it's like, they ain't fucking up our space. We've done thirty shows here since January. If we have problems we know who's making the problems, it's our friends, and we just have to deal with it each time it happens, mediate it. And I think that other people don't have understanding for the communities that a lot of punk kids come from.

There's other places that I'd like to do shows at, but they have sober policies. There's no way we can ever do shows with our bands where there's gonna be nobody drinking and

nobody smoking weed. That's the other thing that's hard, too, is we used to work with community centers, and charter schools, and places like that, but I stopped booking stuff like that just because I don't want to be responsible for trying to babysit something that I can't babysit, and potentially getting shut down if they get found out about people drinking in the space.

DAVILA: I've seen, online, people reacting negatively to not being able to drink if they're underage in this space.

DELGADILLO: Yeah, well, what I try to tell people, because that's like a new-ish thing we have to do, is if they wanna drink, then be smart about it, bring a canteen, or don't perform that you're drinking. If you're drinking for yourself, then drink, but you don't need a can in your hand. Because if we have a undercover cop come through and that person doesn't have an I.D. to match that they're able to drink, then we get shut down. So that's the thing is like we want to have an all-ages space, and we just have to kind of do that mostly because of protecting our space. It's not like a pointless, random rule. It's a rule from the outside. Drinking, none of us that work here or invest here, really drink that much. So it sucks sometimes because alcohol really complicates shit or makes shit stupid. But again, I'm more about a harm-reduction approach, rather than going straight to like, "Oh, that's the White Man's poison, and this is fucking this, and this, and this, and it's a corporation," you know, it's just like people don't hear that shit. And it doesn't even matter, people do know that stuff, people still do it anyway. I think that you can't just go out and critique all this shit if you don't have some kind of alternatives to back it up, or if you don't have some kind of.... So I think that's why we're, again, it's like we're trying to build power so we can experiment with alternative ways of getting money, or putting out our own shit, or employing each other. So it takes time to do that stuff.

DAVILA: Earlier you mentioned something about being able to document your own scene. What do you think is the importance of being able to do that?

DELGADILLO: 'Cause it's your own words. You don't have this third person, or this external party, someone that's not connected to the scene, doing it for you or being a middle person about it. I think that's a pretty obvious punk thing, one of the things you think about when you hear the term "punk", DIY is usually closely following. So I think

doing your own media is a response to the fact that, if you don't like somebody else's magazine, rather than talk shit make your own, start something up. And even underground publications like *Maximum Rocknroll* that have been around forever, and blah blah blah, there's a lot of people that will talk shit on that, and it's like, well, make one for your area, too, do something, if you don't like the way they're running it, then you do it yourself. So I think media is really important just to...

It depends, too, though, what your audience is. Some punk media is meant to just stay within friends, some punk media is meant to kind of reach out to other audiences, some punk media... But I always have a healthy distrust for larger magazines, or culture vultures, or anything that's not coming from a real, genuine place, there's no good intentions in those places. Or I don't even know what it is, it's chaos. I don't know how things can be flipped around or utilized. So I think it's better to just not fuck with those things. In the same way that I don't call the cops. I don't know all the ways that it can go, it's a wild animal to me. And it's predictable at the same time.

I don't know how else to explain it. I think when you do your own media, and you use your own words, and you put out your own visuals, there's something a lot more powerful about that. And then you also, over time, you swap your zine with somebody else's, or you find out the zines that you like, and then those become the people you end up working with just because you have a relationship and you trust the way they do things. That's the other thing, too, in the punk scene is just, internationally, you build relationships, you have reputation, people know your work style, how things happen, so that's how you end up building the different kind of friends or the networks, based on how involved, how active, what kind of shit you're doing.

DAVILA: So was that one of the things that motivated, I don't know if there was ever sort of a formal originating point for the Silenzio Statico collective, but do you think this idea of documenting what was happening, trying to network with other scenes, do you think that was kind of what...

DELGADILLO: We weren't trying to network with other scenes at first. I mean, we had our basic networks before, but we were like, let's do this for the South Central backyard scene. Not that we were saying we were unique, but Abe and I were thinking we need to document all these bands because what ends up happening is there's so much good bands

that go through and they never have demos or rehearsal tapes that go beyond the neighborhood or some friends. And the other thing is bands don't exist for too long in L.A. It's like a year or two years, so in that quick window of time, it was just fighting for the resources to do what we could do to get things out. We obviously are in a better place now with resources, with the space to record, all this kind of shit. But I think when we were active in the beginning it was just a lot more fresh and youthful, and we were crazy, and we would spend more time doing stuff. It kind of became something that we ended up taking for granted over time. But we were ambitious, and then some projects we had in line worked, others didn't. But, yeah, it was meant to be about L.A. backyard scenes, and then kind of Southern California. The label is meant to be kind of a locals' label.

DAVILA: You were saying that aren't too many backyard shows happening any more?

DELGADILLO: There hasn't been that much, not this year. Since we've had this place, again, we've taken on a lot of shows that usually, and a lot of the bands that usually would be from the kind of backyard scene that we're doing. It doesn't mean there aren't backyard shows. I think our crew is a little older now, now everybody's getting to be in their early-twenties through late-twenties, and people have been doing this... A lot of the bands that came out of our scene, like Aborto Social kind of started a lot of stuff, that was like 2004, 2005, 2006, somewhere around there. So people have been growing up, and there's younger scenes happening. L.A.'s so big, it's like there's something happening twenty miles away I don't know about.

But the South Central scene maybe started out as street punk and kind of became something that was more about finding international punk, '70s, '80s stuff, especially a lot of Third World bands or whatever. So that kind of became a big force at least in the South Central punk scene, which is a lot of bands singing in their own language, or singing in Spanish, listening to a lot of bands from Mexico, Spain, Colombia, South and Central America, Japanese bands, Italian bands, all kinds of stuff, European, Asian countries. So, yeah, and I think that that's starting to happen in other scenes. I mean, in Santa Ana and East Los, there's kids that come here that are trying to organize, like get out mixes. Like, what we did was we made a lot of mixtapes, and that just kind of helped to push people past a certain narrow frame of bands, and reference of bands, and get people to have a habit about making sure they're always checking out and researching

and sharing new kinds of new old music, stuff people haven't heard before. I think that that's another big thing is like music knowledge is very important, not necessarily collectors, I don't think there's a lot of crazy record collectors in our scene, but definitely people are really passionate about good songs, and good bands, and sharing that. I don't think there's a lot of elitism within this group around, like, "I know this, and you don't."

DAVILA: It's interesting to me coming out here from where I'm from, it seems like there's sort of a—and not that I'm that involved in the scene necessarily—but there's sort of a different set of references. Like, I talk to people out here and I ask who their influences are, and pretty much everybody mentions Eskorbuto, which is not necessarily one that hear about as much where I'm from.

DELGADILLO: And of course people love a lot of the early L.A. punk stuff, too, like the Brat and the Plugz, all that stuff.

DAVILA: So who are some of your principal influences? I don't know which bands you write for.

DELGADILLO: Well, I listen to everything. I love soundtrack music, I love black metal, I love death metal, I love punk, I fuck with all that kind of music. So for me, I just like a lot of the originators, I'm not really into a lot of new bands. I am when I feel like there's soul and there's identity in them, but a lot of times, especially with how fast information moves and people learn about something, it's easier for someone to be like, "Oh, I like this country of bands, or this style, I'm gonna do a band just like that." I like a lot of stuff, like, internationally, and I like stuff that has a good rhythm section, bands like all the early classic punk, Discharge stuff. I love a lot of punk from South America, Central America. A lot of Oi! from France, and weird post-punk stuff. We all listen to a lot of different shit.

DAVILA: Do you write songs for any of your bands?

DELGADILLO: Mhmm. There's a lot of different song writers, and some bands certain people take more of a lead. Like with Sadicos, Robert and Gabby, who I play with, they take a more of a lead with songwriting, like I've probably only written one song for them. With Drapetomania, we broke up, but I think I did most of the songwriting, but I would

still write with Abe. And he did a lot of the artwork and the layouts, and he did all the lyrics and stuff. So it was kind of like a collaborative, me and Abe did a lot of that. So when you can find someone that you kinda have the same, you're in the same world about the kind of music you're trying to create, or the vision, or the words, then it's awesome because then you have this partner, this relationship, this writing relationship. It's better that way. But when I was younger I always was the person that probably would be the lead in writing stuff. As I got older, I'm learning to play with people, communicate better with people, have more democracy in a situation. But I think that only works if you're really honest with each other about, you're good people to be in bands, you have good communication, you're on the same page about music. It's hard to have equal participation when those things aren't all...

DAVILA: Could you give me kind of a timeline for the bands you've been active in? I mean, you don't necessarily have to go all the way back to middle school or whatever if you don't think they were significant.

DELGADILLO: Well, I started doing bands again---I did a lot of bands when I was younger—but in my mid-twenties, I think the band I started was Tuberculosis with Abe, Reyna, and Gabby, and then out of that band we kind of got a house together, and kind of did the label together. It started out with mostly me and Abe, and then we kind of expanded with some other friends. So that was around like 2008-ish, is when we started Tuberculosis. The band that started off that we first released was Asko, and that was Robert, no, that was Gabby, Tony from Generacion Suicida, and Abraham. And they broke up, and then Tony started Rayos X, and Gabby and Abe started Tuberculosis. And then we just kept meeting bands. We hooked up with Poliskitzo from there, we went over to check them out, they invited us to a backyard show, and then we saw them and then told them we wanted to do their tape, and it just kept going from there.

So, yeah, I did Tuberculosis, and then started Attaque de Nervios, and then that turned into Drapetomania. That was with Abe, Tony, and myself, but then we didn't work so well with Tony, and we started Drapeto. And then I started Mata Mata in late-2009, early-2010. And then—what else—there's probably other bands. Sadicos started around that same time, like around 2011. And Drapeto put out a demo then. So Tuberculosis, Mata Mata, Sadicos, Drapetomania, and then Drapeto broke up, and then Blazing Eye is a

new band that came out. Maybe I'm forgetting something. Oh, there's another band, Zoloa, that started. Too many fucking bands. A lot of times, too, everybody's in a bunch of bands. That's another thing. I think Gabby, she plays in three different bands, and Abe probably is only in one now, but there's people that are in four bands, five bands. A lot of times, too, 'cause some bands are more seasonal, or some bands are more active. And then it's also a representation of everybody wants to try doing different types of music, or different types of punk, rather than create this one weird medley of things. So I think it also shows that people are really just wanting to try different things.

DAVILA: Yeah, it seems like a lot of the different bands, there's people who do different bands with different people, and those people are doing bands with the other person's band mate from a different band, but it's all...

DELGADILLO: It's pretty incestuous.

DAVILA: It seems like it's a way for each group of people to kind of like express themselves in a particular way that they can't in a certain band. Transitioning, do you think that people hold certain perceptions of this scene?

DELGADILLO: I think when we first started, we were really tight and a huge group, so whenever we'd go anywhere, we'd go deep. And everyone's really down for... Pretty much if someone would talk shit, even as simply as, say, "Fuck L.A.," they'd get confronted. I think there's a lot of power in numbers, and as a group sometimes we'd use that power responsibly, sometimes it would be irresponsible. And I think it's also learning and growing, and we've played places where people are these hipsters, and there's been, people have jacked people's homes, or things like that. So there's been shit like, "Oh, those kids steal," or "Those kids bring fuckin' weapons to shows," or "Those kids have beef with this person."

And then over the time we just realized that we shouldn't play in places where we know there's gonna be potential conflict. So we don't do—say, if Limp Wrist invites us to play the Echoplex, even though they're our friends and a band we like, we're not gonna go there. And it's just 'cause we already know most of us are gonna get kicked out of the club, or we already know that there's potential drama because certain people don't have filters or can't not talk shit to certain people. So it's just like everyone has different, crazy

places they're coming, and we still have to look out for each other, so it's kind of like a weird thing.

The other thing is it's pretty insulated, it's like a lot of people don't go to those shows. We don't play a lot of shows.... Until we got this place none of our bands really do too many big shows, either. Nor is it desirable for most of the bands. I can't speak for everybody, but a lot of bands don't care about playing with old, dinosaur reunion bands, and they don't care about there's 500 people at the show, or they don't care about an interview in *Maximum Rocknroll*. It's nothing to say against any of that, I'm just saying, maybe people are being more careful, or they feel content with what they already have going on, the fact that their friends are already doing a zine with them in it, or their photos are already getting out in this thing, or, you know what I mean. And maybe people think that's crazy because you'd think if you're in a band, or if you're doing art, you want to get out to as many people as you want, but... I think we're trying to slowly build our power and our thing, and not have to rely on any shortcuts or any stepping-stones, we're trying to do everything....

DAVILA: I think I've been to five or six shows now, and I see at every show, I think there's one or two people I've seen at every show, and I'm starting to see the same people over and over again when I go to shows. But is there...

DELGADILLO: But then you see people you haven't seen at any shows.

DAVILA: Yeah, exactly. That was the kind of question I was going to ask is are there other sort of DIY punk scenes in L.A. that this kind of...

DELGADILLO: Connects with?

DAVILA: Yeah.

DELGADILLO: It seems like now that we have this space, it's been opening up and connecting with things. And even scenes that we probably don't even want to. I think it's challenging us. I don't know, I don't think that we have to feel worried about anyone being entitled to our space just because we have one, like every band has to play. Or people say we're elitists if we don't have this kind of music. But first off, we don't have permits, we have to be careful, and certain crowds... I also have to be careful about

certain crowds, 'cause it's like if you don't think about the dynamics of your show beforehand, you can have a lot of fights, or you can have a lot of drama, or you can have a lot of this and that. And I'm trying to be careful about working in, for example, more younger bands from East L.A., because in the past there's been conflicts between neighborhoods. So you can't just go full force into something, it's like I want there to be unity, but it's not so easy to just be like, "We're united." It takes time, and people have to build trust for each other. So that's another thing, too, we're coming from a place where we didn't give a fuck about other towns, and we thought our shit was the shit, and we didn't have to work with anybody, and everything was pretty neighborhood-based. So it's like you do a backyard show, and the same hundred people show up walking down the street. It's their neighborhood, or it's their area they grew up in.

Now that we have this space, though, it's like we do feel a little bit more responsible to growing our networks, but we don't really feel obligated, I don't think... I can't speak for everybody in the house, but I'm pretty sure we don't feel obligated to having to do shows for every fucking scene. Because there's the Smell for that band, and there's the Fort for that band, and Bridgetown for that band, and all these other venues. We are really specific about doing the shows that other people stereotype, or don't want to handle, and don't know how to handle. We're going to do metal, and grind, and punk, and that's mostly our focus. Doesn't mean we wouldn't do a goth night, or a hip-hop thing, or a reggae thing. But not as often. And also that's just because that's not where we built a lot of relationships yet with, so we'd love to do more of that stuff, but I also want to trust those people, and know how they work, and know what kind of people they bring. Because it could be a whole 'nother scene of knuckleheads, and, again, it's like I want to get everybody in the same room, but we have to be careful about certain types of relationships becoming dynamite.

DAVILA: And you probably don't want to bring in bands that bring in too many people, where'd you have people hanging around on the street.

DELGADILLO: Well, now we are, but we're just going to the sell the tickets and that's it, so it's gonna be sold out. Shit's like a 150 tickets, as long as we have these two spaces. If we get this spot, and we open this up [points to wall dividing units], then we can expand more. I think that we have Mob 47 and Hoax, these are two different shows that

are coming up in September that probably could draw three, four hundred kids maybe, so we have to just be like, tickets, buy 'em, and once they're sold out, you can't get in. It sucks, but that's the best we can do.

DAVILA: Could you maybe talk a little about the rationale for doing things like a membership list and having people RSVP?

DELGADILLO: Well, the only time we've ever gotten the cops called on us was from this lady [points to wall] who's a shitty neighbor, she's a really stupid lady. But that's always, it's like back and forth, these stupid little games, I don't know. But we worked that out, and then as soon as we worked that out, we had a show, maybe a month ago, where the vice cops came in—of course without a warrant—and pushed everybody out. They randomly were checking anybody that had beer on them, their I.D.s, and everyone luckily was twenty-one. And they had stopped the show—I think they came in here thinking all this craziness was going on, and really everything was pretty clean and organized, and people weren't trippin' on them or being disrespectful. So we just stayed in communication with them over the next few weeks. They let us stay doing that show, which was fine, because we were telling them, we have the support of the neighborhood, nobody really calls the cops on us, the landlord knows what we're doing, they're private events, everything's donation, we say what we gotta say. And then they would give us the runaround to talk to this permit, or figure out that license, and those people would tell us we don't have to get that, we don't need to qualify because we're non-profit, it's an art space, and blah blah. So they just told us eventually, "Okay, everybody in there has gotta be RSVP'd, they need to be part of the party, they need to be on a list, if we come through, someone's not on your list, then they're not supposed to be there."

The other thing is we gotta be strict about underage drinking. Obviously we can't sell alcohol, and we don't, but people can bring their own beer if they're twenty-one and over. And then the other thing is, which I don't think they said, but it's just obvious to anybody, is like we're not trying to have all these people hanging out front, burning the spot, because we could easily have the whole sidewalk covered. And I think this space, that space, both used to do clubs before us, and they burned this spot really bad. They'd have three, four hundred people just in that spot, packed out into here, putting pictures on Facebook of NOS tanks in the bar, and underage shit. And we're not trying to be stupid

about shit. I've been booking shows for like fifteen years, and learning over the years, and seeing what's happened to other venues enough to know, and this is true of other people that work here, too, or pay rent here. We all kind of have a sense of, like, "If you do this, this is gonna happen, if you don't do this, this is not gonna happen." So I think that we've been pretty successful so far. And the membership's just part of that thing, it's like rather than RSVP every show, one-time membership and we're good.

DAVILA: What are some of the barriers to getting permits and establishing the venue?

DELGADILLO: I don't know everything. We were trying to meet with a lawyer soon, like someone that could kinda just answer a bunch of questions for us. We have some connections through, I used to do a lot of activist work and be more involved with community organizing stuff, so I usually have some connections through that or other friends. We're gonna be opening a record store. We do want to be legit, we don't want to get caught up by the IRS, or whatever the fuck that would be, so we gotta figure out all that stuff soon. But right now, obviously we're not totally legit, and we're trying to do these private parties, these donation things, this fundraising campaign so that we can pay people for legal advice, pay for the permits we need to, become legit in the ways we need to be. So all this is fundraising to get that point where we can be more stable. So I think I'll know a lot more, be more aware of it in the next few months hopefully.

DAVILA: I've heard that in L.A. it's very difficult to pay for everything you need to pay for to establish yourself as a...

DELGADILLO: Yeah, if you go to Headline Records, for example, on Melrose, the guy that works there that owns will spend an hour telling you about all the different permits and things. But I think that, because we're trying to do things more as a co-op and a non-profit, I assume that we're gonna slide around some of these other things that more for-profit businesses can't do.

DAVILA: Have people been pretty respectful, like kids who come to shows, have they been pretty respectful of you what ask of them?

DELGADILLO: For the most part, yeah. I think nobody's ever been too crazy. And the other thing is, the only people that would be disrespectful or take anything too far are

people that we wouldn't know, or some random traveller that's all wasted, or whatever the fuck. It's like I said, people who know where we come from and what... The crew of people here, nobody fucks with them, because they'll get beat up. And it's not that we want that, I always try to mediate, like you saw me mediating, if you were at the show, the Replica stuff...

DAVILA: I didn't really see anything that was happening. I was there, but I didn't...

DELGADILLO: Yeah. But I'm always trying to... I'm aware that certain people can fight really well or can handle something in a fight, but if we can handle it, if we can get people to leave and be gone and not have to go there, or get people to talk, that's what I prefer. A lot of times fights aren't even that fair, too, when it's a big crew thing. But I think people are also aware that we're not pacifists here, but we try to talk things out, we'll ask you to leave, but if you're really pushing people too much...

Like, we had a guy that came in, older white dude, probably in his late-forties or something, who was tripping people out, I know he's probably been locked up before, and he was just rubbing a lot of people the wrong way. So I just, I actually got someone who's been a problem at our space, like one of our friends, with violence, to back me up and turn it around in a different way. I'm like, "Hey, I need you to be right here, I'm gonna ask this guy to leave, and if anything gets crazy, you should restrain him and throw him out." So I just told him, "Look, out of respect for you, we're gonna give you your money back and you're not gonna get hurt. But a lot of people, you're pissing people off, I don't know what you're saying to people, but pretty much you're outnumbered here, so I want you to be safe, and thanks for coming." And he heard me. I probably shouldn't have given him a hug, but I gave him a hug, and he left.

I'm just saying that that's one example of, I would prefer to do things like that, and have my friends be there as backup, rather than jump the gun and just use, even if someone fucks up, use that as an excuse to beat them to a pulp. I don't want to see that happen. Also because we'll get fucked over here, like police come, paramedics come, it's like, "What's this? What's going on? Where's your insurance, where's your...", you know. So fights, I hope people recognize that this has gotta be a neutral space, and if a fight's gotta go down, it's gotta be fair, and we gotta break it up when it gets too crazy, and that's it. And it's gotta be one-on-one. And, again, that's a harm reduction thing, I'd rather that not

happen, but you just can't cold turkey shit in a scene like this where everyone's used to a certain way of interacting or dealing with conflict. Like I said, it's better than thirty people jumping one person.

DAVILA: Do you think that a lot of that has to do with the neighborhoods that people are from, and their sort of understanding of conflict?

DELGADILLO: Yeah, people have different experiences, I guess, with if their families were directly violent or not, or cousins, or police, or having system experience at a young age, or if the neighborhood is a gang neighborhood or not.

DAVILA: So just kind of wrap to up, you know that my interest in the scene, in addition to thinking that so many of the bands are just really good and that it's really awesome what's happening, but my interest in it is from this kind of perspective of wanting to sort of document the history of Chicanos and Latinos in punk. So one of the questions I had was about the fact that there are so many Chicanos and Latinos within this scene. Do you think that that was in any way a conscious effort to try to network with other people...

DELGADILLO: No, I think it's, again, a lot of these scenes are neighborhood-based, and people that grew up with each other, and went to elementary school, or live in the same block. So there's different kinds of... I can't say that I know a lot of kids from South Central or East L.A. that are trying to be these kind of punks where they're looking for the next punk town to move to, and what's hyped up, and gonna go to Portland, gonna go to New York, gonna go to whatever. People grow up and stay in their neighborhoods, and are proud of their neighborhoods and their community, and they build what they do, what they hustle, how they survive, around that. So I would say these are very neighborhood-based scenes, and that's both positive and negative. What was the question again?

DAVILA: Oh, just about if there was sort of an intentional effort to...

DELGADILLO: Yeah. And then, obviously there's a lot of Latino people, or South American, Central American people in L.A., whatever, Mexicans. And I think that's just naturally, the ska scene is that, the metal scene is that, the punk scene is that. So, it depends. It depends on the neighborhoods you're in. But, yeah, South Central, East L.A., those two areas and all the neighborhoods within them, while they don't always cross

with each other, they're doing all that shit. And hip-hop, too, and reggae, and all that stuff. So it's just like, it's the neighborhoods where people come from, it's who's around them, it's their community.

DAVILA: Do you think that there's a strong sense of Chicano or Latino consciousness within the scene?

DELGADILLO: Yeah, I guess, but I wouldn't say that people are all on the same page about pushing that all the time, or being radical about that, or not even really using all the... I wouldn't say it's academic. So a lot of the language that's academic attached to that, probably not. And I don't think a lot of people really romanticize or get caught up in nationalism, either. So I think that it's more just like people are proud of who they are, and they're punks, and people are aware of their good and bad sides, and honest about that. So I think that everybody shares in experiences with trauma, and harm, and being fucked up to people, and getting fucked up things happen to them. And people kind of grow with a certain kind of hardness around that, too, and toughness. So I think people come together with a lot of that stuff there.

I think that lyrically... I don't know, it's weird. It's different than other what I would say people of color scenes, or punks of color things that are happening in other places, a lot of times those are coming from these more middle-class perspectives, or perspectives of a punk of color who was the only among a very few in a mostly white punk town. It's a different context here. Because you can begin building consciousness and then thinking about race stuff for the first time, and then applying this to your punk experience, and then really building this militant thing about it. But I think a lot of people might think a certain way about L.A., or just assume inherently because there's a lot of brown kids that there's gonna be this radicalness, or this Chicano-ness, or this pride, or all this whatever. But it's not that people don't have that, but it's not like that's what defines all of them. And I think that more than anything, people just work really hard, and struggle with each other, they deal through all the politics of the neighborhood, the prison, the jail, whatever the fuck is going on.

DAVILA: Yeah, that's kind of the impression I get for a lot of people is that they're very much aware of, and interested in their culture and all of these things, but it's sort of a

different thing than it is for me, coming from where I come from, where there seems to be more of a focus on community in a lot of people's lyrics, people are talking about things that are specific to their communities in a way that is clearly sort of shaped by being Chicano, but isn't about pushing that kind of consciousness, necessarily.

DELGADILLO: Yeah. And the thing is, there's a lot of ignorance here, too. And people are very real about all of it. So that's the thing is, I feel sometimes even the Bay area—and I'm generalizing, whatever, I'm not going to name off particular people—but I think there's ways that we can become romanticized, too, or thought of in a certain way from more radical people of color stuff over there. And it's just like, I think a lot of people would get disappointed coming through.

And you can't even just assume that you hear a couple of homies say some homophobic shit that you know what their sexuality is even. That's the thing that 'sjust twisted, there's people here that might put on a certain front, but everyone has different kinds of identities going on. But I just feel like people I've known, it's like you're coming from certain areas, certain neighborhoods, regardless if you're queer or not, you still gotta be tough, or you get eaten up. And I think that that kind of attitude is still around, it's like a lot of people don't get caught up on "bitch" and "ho" or fuckin' "fag", or whatever, those kind of words. While they're ignorant or lazy, whatever, there's still ways that people talk, or ways that people address each other that are pretty ignorant. And I think people are aware of it, and some people don't do it. It's just kind of like people don't jump down on people right away for stuff like that.

And there's a lot of anti-black racism, that's a big thing out in L.A. I think, and a big thing with our crew. And that's just a real thing, there's a lot of division, a lot of internalized racism, things that come out of prison, and come out of fuckin' whatever, come out of the media and get recycled back into our neighborhoods or communities like a poison. So with a lot of stuff, there's definitely issues with anti-black racism, and homophobia, and transphobia. But we also have a lot of people that are out and queer, too, and everyone kicks it, so it's, I don't know. It's weird, I don't think people can black-and-white the situation over here, basically.

DAVILA: And hopefully you'll feel that I haven't when you see what I've come up with at the end.

DELGADILLO: Yeah, no. I think it's just everyone is pretty real with each other about who they are, their shortcomings, what they want to do. I don't know, I think more than anything it's just changing people's consciousness around believing in themselves more, and knowing that there's more that they can affect around them if they work together, if we work together. I think that's the thing with this space is trying to figure out how we grow into being more collective, more cooperative. And it's not necessarily like there's a particular ideology driving it, but we want to experiment with different ways of organizing our lives, or doing a project, or making music, or whatever the fuck. And we're not going to stop at a record label or screen-printing business. I mean, we have people that cook, and people that might be interested in legal stuff, or medical stuff. If we can fund friends or people or organizations in our community to do the kind of things we need for survival, to depend on our networks or communities, then those are the kind of things we want. It's just as punk to me to support someone that's going to school for dentistry and to hook up punks with dental work and shit. Or it's just as simple as people growing food and trading that, or whatever the fuck, anything. I think for us we're trying to, again, build economic power beyond just a label and a band. And we know you can't, we're not necessarily trying to live off of punk, but we want to be able to work for ourselves, and we think we can use the culture as we're a part of it to create that kind of infrastructure. And hopefully that's a model to other people, too. I'm just sick of people giving up so easily, and fucking with corporations to sponsor shows and fly bands around the country and all this shit, it's like fuck that stuff.

DAVILA: And do you think that the approach or approaches to DIY that are happening in this particular scene, do you think that the experiences of people coming from the neighborhoods they do kind of gives it a different significance than people coming from middle-class neighborhoods?

DELGADILLO: I feel like in certain ways it can be more honest. I think there's a lack of honesty coming out of a lot of punk, especially from middle-class backgrounds. I'm not saying that's true across the board, but I'm just saying, with a lot more privilege to not have to deal with the same shit, like citizenship issues, or constant police surveillance of your high school, or your neighborhood, or your scene, or your shows, or growing up in foster care, whatever the fuck. Not to say that those things are always exclusive to one

class. But I think it definitely has an impact on what bands are going to be singing about, where bands get to tour, if they feel comfortable driving through Arizona or not, whether they have documentation. I don't know, I'm not saying that one's more genuine than the other, because there's a lot of punk rock that I'm really still super inspired and excited by that's made by middle-class folks, too. And I think that it's just about being honest about who you are, where you're coming from, and how you're taking apart the world and collaging it back together. And of course a lot of kids in this scene love, love fucking Swedish bands and Scandinavian bands, bands that grew up with a lot of social programs and resources and grants to fuckin' tour, just things that don't happen here. So, I don't know, I think kids have to fight a lot harder in these neighborhoods to really make their shit crack.

And there was always... I'm not saying it's the same today, but you can trace stuff back to the Brat not being able to play certain clubs, you know, until they were legitimized by X, or something. That's not to say anything about X, I think it's awesome, but I think it's weird sometimes how it's like you can be this band that are just all these Latino kids from East L.A., whatever, backyard band, garage band, but not taken seriously in the same way that white rock musicians have been. That's part of this history in L.A., so I think that's why places like the Vex eventually opened in the past because it was an alternative to, like, "We need a club for rock music, or for our music here." And that's nothing necessarily about being elitist or exclusive, either, it's just like a thing of "Well, we don't have that, let's make it." That's punk as fuck, and that's what it's all about. And it's like when a lot of punk bands couldn't get accepted at a lot of places, it was like queer bars or other places that were already marginalized or fucked with by the cops, too, so it's just like punks making connections with other oppressed people, and sharing resources, and it's not that you always agree, but, you know.

DAVILA: I also wanted to ask about your feelings about the Vans documentary and about Scion wanting to document East L.A. punk.

DELGADILLO: Well, I don't know, I think I've seen that they did a little blurb one time, but I don't know that they... I'm just saying even for the future, too, I'm saying as an example. Like these are the current corporations that have been fucking with underground music scenes, garage, or hip-hop, or punk, or metal, black metal, death

metal, whatever the fuck. And I just don't think that it's necessary. I think a lot of people are lazy when it comes to working really hard for themselves, they want to take shortcuts. And it takes time to build up doing it yourself, but I just think that that's, to get out pimped out like that, or to be under the logo of a corporation that really doesn't give a fuck... It's like one dude or a couple dudes that probably came from that scene and found a loophole or way to be like, "Dude, I have this chunk of money that could have gone down on a million dollar car commercial, and now I set up five events across the country." I just feel like there's something... I've always grown up with that messaging in punk, and that's what I've been attracted to, is like punk being about doing it yourselves, and it's not that I'm anti-sponsorship, but it's like who are you getting sponsored by? Why do you need that sponsorship when there's other possibilities? And I also think a lot of music sucks, and usually it's the bands that really, I feel like, I don't know...

DAVILA: Do you think similar things could be said of the movie, *Wassup Rockers*?

DELGADILLO: Yeah, for sure, it's a total exploitation film. Those kids got ripped off, too. I know you could talk to kids that still come here that were in the soundtrack, or signed something, and did this and that, and promised this. It's just like you fuck with those people, and they're not your friends, they're business people. So it sucks, because I don't want those kids to grow up thinking they fucked up on their chance. Whereas we're just like, "No, we're doing it ourselves, fuck it, we don't need nobody's film, we don't need nobody's sponsorship, we're gonna do," that's our mentality, and so you can never be knocked down that way except by yourself. You don't have to be dependent on something else, you're only dependent on your homies, your neighborhood, the resources you can connect.

DAVILA: And there's something, so I guess my kind of take on it, looking at it from the outside, since I'm not from here. But to me it just seems that the entire motivation of those companies to want to do this seems really disingenuous, and I think kind of indicative of one of the only ways that Chicanos and Latinos ever really get recognition in the U.S., which is as a marketing segment. So to me it feels like these companies are coming in with this idea of, "We can stamp our name on the work that other people have

been doing, to try to document...”

DELGADILLO: Legitimize it.

DAVILA: Yeah. “And open ourselves up to this community.”

DELGADILLO: Well, I always make that joke, oh, well, finally they’re validating us because without them we couldn’t feed ourselves, or clothe ourselves, or think for ourselves, or know where to travel, how to do this, how to do that, who to be, how to think, whatever. I mean, that’s just the opposite of a radical punk attitude and behavior to me. It’s not that I think all punks should think the same, but there’s some basic shit around being really stubborn about doing it yourself, learning it, and finding, making friends with people who know what you want to know. And again, I know people like, “Oh, well it’s gonna get out to a lot of people, on a mass...”, and I’m just like, “But that’s not the way to do it.” And if you want to get shit out there, organize it, make it happen, fuckin’ make a sick documentary, work hard on it, and find the right connections, set up your own screenings, do what you can do. People do all kinds of crazy shit in this world throughout history, I don’t know why people think that they can’t do anything without a corporation.

DAVILA: Yeah, like Martín did the *Beyond the Screams* video...

DELGADILLO: Yeah, and he’s been able to show it a lot of places. I know it’s pretty underground, and probably most punk people aren’t gonna be like, “Oh, yeah, I’ve seen it,” but... But at the same time, it’s like there’s enough people and resources to go bigger than that, and there’s really rad artists in here, and I just wish there was more... I’ve never seen a good punk documentary, in my opinion. I’ve seen a lot of stuff about it, but in terms of something that comes out of the community, and Martín’s thing is awesome, too, but I’m talking about something that actually has money, production, really good, everything is put together in a strong way. I think that stuff like that has yet to happen. Even a book or even things like that. There’s no real book that I can point to that I think is a rad trajectory of Latino punk from ‘70s to now. Or even starting with rock ‘n’ roll, or whatever else. It’s always just a footnote or chapter.

Interview with Tracy and Angie Garcia
West Covina, CA, 8/3/2013

DAVILA: The first question for both of you is how did you first get interested in punk, and how did you define it, what did it mean to you when you became involved?

T. GARCIA: I first got into punk like '77. A friend of mine in high school was playing records like Iggy, the Ramones, Pistols, and we were all stoner rockers, and we started turning onto that, like wow, it's a lot different than the rock stuff with long boring solos. So he was turning us onto records. Then when I was in high school, I met the drummer from Thee Undertakers—and we didn't look punk, we all still had long hair, but punk to me is not about the look, it's the attitude. So we started talking and he's saying, "Yeah, I know this guitar player, do you play?" And I was just starting out playing guitar, but they said, "We need a bass player." So I was like, "Well, you know, let's give it a try." I had some songs, and we started playing, but we were only a three-piece. But there wasn't a big punk scene in East L.A. when I first got into it, there was only a little handful of us, and people frowned on it, too. Like, the cholos didn't like us, a lot of the jocks didn't like us, so there was a lot of... Everybody says it was a racism, not from our skin color, but from what we believed in. We weren't in the Chicano Movement or anything, we were getting into the politics of what was going on in the United States, it was Reaganomic time, so that's where a lot of Thee Undertakers songs, if you listen to the CD, a lot of that—do you have the CD?

DAVILA: I do have the CD, yeah.

T. GARCIA: Okay, yeah. So if you listen to the lyrics, a lot of it deals with what we had to deal with around us. 'Cause East L.A. now is a lot different than it was back then, it's maybe more middle-class or a little bit changed a lot. But back then it was, a lot of people were poor, you went to school and got free lunches 'cause you're on welfare, so it wasn't like this glamorous life or anything. It took a little bit, but we started writing songs and going probably for about half a year, and then Mike knew this guy Art, so went to go see him—and he was a in rock band, so everybody started out pretty much in rock bands. And then we told him to come down, and we used to play these really slow goth-y, Sabbath-type songs, and he just—this is the way he talked, too— [talking quickly in

high-pitched voice] “Hey, motherfuckers, hey, we gotta do something faster.” So we started writing a little bit. If you listen to the CD it’s not fast punk, it’s mid-tempo, but if you listen to the Pistols record, it’s pretty much rock ‘n’ roll. The Ramones weren’t that fast, either, but it was just the drive and energy. And since we were young, we didn’t become cholos, we weren’t gangsters, we didn’t really know what we wanted to do in life, and then we were like, “Wow, if the Ramones can do it”—like everybody always says—“we can do it.” So we started writing more songs, more songs, and then we started playing out.

And I always tell a lot of people, like how you were saying about people say, “Oh, you’re an East L.A. band,” if you talk to other people, we weren’t playing in East L.A. in the beginning. We were playing San Pedro, we were doing L.A. before everybody thought that they hated Mexicans, and they didn’t really, they were more into the music, so they didn’t really care what you looked like, or your race. If you played good music people got into it. So we were kind of the outsiders. The Stains were outsiders of East L.A., ‘cause a lot of East L.A. clubs or whatever wouldn’t book them, but they ended up opening for Black Flag and Dead Kennedys because they didn’t want to be trapped in that Chicano Power thing like the Illegals. Like you were saying, they spoke about the Chicano thing and how it was to be Mexican, and this and that, but we didn’t. We were more into revolution, we more into for the people. It wasn’t about, “Oh, we’re Mexicans, we’re poor, and you guys are putting us down,” it was more like, “Hey, look around you, man, it’s not just us, it’s a lot of other races.”

DAVILA: Just to back up a little bit, you were talking about punk being about an attitude versus a style. Could you expand on what you mean by what the attitude is?

T. GARCIA: Just rebellious. You’re against your parents, you’re against the cops, you’re against the government. You didn’t have to wear a leather jacket, you just were a rebel. It’s kind of like being in the ‘50s, the greasers and everything, they were just rebels, they weren’t really trying to take over or anything, but they were just voicing their opinions. So I think it was more like that. You didn’t have to have spikey hair or anything, you could have long hair, but you were still a punk because, what does punk mean? It could mean a lot of different things, but people say, “Oh, you’re a punk,” because you’re not conformed to the norm. So I think that’s pretty much what I would say, something like

that.

A. GARCIA: And I think punk, personally, was the original Do-It-Yourself, because so many people that came out of the punk genre, they didn't really know how to play instruments very well, yet they got up there and did it. And it was just like the attitude of, "Yeah, let's try it, let's give it a try, let's do it." And so I think it was the original Do-It-Yourself before the whole DIY thing that's happening now. I think that was the original DIY.

T. GARCIA: But a lot of the East L.A. musicians, of all the bands, were actually really, really good when they first started, because we honed our skills, we just kept practicing. So it wasn't like we just picked up instruments and started playing, we already knew how to. Like our guitar player, he was already a soloist. Like I say, you listen to the CD, he's doing all these solos. A lot of punk bands weren't doing that, or they couldn't do that.

DAVILA: That brings up one of the questions I was going to ask. I think when you first started out, and probably even still into the early-'80s, you were doing things that could be described as DIY, but I don't know that that term was necessarily around yet.

A. GARCIA: No, it wasn't.

T. GARCIA: Back then, no.

A. GARCIA: But there was no Internet, no anything, and so everybody had to make their own flyers, they had to get out and just hustle, and get people to come to the shows. So to me, all that was Do-It-Yourself because nobody helped you do it.

T. GARCIA: The beginning of Do-It-Yourself, you could say. Nobody used that term, but there's no computers, so you had to hand cut and paste your flyers, and then you have to—and nobody does that any more, you've got Facebook and MySpace—but everything was cut and paste. If only one person had a van, then the whole band would just pile in the van because nobody else had cars, so it was a struggle. But we were having fun doing it because we felt like people were starting to turn on, so we're just like, "Wow, we're rock stars," even though we're really not.

DAVILA: To continue on that topic, you talked in your interview with Jimmy about coming from families that weren't necessarily all that sound financially. And when people talk about DIY now, they kind of talk about it as this sort of conscious rejection of

capitalism, like they talk about it as being specifically anti-capitalist, and it's this ideology that people have. And I wonder if your experience of what we're talking about now, the way you were doing things yourself, do you think that was sort of different from the way people talk about DIY now as an ideology? It seems like more of a practice than...

A. GARCIA: I think back then people weren't as aware of stuff as they are now. Sure, the world was still fucked up or whatever, but over the last thirty years, a lot of things have really deteriorated, and so I think it's opening more people's eyes to stuff. Back then I think it was more about survival. It was just like, "How can we make this work?" Just get out there and try to hustle, get this stuff going. And I don't know if when you're that young, I don't think you have the same mindset as you do when you're older. 'Cause you're just about getting out and doing it, having fun. And as you age, you sort of take into consideration reactions, and...

T. GARCIA: Well, you have responsibilities now. Back then we had responsibilities—not responsibilities like you had to pay bills, but we had responsibility as like, if you're going to be in a band, we gotta be as a family, and we have to pretty much live together, work together. But, yeah, we didn't come from rich families, and scraped our money, what little bit of money we could, to get equipment, or gas, and maybe a little bit of food. But nobody's making money off it to support families. But yeah, I think everybody, the bands from East L.A. came from either middle-class, or poor, or welfare families.

DAVILA: And do you think that DIY sort of means something different in a setting like that? You think sometimes about Olympia, Washington and that whole scene, they were putting music on tapes when they didn't have to just because they kind of imagined it to be somehow more pure or authentic in some way. Versus, I don't know if you read Jimmy's interview with the guy from Social Conflict, a newer East L.A. band, and he was talking about stealing tapes from this Chinese church, like they had devotional tapes, and he would steal them and record his music over it just because that was the only...

T. GARCIA: I think—and I'll just speak for Thee Undertakers on this one, though—but we never worried about cassettes. We used to make reel-to-reels and demo tapes just for ourselves to see what we sounded like. But I think back then people were more wanting to put albums out, so we were looking for record deals, and we were trying to get records

out, and that was a struggle. So the DIY back then, I don't think applied in that time, because I don't think people really, like you said, didn't use that term. It was more like survival and the struggle just to get your music out there. But I never saw any cassettes or anything from anybody back then, I think everybody was just trying to put records out.

A. GARCIA: Well, I think that at that time it was still 8-tracks, wasn't it?

T. GARCIA: No, it wasn't that old, geez. But I can't recall, nobody put out cassettes, everybody was trying to get albums out. And a lot of records didn't come out until the '80s. Like our record should have been out, but it didn't come out, but thirty years later it did. But it seemed like going through the '70s, X got a record—but those are L.A. bands, so they were able to get into the record labels. But the East L.A. bands, there was Fatima Records, and the Brat put theirs out on there. We were supposed to be on that, but something happened and I don't know what, but that was between our singer and him. But those were the only labels that were willing to put Mexican, or East L.A. bands out. But there's not too many of the bands that did get their records out. The Stains got their records out, the Illegals did, and the Brat did. But that was about it. So as far as cassettes, like I said, we would make tapes of us practicing, but we never sat down and did a proper recording until we did that album.

DAVILA: That brings up another question I was wanting to ask. You were talking about wanting to put out an album, and it kind of seems like when you get into the '80s with the hardcore bands, they kind of had this idea that they didn't want to be famous, they didn't want to work with major labels, they were kind of against all of that. But it seemed like in the earlier days there was this idea that it might be possible, if people were able to get their albums out, that people could change the mainstream, that punk could become the mainstream. And I wondered if that was the case for Thee Undertakers?

T. GARCIA: We wanted to put a record out to be mainstream. The Brat—like I said, I'm not speaking for them—but when their records are coming out, they're opening up for Adam Ant and the Bauhaus. And then our management was getting us gigs with Suburban Lawns and X. We were opening up for some pretty good bands. So like you said, the '80s was the hardcore, that's when everybody was anti- this and that. We were more like, yeah, we can be rebellious and anti-political, but it would be nice to have an album out on a major label and would be able to make a little bit of money off of it.

Yeah, it might be called selling out. But if you can make a living off of music, it would be great. And then you get to speak your mind, and you're actually kind of preaching to other people—not preaching, but getting your message out. So I think that would be the right answer to say is, yeah, we wanted to get our message out, but we wanted to get it out worldwide, not just in L.A.

A. GARCIA: It's so funny in the whole business because you start off as a small band, and you get your loyal following, and then the minute you start getting successful, a lot of people from that original group of followers, then they start calling you sellout and stuff. And yet, what's the purpose of starting the whole thing? It's to become successful. And their singer always said, "If we can make money, let's make money," while some people were like, "Oh, no, then you're going to be a sell out." So it's always been a kind of yin-yang thing.

T. GARCIA: The drummer was like that, he goes, "I don't care about money," and our singer was like, "What are you talking about? If we can make money off this, this would be great." And that's why we practiced so much, and we got tight, and people used to come see us, and they're going, "Damn, you guys are so great." Unfortunately, like I said, the record didn't come out, and people tell me know if that record came out when it should have it could have been something still today. But things happen, and for a reason. But I'm glad it came out finally because people are actually. People bought it in Japan, Greg from Artifix sent a thing from Yugoslavia that they got. So it's not huge, but what we were talking about, I wanted to be worldwide, and somebody somewhere has got it, so that makes me feel good.

DAVILA: Did people actually use the term "sellout" back then?

T. GARCIA: Yeah. Like Social Distortion, when they started getting big, everybody was saying, "Oh, you're a sellout." Anybody who was, all of a sudden they've got a little bit of money, and the label's putting them out, and they're getting good shows, you're a sellout, I'm thinking, so you want to stay in the garage or backyard parties your whole life? No, we want to play big clubs. We're opening up for X and Suburban Lawns, and we're playing in front of hundreds of people. When you're a kid, that's a thrill. Not in a backyard party when it's twenty people, and everybody's drunk, and slamming and falling all over the place. We did want to be successful. That was the main thing.

A. GARCIA: It's so funny because there's a saying that East L.A. is like a crab pot. Everybody's in a band or whatever, and the minute somebody starts making it, everybody starts calling them sellout, and they're trying to pull 'em back down into the crab pot. Instead of being happy that somebody's getting successful, or getting a little bit of notoriety. No, they want to pull 'em back down, and they don't want to see anybody succeed. And I don't know if it's jealousy, I don't know what it is, but it's just sad. And it's happened with so many bands that we know, with people, artists. It's just never-ending.

T. GARCIA: Like the Illegals got on A&M Records. We didn't say, "Oh, what a bunch..." it was like, "Wow, we wish we could have gotten on A&M Records." But that's what you strive for. Even today, if you're going to be in a band, you've got to make it. But there's so many bands now, they're not going to be huge or anything.

A. GARCIA: It's a whole different world now. Anybody can put anything out on the Internet. You don't even need a label any more, you don't need a publisher, you don't need anything. You can just put your stuff online, and be as...

T. GARCIA: Which, like you were saying about cassettes and records, back then that's all you could get out. There was no Internet. Now you just put it on SoundCloud, you put a great video on YouTube and it gets a million hits. Never had that before. So times have changed a lot.

DAVILA: It's cool, though, I have a blog that I post some of this stuff to, and I posted "Crucify Me" to it, and I got an email from somebody who was like, "Oh, I found your blog because I was looking for another song," I forget which one, but it was one from the 7" that came out.

T. GARCIA: Oh, Artifix, yeah.

DAVILA: Yeah. And it seems pretty cool that the Internet seems to have allowed, you didn't have it at the time, but now that it's around, and now that your album is out finally, it seems to be allowing a lot more people to come to it.

A. GARCIA: Yeah, more exposure, I know.

T. GARCIA: Well, there's people researching, like you said, the East L.A. scene. And I would say, up to 2000, nobody really talked about it, and then all of a sudden 2000 came

on, and everybody's like, "Oh, can you guys do reunion shows, and can you do this?" And then Jimmy and people started getting involved with it and doing interviews. And at first, it was like, "Oh, we're getting older, do we really want to do this?" And I thought, "You know what, fuck it." Let people know what happened back then. I'll give you an example, we played at Self-Help, at the first reunion show, I think it was 2001.

A. GARCIA: Yeah.

T. GARCIA: And we're standing outside, and I'm watching all these kids walking from different parts of the block, and I'm like, "Where the hell are they coming from?" And I talked to a few of them, they go, "Yeah, my parents used to see you guys play here, and we live down the street." And they still live there, and now the kids are coming to see us because their parents, "Oh, go see them. We used to see them." We would see their parents, too, but it was amazing how all these kids were just all over. And, as you said, Jimmy researched a lot, there's a lot of young East L.A. bands still coming out now, which is generation to generation. The scene's different, the music's different, but it's still in that whole little sector, so that made my night. I was just like, "Wow, this is pretty cool."

DAVILA: Maybe if you're willing, we could talk a little bit about the album and why you think it didn't come out when it should have?

A. GARCIA: That has to do with the singer, and...

T. GARCIA: There were just a lot of problems. Substance abuse messes people's heads up. We were playing so much and not taking breaks, it's kind of like the Clash, no vacation, just keep going. We did the album in two days, and people don't know that, but we tell them we recorded all the music in one day, tracked it, singer came in the next day, the third day they mixed it, it was ready to go. And then, I always say, just the car slammed into a wall. Everything just started falling apart. And at the same time, bands around us, even though their records were out, they started having the same problem. A lot of personal issues, you know. And people start throwing more ideas, and people want more out of you, and you don't know how to... Like you were saying, you want to be successful, but when it starts being thrown at you, you start getting like, "Oh, shit, are we prepared for this?" And I don't think a lot of the people were prepared for it.

DAVILA: So Roadhouse, that was a record store?

T. GARCIA: Roadhouse Records, yeah.

DAVILA: And were they putting out other albums?

T. GARCIA: I think we were gonna be the first band. And all the artwork was ready, recording was ready, everything was ready to go, and I think it was just a matter of they didn't have enough money, and like I said, a lot of internal problems, and for some reason it just didn't come out, which is unfortunate. And then the band kind of imploded, and everybody just started going their own ways, and then we didn't hear from anybody. And then Grand Theft Audio got a hold of us, and were like, "Hey, we want to put out the record." And we're like, "Okay, we're not going to make any money off this, but I'd rather just have it out," just to share our experience, and so that's how that came about. But, yeah, it sucked when it didn't come out, 'cause we were all just really excited about it, like, "Okay, we got this recording, we got the artwork, and everything's ready to go," and then when you have that carpet pulled from under you, you're just kind of like, "What do we now, who's really going to want to put this out?" And then, plus, when somebody else has the tapes and you can't get a hold of 'em, your hands are tied pretty much.

DAVILA: It's sort of a similar story with the Stains, they recorded their album with SST, but then it got delayed because when you're working with those kinds of small labels, or in this case not even a proper label, just someone who wanted to put it out for you, things go wrong and there's no budget, and then...

T. GARCIA: It's the budget thing.

A. GARCIA: Somebody gets mad or in a fight.

DAVILA: You were talking about Fatima being kind of the only label that was willing to put out East L.A. bands, and I guess I was kind of wondering if you think there's a reason why people weren't interested in putting out East L.A. bands?

T. GARCIA: Probably because, I would say, bands weren't shopping—except maybe the Illlegals to A&M or whatever—it was like if a label came and said, "Hey, we want to put your record out," you just take advantage of that just to get it out. I don't think anybody's

gonna get rich off of it. But Fatima was ran from Latinos and stuff, they had Richard Duardo doing artwork for everybody. So it was kind of like, I think I would consider them a proper label, because they did kind of have their shit together, they did put the records out, they did artwork, they did all the advertisement for you. Which, as smaller labels didn't really have the budget to do that, it's like, "Okay, your record's done," now you gotta distribute it, but where are you gonna distribute it? I don't know if Fatima was worldwide, but we were talking about that, I wanted the record to be worldwide. Even if the record came out back then, I don't know how far it would have actually gotten. It probably would have just been in L.A. But, like you said, it's up to the label how far you want to take it.

DAVILA: Do you remember many of the details, did you have a contract with Roadhouse or anything?

T. GARCIA: I don't remember.

A. GARCIA: I don't think they did.

T. GARCIA: I don't think we had a contract, no.

A. GARCIA: I think it was all verbal things.

T. GARCIA: A lot of things were verbal back then, because you trusted everybody. You were just kind of like, 'cause everybody were not friends, but we knew each other, so it was just kind of like, "Oh, we trust you." And then when something happens, then you get pissed, but when you don't have it in writing, what are you gonna do? You can't do anything about it.

DAVILA: Do you remember, did they front you for the recording?

T. GARCIA: Oh, yeah, they paid for the recording and everything. So, yeah, nothing came out of our pocket. We had a budget, and that's why we tried to get it done in two days, three days, because that way we would have more money to put into the artwork, and more money to distribute. But like I said, I don't even know what it was, just things...

A. GARCIA: It was nothing that the band actually did. The singer and one of the guys at the thing, there was a lot of [substance abuse] back then. And it's not that they didn't put it out because of blah blah blah, it was just sort of like, there was trouble at Roadhouse,

there was trouble between the singer and somebody there.

T. GARCIA: And other band members who didn't agree on certain things.

A. GARCIA: I had just met him at the time. The band was starting to sort of fall apart, and they tried to kick the singer out, and so then they tried to get other people in the band, so they were calling me like the Yoko Ono. Because Tracy suddenly didn't want to, "Do I want to go practice with these guys when they're gonna be bitchy?"

T. GARCIA: Well, that's what happens after a while. You've just been doing it for so long, you just get sick of it. And you want to see success, but you're still stuck in a hole because all the promises you've heard are not happening, so you get very frustrated. What are you gonna do, you know?

A. GARCIA: And I think everybody started having different ideas as to what should happen, and who's the boss here.

DAVILA: To go back to the question of people not wanting to put out East L.A. bands, some people seem to imply that there was sort of a racial bias there, that people weren't interested in East L.A. because it was a largely Chicano neighborhood. But I wondered if you think that that's what's potentially going on, or if maybe there are just some bigger...

T. GARCIA: Well, there's an article in the *L.A. Times* when this *Vexing* thing was coming out, and Willie and Brendan were going back and forth. Willie stated that Brendan wouldn't book them because they were a Chicano band. Brendan says, "I don't book bands that suck." Okay. This topic always comes up when we do interviews, "Did you feel racism?" If you talk to our singer, he says no. I always say no. The crowd, I think we were more like a freakshow, like, "Okay, it's an East L.A. band, let's see what they're about." Then they're going, "Oh, wow, they can play. Oh, wait, they're in black suits, they do look like undertakers." So we took our name, and we took the look, and we made it into what, it's kind of like any band, you gotta have a look, too.

I don't know, I just think that a lot of the bands didn't push themselves outside. There was somebody quoted one time, they didn't want to deal with the Chicano-ism because they didn't want to be pigeonholed, which we felt the same way. But the Illegals always talk about, "People don't like us because of our Chicano-ism," and I go, "What is Chicano-ism?" We weren't into the whole La Raza thing and everything. I'll give you a good example. We were in the RCP for a little bit, Undertakers. Play at the Roxy for the

first time with the Illegals—and I always love telling this story—I go in the bathroom, I have my black beret with a Reverend Mao button. Comes Willie walking in with his brown beret with a Chicano fist. He looks at me, I look at him, and I just told him, “We don’t agree on anything, do we?” And he was mad because we were all RCP papers all over the stage, we took it to this whole, still dressed in black, but we were these Communist Mexican rebels. And people always ask, “Why did your singer wear his suspenders backwards?” Like I said, we weren’t in the Chicano Power thing, but we did love Zapata, and we loved the old... Revolution we always told people, so he wore them backwards because that was the, what do they call those?

DAVILA: *Bandoleros?*

T. GARCIA: Yeah, the *bandoleros*. So people would always go, “What are you guys...” We were taking these different looks, but we were kind of like making it subliminal.

A. GARCIA: You were just sort of making it your own.

T. GARCIA: Well, taking things that we liked about our heritage and culture and putting into our style. So Art used to wear white cowboy boots, but to me that was still punk because you’re against the norm, you look different.

DAVILA: With bands like Los Illegals or other people who are invested in the Chicano Movement, I do wonder if there’s a little bit more similarity between that and, for instance, the RCP thing, in the sense that both of those parties are invested in people power as you were saying. But I guess maybe with Los Illegals, they wanted to talk specifically about the things that were happening within their community as a way of maybe seeking solidarity with other groups who were interested in similar things...

T. GARCIA: I think it was more like, they were more into the Chicano Power, and about the Chicano people, and the struggles they had. And we were more like, even before the RCP, the songs we were writing, “Let’s write about the people.” Because, like I said, we played outside of East L.A., and we saw the same kind of poverty that we saw where we lived, so it wasn’t just us. And like our singer would say, “Hey, we’re worldwide.” It’s like the Clash, the Clash was like, “We just don’t want to preach to certain people, we want everybody to know what’s going on.” So that was our idealism. We don’t want to be, “Yeah, we’re poor Mexicans.” It’s more like, “Hey, we got a voice, too. But we don’t

just have to speak about us, we can speak about everybody.” ‘Cause, if you read some of Jimmy’s things, and a lot of my friends after Thee Undertakers broke up, Japanese, Armenians, and they all grew up in L.A., Montebello. ‘Cause everybody says East L.A., and I go, “Look around you.” There was Boyle Heights, Lincoln Heights, Highland Park, there was a lot of stuff coming out of there, too. But I think everybody was just focused on what we were doing because we were pretty much in the same community, I think that would be the thing to say. And outside, everybody considered... Like Alice, she grew up in Boyle Heights, or East L.A. somewhere.

A. GARCIA: Yeah.

T. GARCIA: But when she gets interviewed, they always ask her, she never... People, boy, they got mad at her at the Vex thing, because she wasn’t part of the East L.A. scene, but she grew up in East L.A. But see, the point you were saying about... she decided to go to Hollywood because people liked her there, and she made something out of that. We played out of East L.A. ‘cause we were able to get shows out of East L.A., because people were like, “Oh, yeah, we like you guys.” So when people start saying, “Yeah, it was racist,” or whatever, I don’t believe that. If you keep saying that then you’re probably the racist, because you’re holding yourself back, you’re not letting loose, and going, “You know, yeah, we’re this and that, and let’s speak what we feel like, but let’s get outside of where we’re at and speak about it.”

DAVILA: Yeah, and Alice talked about feeling more rejected by MEChA than by...

A. GARCIA: Yeah. Because she was a little bit different, it was quirky. And she tried to get in MEChA, and they laughed at her because she had her Elton John things on.

DAVILA: So I think that’s something that comes up is that in East L.A. there’s kind of a conservatism...

A. GARCIA: I think so. And I think maybe nobody was booking the East L.A. bands ‘cause maybe they weren’t out hustling trying to show everybody what they were about. And any band that made it back in those days, it’s because they got out and they kind of had to make it happen. They had to get out and sell themselves, just get out and try to book shows here or there, or call people and tell them to come. If you don’t know anybody, then...

T. GARCIA: Plus after a while, Undertakers had management for a little while. So they were actually getting us good shows. So that was another thing, too, was you could get your own shows, but you do need a manager. Somebody who's gonna say, "Hey, just because they're from East L.A., don't, how would I say..."

A. GARCIA: Don't pooh-pooh them.

T. GARCIA: Oh, yeah, [in British accent] don't pooh-pooh them.

DAVILA: Do you think that people had expectations of you outside of East L.A., knowing that you were from the neighborhood?

A. GARCIA: I don't think so. Well...

T. GARCIA: Well... We didn't care. Let's just say that. If you read some of the articles, and you listen to Art, Art says he didn't give a shit, he just wanted to play. We were just like the circus act, we're going town to town. We don't want to be crying about this and that, or, "Oh, we can't get gigs 'cause we're these poor kids from..." Like I told Jimmy in one interview, people didn't realize that a lot of the Chicano kids were very smart, very educated, they knew what was going on around them, and that's why you had the artists, and the poets, and the musicians, and they were all good at it. But when you start just talking about the struggles of my people, it's like, well, there's other races that had a lot more problems than we did. So Thee Undertakers just took all this information and put into what we believe in, and if you read the lyrics, a lot of, recession...

A. GARCIA: A lot of it pertains to today. You could look at half those songs on the CD, and they still...

T. GARCIA: Somebody had said that before. They listened to the CD, and they go, "Wow, the CD is still fresh from back then, it still sounds like something somebody would put out now."

A. GARCIA: Just change the name. It's not Reaganomics, it's Bush-onomics, or whatever.

T. GARCIA: Plus we recorded it in a really good studio, so we were fortunate to be able to go in and do that. The Illegals and the Brat were able to go into great studios and put out some good records. The Stains went and did a proper recording, and that's a great record. But everything gets lost in time. Now it's like people are starting to come back and get together. The Stains are probably the only band right now that are doing a lot of

shows. Undertakers, once in a while we'll do a show. In terms of the Brat, I don't know what's going on with them. And Willie's still trying to do whatever he's doing, but I'm sure when you talk to him, he's gonna be like, [in whining voice] "Oh, yeah, the Undertakers..." Which is always interesting because I don't care what they say, it's just interesting how their perspectives differ from ours, let's just say. Like the bathroom thing I told you, our perspectives were just totally different. It was supposed to be East L.A. Night, but we're dressed in black and we're wearing Mao buttons, and we have RCP papers on the stage, so, yeah, it was a pretty weird night.

A. GARCIA: Yeah, East L.A. Night, to me that just means "bands from East L.A.," it doesn't mean "brown bands from..." you know what I mean?

DAVILA: Yeah, yeah.

T. GARCIA: And they were trying to pigeonhole that, too, like, "It's East L.A. Night, the Chicanos are in town here in Hollywood." It was kind of stupid. The Plugz are playing with us, and they're not from East L.A., they're from Texas. But they somehow got involved with that. I don't know how to say it, but I think it's like it was weird, like all of a sudden everybody wanted to be part of this East L.A. scene, so bands from the outside were coming on the inside. But in reality, the Vex was only open for six months, a lot of the bands in the '80s started playing out more, and like you said, we weren't like a close family or anything. We knew each other, but we weren't like buddy-buddies and partying all the time. It was more like, to me I always tell people it was a competition, who can outdo each other, who's gonna get the better shows.

DAVILA: To go back to, you were talking about having a manager. I don't know if you want to talk about the actual business dealings. So if you'd rather not, that's okay.

T. GARCIA: I didn't really deal with the management, our singer did, so that was more like he was dealing with them and we just played. We were just kind of like the little pawns...

A. GARCIA: He was older than them, so he kinda took it upon himself to be the leader, the boss, whatever.

T. GARCIA: He was the businessman.

DAVILA: I think that that's one thing that doesn't necessarily get talked about very much in a lot of the stuff that people are doing about the East L.A. bands now is the actual kind of business side of it.

T. GARCIA: Well, but, see, but it is a good point, and it's a valuable point, too, because people didn't realize that we weren't just playing to play. We were talking about being successful: okay, when you get a manager, that's a kick in your ass. Because they're telling you, "We got this gig, you guys gotta be on your best behavior, you're gonna open up for this, you're gonna open up for that." So it becomes a business. Now maybe some bands felt like, well, this is against being the poor Chicano or whatever, we're the opposite, like the farther we get up those stairs... You wanna climb, you don't want to go backwards. I always say one step forward, not two steps back. So we were always keeping those wheels going. And then back then for us, we weren't familiar with this business aspect until it started hitting us, then you're like, "Wow." Now you're learning something else, it's not just about playing, it's about being proper, not being stupid, or breaking the club, smashing rooms, or whatever it is. So you learn a lot from things like that.

DAVILA: Would Art have also handled most of the business dealings with the Vex when you played there?

T. GARCIA: Yeah.

DAVILA: Is he around still?

T. GARCIA: Yeah. If you talk to Art, he'll just go off. He'll tell you about the whole business thing, and what happened and stuff. I try not to say too much. Well, you've read some of Jimmy's interviews. If you listen to Art talking, he dealt with the managers and stuff, and went out with them, and this and that. You can't bite the hand that feeds you, so you got to be careful when you're doing business stuff, and that's what happened with a lot of the... Dealing with management and record labels, you think, "Oh, yeah, we can do whatever we want," and then they're like, "No, you can't. You're under our contract. We don't want you doing this and that."

A. GARCIA: I know, and sometimes when they start telling you how they think the

direction you should go, I think that's where a lot of bands start saying, "Oh," and then it kind of falls apart.

DAVILA: Yeah. Art wasn't involved with Peace Corpse or Insulin Reaction or any of those bands?

A. GARCIA: No. Because when the band broke up, Mike, the drummer, kicked Art out, right? And so then they tried to get this other guy, and it just didn't work out. And so meanwhile, I was living in Pomona, and so Tracy moved in with me, and he just said, "Eh, I'm done." So then, I didn't play music at that time, but he goes, "Come on, I'll teach you bass," and so I bought a bass and a thing, and then after a few months of practicing we started a band.

DAVILA: Was the first band Peace Corpse?

A. GARCIA: Yeah. And we hooked up with Bill and Julianne from Pomona 'cause we were living in Pomona at the time.

T. GARCIA: Well, after the Undertakers had imploded, I moved to Pomona, and it was really weird because I didn't think there was a scene out there. And I went to Toxic Shock Records, and I think the Undertakers were still kind of together, and somebody goes, "Hey man, great show the other night," and I'm like, "What are you talking about?" He goes, "You guys opened up for X," and I was like, "Holy shit, people from Pomona went to the Whisky?" I was like, "Wow."

DAVILA: Where's Pomona?

A. GARCIA: It's about ten miles east of here.

DAVILA: So it's kind of a drive to get into L.A.

A. GARCIA: Yeah.

T. GARCIA: Yeah. And it was interesting that all these people from out there knew about the Undertakers, so that's what we were talking about. We weren't just in one little place, it was like people all around were going, "Oh, yeah, we heard about you guys," or, "I recognize you, and I've seen..." So that was the fun part of it.

A. GARCIA: I know, the Undertakers used to play Orange County a lot, too.

T. GARCIA: We were all over.

DAVILA: Were there shows out this way back then?

T. GARCIA: In Pomona, when I first... Well, you saw the early Christian Death.

A. GARCIA: Yeah, but that was kind of a theater thing that had opened.

T. GARCIA: There were shows in Pomona. We didn't know about them because we didn't really go out to see other bands. If we did, it was the Clash or Gang of Four or something. We didn't really go see other bands unless we were playing with them, like if we did a night with the Brat or with the Illegals. We never played with the Stains.

DAVILA: So you had two EPs with Peace Corpse?

T. GARCIA: Did a 45...

DAVILA: And a 12", I think.

T. GARCIA: But that was when it was, they were first called Moslem Birth. And then we just one song on a little four-song record Bill had put out. And then we did the second one with the Quincy. And we did one song on their other one. But then I quit, or something happened where she quit, too, and they got other members, so they went and did another record. They were putting everything out on their own label.

DAVILA: Is that Toxic Shock?

T. GARCIA: Yeah. Now it's Toxic Ranch.

DAVILA: Right. And now they're based in Arizona?

A. and T. GARCIA: Tucson.

DAVILA: So how long were the two of you in Peace Corpse then?

T. GARCIA: A couple years maybe.

A. GARCIA: At least a year. Maybe more. It was so long ago. And then we started the early Insulin Reaction. Julianne was in that, right?

T. GARCIA: For a little bit, yeah. She did the recording with us.

A. GARCIA: It was me, you, and Scotto, and then Julianne.

T. GARCIA: And then got Julianne.

A. GARCIA: Yeah.

T. GARCIA: And then members just started, like flies, dropping out left and right.

A. GARCIA: Then it was me and him and a drum machine for a while.

T. GARCIA: That's 'cause we wanted to do something different. You're playing in other bands for so long, and then all of a sudden you're like, "Well, let's try something different, let's do two bass players, no guitar player."

A. GARCIA: I know. That was the early '80s, I think we were kind of like before goth music kinda actually came out. I think we were right on the stepping stone of goth back in the day.

DAVILA: And I mean Thee Undertakers kind of already had that look a little bit.

A. GARCIA: They had the look, yeah.

T. GARCIA: People kind of say that because Tony always wore white make-up. The best story is we played a show, and he came out of a coffin, and his cap got stuck and it dragged him back in, and the coffin shut on him. We thought, "Okay, that kind of backfired." Yeah, we used to do tombstones on stage, flowers, this and that, and I think it was before a lot of people were even do that. So, yeah, it was kind of weird that we just weren't going for that leather jacket punk look. If we're Thee Undertakers we might as well look like undertakers.

DAVILA: I've heard people use the word "death rock" to describe Peace Corpse, and I think Insulin Reaction maybe as well.

T. GARCIA: I think before people used the term "goth", it was "death rock." There was like Super Heroines, and then the Speed Queens, and Castration Squad when they came out. It wasn't goth. And it's a funny story, because we went to go see Castration Squad, Undertakers, at the Vex, and we're all dressed in our suits, and we see these girls all dressed in black, and we're going, "Hey, what's going on here?" Or, "Wow." I don't think we started that, but it's just weird that we show up all in black, and then all of a sudden there's all these other people in black, and we're like, "Wait, there's something going on here, maybe that's why nobody beat us up."

DAVILA: 45 Grave was another band that was kind of doing that, were they around the same time?

A. GARCIA: I think they were later.

T. GARCIA: They were early '80s, 'cause we played with 45 Grave a couple times. Because Don Bowles used to book us shows 'cause he liked Thee Undertakers. And that's the other thing, see, a lot of people from Hollywood liked us. They liked us because we didn't have an attitude, we weren't like, "Hey, we're this and that," we were just like, "Hey, we just want to play, and we like you guys." So we're playing with Mad Society, 45 Grave, we just played as much as we could, and bands that we liked and wanted to play with, and I think that's what made Thee Undertakers survive as long as we did. But then, like you say, everything fell apart.

DAVILA: So was Insulin Reaction a project that was really the two of you for its lifespan?

A. GARCIA: After we left Peace Corpse, we started Insulin Reaction with our friend Scott, who's a drummer. And we did that for a few years, and then...

T. GARCIA: We did that for about ten years, actually.

A. GARCIA: Well, no, then Julianne, I think Peace Corpse fell apart, and she played keyboards at the time, and guitar, so she came and played with us for a little bit. And then towards the end of the '80s we got a bunch of members, and it turned kind of more rock, kind of a rock 'n' roll thing.

DAVILA: And you had an album out, right?

A. GARCIA: Yeah.

T. GARCIA: Do you have any Insulin Reaction stuff? We were doing stuff like this in '91. [Holding copy of Insulin Reaction's "Self-Gratification" single.]

DAVILA: Is this a recent reissue?

T. GARCIA: No, that's an actual print. You can have that.

DAVILA: Oh, really?

T. GARCIA: Yeah.

DAVILA: Thank you, so much.

T. GARCIA: I have some cassettes somewhere, too. I'll look for them before you leave.

DAVILA: I actually found this on the Internet recently, to download.

A. GARCIA: It was so funny, I had looked on YouTube...

T. GARCIA: Yeah, Tim had put it up, or...

A. GARCIA: Somebody had put up old Insulin Reaction songs, and I was like, "Oh my gosh, who did that?"

DAVILA: It's all out there. Maybe you don't want this to be the case, but I downloaded the album and both seven inches.

A. GARCIA: Yeah.

T. GARCIA: Yeah, 'cause the album is out of print.

A. GARCIA: It was very like, [mimics high-pitched wail].

T. GARCIA: It was just slow, it was kind of like Cure-ish type stuff. But I was just into that stuff back then. I got to see the Bauhaus when they first came to the United States, and I was just like, "Wow." And all the punkers and everybody went there, and they were spitting on them because they thought it was going to be different than what they thought.

DAVILA: And when you were playing in these bands were you playing mostly around L.A., like with Peace Corpse when you were in it, and...

T. GARCIA: Pomona, L.A., we were doing shows in El Monte. We just played all over, wherever we could play, wherever we could get shows. But the whole scene had changed a bit then. So, like I said, we're playing in El Monte in these weird little clubs, and Pomona. I think Peace Corpse did one, the last Vex that Joe had, we played there, too. Jimmy has that in one of his interviews where there was like two nights of all these bands playing and stuff. There wasn't a lot of people there, but I just liked playing. I just kept joining bands, and playing with bands, starting bands. We had Knucklebone for a while. And then I started joining other bands, which the last band I quit was the Woolly Bandits. I was with them for about two or three years. And then had friends asking me to go on tours with them, and this and that.

A. GARCIA: Yeah, this was our album that we had. [Holding copy of Insulin Reaction's *What's the Point* LP and the Peace Corpse compilation album *Terror of Quincy*.]

DAVILA: Yeah, I think this is the one that I've downloaded.

T. GARCIA: Do we have any extra ones of those?

A. GARCIA: I don't think so.

DAVILA: They're online. I've found copies for sale.

T. GARCIA: Yeah, they're cheap, too. Somebody said, "Hey, I found your record in a 99 cent bin," and I go, "What?!"

DAVILA: I didn't see them that cheap. I think it was twenty or twenty-five dollars.

T. GARCIA: Oh, okay.

A. GARCIA: Oh, wow.

DAVILA: And this is...

A. GARCIA: This is Peace Corpse.

T. GARCIA: Let me see.

A. GARCIA: It's us and the other Peace Corpse, I think.

T. GARCIA: Oh yeah, this is the *Quincy* album, and side two is when we weren't in Peace Corpse. And Bill actually just put this out.

A. GARCIA: Yeah, when we were in Tucson last year, he gave me this.

DAVILA: Oh, okay, I think I saw this online, too. So basically the whole first side is with the two of you, and then the second side is the next incarnation.

T. GARCIA: Is with other people, yeah.

DAVILA: Jimmy did that East L.A. family tree in, I think, *Razorcake* #12. I don't know if you saw it. It was kind of...

T. GARCIA: Yeah, I saw those a while ago.

DAVILA: It was sort of focused on what came after Thee Undertakers and the Stains.

A. GARCIA: Like the bands through the '80s and '90s and stuff.

DAVILA: Yeah. And he lists Peace Corpse and Insulin Reaction in there, but it sounds like you weren't necessarily...

A. GARCIA: We were more in Pomona.

T. GARCIA: It wasn't an L.A. thing. But I think Jimmy was like, just people that were in the East L.A. scene, this is what they're doing now. And that's what I think the tree was about. I played with Moral Decay for a little bit, I think he put that band in there, too, because Scotto was in that. Yeah, that was just all the bands, like the Brat, they all went off and did their own things. I don't think, no, I think the Illegals just stayed the Illegals until now. And I don't even know what they're doing now.

DAVILA: So you weren't really playing the backyards in the '80s?

A. and T. GARCIA: No.

A. GARCIA: We were playing, we had a friend in Insulin Reaction...

T. GARCIA: Oh, Insulin Reaction, we'd do little house parties, 'cause we were using just me and her and a drum machine. So we were compact, we could just set up in a little living room and play. So, yeah, we did a lot of those. But that was the beauty of it, just doing little weird parties, and not worrying about big clubs. And in Insulin Reaction we put a lot of stuff out, but there was interest, labels and stuff, but it just never, I would say, clicked.

DAVILA: At that stage were you still kind of hoping to have an album that would have some kind of mainstream...

T. GARCIA: Always.

A. GARCIA: Him, yeah. Me, I was working at the Post Office, so I was just like, "Yeah, whatever."

T. GARCIA: Insulin Reaction for me, that was a business. I had a little office in here, I was always on the phone, getting stickers, getting t-shirts. I was doing the whole... You gotta understand, when you're in a band, see, that's the problem back then with Thee Undertakers and the other bands is we really didn't have merch. Nobody had any merch. I don't think anybody was thinking about merch, they were just worried about the music.

A. GARCIA: Or they didn't have money to put out merch.

T. GARCIA: Well, merch wasn't really big back then, either. I don't know, it was weird, because I think they just wanted to see the bands more than anything. Plus, when you don't have a lot of money, you were gonna get in the club, buy some drinks, and that's it.

Nobody wants to buy merch. Now merch is like the biggest thing for a band to make money.

DAVILA: Yeah, I guess it's useful in that sense that, if you are able to sell it, it helps you to support yourself on the tour.

A. GARCIA: That's what got me and Alice all through the whole year last year was her book sales.

T. GARCIA: Well, me and Jesse started like, "You guys need t-shirts." "All right, let's not make a lot of them, though." And they sold all of them, so that helped a lot.

A. GARCIA: Or posters. Books and bags.

T. GARCIA: It's like when you're talking with Alice, the Bags didn't really have any records out until now. Now Artifix is putting their stuff out. So it's this whole thing, all these bands that were kind of like... What did Alice say that one time when she wore it to the *Vexing* thing? She cut an Undertakers shirt and wore it like an Indian thing, and she goes, "You noticed that?" I go, "Yeah, what are you doing?" She goes, because people didn't recognize the Bags like they should have, she goes, "I feel Thee Undertakers were the same way." 'Cause she was cool like that, so I was like, "Ah, okay." So she was kind of like being that rebel, too, being like, "Hey, what about these guys, what about us?"

A. GARCIA: Well, she said the reason Thee Undertakers probably didn't get any recognition or whatever is because they weren't out promoting themselves. Because Art went through this whole phase of, he had people that wanted to interview him and stuff, and he turned it all down. I don't know if it was a personal thing that he was going through, or what...

T. GARCIA: This was after the band broke up, it was books and everything.

A. GARCIA: So I think they lost out on a lot of recognition because of maybe certain decisions along the way.

DAVILA: As opposed to, for instance, Los Illegals, who are very good at it.

A. GARCIA: Yeah.

T. GARCIA: Very vocal. They want to be on whatever they can get on. But that's cool, 'cause that's the way it should be. It's weird because thirty, thirty-five years later people are still interested in all this stuff, and I don't mind talking about it because why just say,

“Nah.” I could just say, “You know, Richard, I don’t want to talk about it.” It’s more like, “Hey, if this is gonna be in some other country or other state or something, let people hear about it. Maybe it’ll inspire other people to be like, “Okay, I’m not gonna fuck up like that.”

A. GARCIA: Yeah, Art will be the first to admit that he’s the one who kind of pooh-poohed everything and made it not happen, so he’s okay with us saying so.

T. GARCIA: But it’s always good to hear it from the other person’s voice, their perspective, too.

A. GARCIA: Well, yeah.

T. GARCIA: Not just a one-sided thing. And that’s what happened with, what you were saying, everything seems one-sided as far as the East L.A. scene. They always try to make it sound like, “Oh, yeah, people were prejudiced against us,” this and that. Like I said, I don’t think we paid attention. We didn’t care, if something happened, something happened, we just wanted to get our music out.

A. GARCIA: To me, now that I’m older, I think of life as, it’s how you look at it. Sure, I could say, “Oh, they don’t like me because I’m brown, or part whatever.” But it’s like you have to look at the whole picture, you can’t just focus on one little detail.

T. GARCIA: But if you look at our drummer, he looked white. And Güero in Girl Scoutz, he looked white. You know, what do they call them, I can’t think of the damn word... “*paisas*.” That’s what they refer to white Mexicans as. Where I work a lot of the guys are white, but they speak Spanish. They’re called “*paisas*.” So people are going, “You guys don’t look Mexican. Well, your singer looks Mexican.” Because he did. But we didn’t look Mexican. I didn’t speak Spanish, Tony didn’t speak Spanish, Mike and Art did.

A. GARCIA: What’s that thing?

T. GARCIA: What thing?

A. GARCIA: The video.

T. GARCIA: No, no, no, I’m not going to dig it out. I’ll make a copy. I gotta get some copies done anyway. Plus, that’s the one Mike fucked up. I lent this guy, Mike Vallejo for Circle One, the thing because he was going to make us some copies, and I get it back and somebody started taping over it. A vampire movie’s in the beginning, and they cut out half of the, I’m going, “Oh, no.” It’s out there, and I think they’re trying to track the

guy down who did it. But Teresa can't stand that one. That's the one where the Brat played, it was only us and the Brat. They did interviews. This was early days, too, like the big hunking cameras, and they're trying to film and interview you. And I guess Teresa, something happened and she got mad, and she showed up in a muumuu and that was it. No make-up, no shoes, no nothing.

DAVILA: Oh, is this, you were mentioning the Plaza de la Raza thing?

A. and T. GARCIA: Yeah.

DAVILA: There's one song, I think "High School"...

T. GARCIA: On YouTube.

DAVILA: ...is on YouTube, and I love that video. I really like that she's wearing just a dress, not trying to live up to anyone's idea of what punk is.

A. GARCIA: Is there any of Thee Undertakers on there?

T. GARCIA: Yeah.

A. GARCIA: On YouTube?

T. GARCIA: Oh, no. I don't know how to do that, I gotta get somebody to help me take clips. Because we're thinking of doing that, if I can get somebody that knows how to do that, we can just take clips and put 'em up there. But right now, they're just trying to track everybody down. I think Jimmy has the whole thing. He's gonna use it in the movie, too, the documentary. If that comes out, it's going to be interesting. 'Cause he did a lot of work, he tracked down the Stains, he talked to Willie, he was talking to a lot of different people. I think he talked to Eddie, who was in the Illegals in the beginning, and then he got kicked out.

DAVILA: Yeah, he's done a lot of work, and he's continuing it right up through the present, which is pretty cool.

T. GARCIA: Yeah, 'cause there's a lot of kids out there that are just the same attitude that we had back then, but they're just the next generation. Like I said in one interview, generations are just going to keep going. Everybody says punk is dead, it's like, no, it's like rap or metal, it's just going to keep going, the young generation's just going to keep moving on. It's not gonna stop. You can't stop it.

DAVILA: I think that's one of the things I'm interested in is that people talk about East L.A. punk, and it's the first Vex scene that they talk about. And it's Los Illegals and the Brat, and sometimes the Odd Squad, and sometimes a passing mention of Thee Undertakers, and if you're lucky the Stains will show up in there. But there was that happening, but then after that there was all this stuff happening in the backyards that Jimmy was involved in, and that he's writing about. So like you're saying, it's these generations, and it keeps going, and it's still going now, and that isn't acknowledged. And I think it kind of relates to what I was talking about earlier when I was talking about the way people talk about Chicanos and Latinos. It seems like it's interesting to people to talk about this moment where there were all of these bands from East L.A. with Chicano members, but they talk about it as if it's this anomaly, like, "Oh, Mexicans were into punk for eight months in 1980," and then no more after that.

A. GARCIA: People were still into it, it was just that the hardcore scene started coming in, and that was mostly all white jocks.

T. GARCIA: Yeah, once the skinhead movement came in, that just killed pretty much a lot of the... And there's still that movement now, the hardcore scene, but the bands back then were not hardcore. You've heard the Illegals stuff, it wasn't hardcore, it was more rock. The Stains were more, I don't want to say metal, but Robert's doing all these crazy guitar solos and stuff. We were taking our cues like Ramones and Clash, but just kind of trying to hone... I think what it was, too, is that the bands were trying to get their own style. We didn't want to sound like the Germs, or X, or the Bags. We knew about all these bands, but they also had their own sound. So if you listen to a lot of the bands' records, if you take all four bands, the main bands, I would say, they all had different styles. All of it sounds different, nobody sounds the same. Which that made the beauty of it, that's what made the whole, why is that band more acceptable than this band, or this and that, or their political views are different. So that was the fun part of it is that nobody copied each other, we were taking cues from whatever we could take.

DAVILA: And all of the other bands that people don't even mention at all, it sounds like they had their own sounds as well. The Warriors, Girl Scoutz...

T. GARCIA: Yeah, the Warriors, they were more like a blues band, but they were bluesy punk. Violent Children, they were kind of like a Stains prodigy, but they were still pretty

good, they were just really in your face. I'm trying to think, I really don't remember. Well, there was Girl Scoutz, I used to like them. And they were from East L.A., you know, just a bunch of young kids, but they could have been part of the scene, too. But it's weird 'cause these bands kind of came later, I mean early '80s, after we already did our whole '79, '80, the way we were doing it. But it was just cool 'cause they used to come see us, and then three weeks later, "Hey man, we've got a band can we play with you guys?" "Oh, okay." So it was cool, you just tried to help out each other.

A. GARCIA: And now, everybody's a musician now.

DAVILA: People don't mention a band like the Warriors when they talk about East L.A. punk, and I think it's significant that people should mention them. Because like I was saying earlier, the way that people want to talk about East L.A. punk as if it was this cohesive group of people who were all sharing the same politics or the same sound or whatever...

T. GARCIA: Well, what's great about the Warriors is that Brian Quall was black. He wasn't Mexican. But he grew up in East L.A. So it's like people don't realize that, it wasn't just—I don't want to say—Chicanos, but there was a lot of different people that were in the neighborhood. Like you said, the Warriors should be mentioned because they did play around a lot, at the Vexes and all these little clubs, and they did do a lot. Interesting with the Bags is they never played East L.A. The Bags always played Hollywood, that was their thing. And then they toured to Seattle and San Francisco. I think the Brat might have gone to San Francisco. Thee Undertakers went to San Francisco one time, disaster. We just should have never done that, but we wanted to get out and see what was up there, and it was a tough...

A. GARCIA: I loved San Francisco back then.

T. GARCIA: It was a lot different then, yeah. That was a whole different punk scene up there, too.

DAVILA: But Alice played the Vex, I think she said once, with Castration Squad.

A. GARCIA: At the Vex? Yeah.

T. GARCIA: Yeah. Just that one time.

DAVILA: But, yeah, the Bags broke up in '79?

A. GARCIA: And the Vex opened in, what, '80?

T. GARCIA: And then like you said, everybody always says, "Oh, the Vex was the center of this and that." No offense to Joe, it was a space, but it wasn't a club, and it wasn't the starting point of anything. I don't know if you looked at the *Vexing* thing that they had out here, they had a lot of problems, too. We had guys like Tracy from Violent Children going in there, "They're fuckin' not even talking about the East L.A. scene," and blah blah blah. But that was between Angela, somehow got a hold of the people who were running the place...

A. GARCIA: I know, like Odd Squad, they weren't...

T. GARCIA: Odd Squad wasn't even in, that was after the '80 thing, I think. So there was a lot of misconceptions of that whole show. But it was still okay. But when I went the first time, I kind of got a preview of it, and I'm going, "You guys are gonna get a lot of shit for this." Especially, people were giving shit to Alice. And who was it, the Odd Squad, and I'm trying to think of who else was in there. Well, Teresa was in there, too. But they weren't really focusing... What I was trying to tell people is like, "Okay, you guys understand that they're saying *Vexing: The Female Voices of East L.A.*," or "Chicana", Chicana punk. So I understood that. "Okay, this isn't about the bands, it's about females from East L.A. that are Chicanas." People didn't pick up on that. It became like...

A. GARCIA: I tell ya, it's the crab pot, the East L.A. crab pot. Everybody fighting and just turmoil.

T. GARCIA: Then after I'd listened to everybody and what they were saying and just kind of evaluated it myself, I go, "It's just a show. It doesn't matter. If you want to do something, start your own show, then." That's what we used to do, just do whatever. It's not like just, "They're not speaking about anybody else." There's a concept to this, that's why.

A. GARCIA: Are you a female that was from East L.A. at the time? No.

T. GARCIA: Are you a drag queen, you wanna dress up like a girl? I don't know, it gets ridiculous sometimes.

DAVILA: So did you participate in that at all, or you just went to see it?

A. GARCIA: We went to see it because Alice was gonna be playing, and Teresa.

T. GARCIA: You can tell him the story of what happened that day with the *Times*, how I got involved with that panel.

A. GARCIA: The *L.A. Times* put out an article about *Vexing* because the show was going to be coming out, right?

DAVILA: This was Agustin Gurza, I think his name was?

A. GARCIA: I think so. Yeah, about three or four years ago. Five years ago, whatever. And so I read it, and I was just like, "Oh, good Lord." And he was asleep, so I went and woke him up, and I go, "Tracy, read this, you have to read this now." So he's reading it, he's going, "Oh, shit." So he called Art, the singer, 'cause Art tried to not get involved in any of the crap, 'cause he doesn't care. Art goes, "Oh, man." So I guess Art called Joe Vex, and, oh, it was on. Because Willie's trying to say he started the Vex, and Joe's trying to say he did, and so it was probably a collaboration, but none of them...

T. GARCIA: No one will admit it was a collaboration. It was a collaboration.

A. GARCIA: And so it was like, "Oh, good God." So Tracy went down to the panel, they had a discussion down in Claremont.

T. GARCIA: She's like you gotta be on the panel. So I get down there and Colin tells me, "I don't think Willie's going to show up because he knows you're going to be here." And then go ahead, sorry.

A. GARCIA: So it was very peaceful and calm, and Richard Duardo was there, and they were all talking. So it was cool. Then they had the show at the museum, whatever. So then they wanted to take it to Guadalajara, and so they tried to get me on, and Colin was trying to get me on, then the budget wouldn't allow it. So then somebody dropped out, Diane Gamboa dropped out, so she goes, "Take my place," and so I ended up going and playing a song with Alice and Teresa there. So that was fun, that was really fun. I loved Guadalajara. But it was just like still a year later, or nine months later, there was still fighting about who should be involved, and why so-and-so and not me, and it was just like, "God, does it matter?" Is it gonna go down in history as...

DAVILA: It's interesting to read the different sides of the debate. Brendan Mullen and Willie got into it, and Alice, I don't know if she necessarily got into it, but people were definitely after her a little bit.

A. GARCIA: Yeah, because she was like the main attraction for the *Vexing*, and she didn't really play East L.A. at that time. But she was from East L.A., so she was...

T. GARCIA: Well, Art's exact words when we went that night, he goes, "She kicks ass!" But I think Art saw the Bags at the Masque. But, see, he was a little bit older than us, so he was going out then, and seeing these bands. We weren't. We didn't get a chance to do that.

But the first punk show, I can't remember the date, Tony knows the name of the place, it was on Soto St. It was the Stains, X, and Black Flag. And we still had long hair. Our drummer says, "Hey man, there's this show," and Tony had a car, so we went. Got to see Black Flag with Keith, saw X, I think we missed the Stains. People were throwing light bulbs and dancing, rolling around on the floor. But they were pogoing back then. So that was my first punk show. But it was weird because these bands were coming to East L.A. before we were even going to L.A. So that would be kind of confusing because keep people saying, "Oh yeah, it was just Mexican bands," but when Joe opened up the second Vex, I saw Social Distortion for the first time. And I think I told this in Jimmy's interview, I just looked at the band, I said, "We gotta fuckin' get better, guys, 'cause there's some kick-ass bands coming in here." Saw Bad Religion, got to open up for D.O.A., which was cool. So the thing with Joe was he always helped the bands out. He tried to put 'em on a bill if he could.

Then you had the Gears, we used to play with the Gears a lot, we're still friends with them. And they were a good band, they're from East L.A. But I think it was a little bit different with them because, like you say, when people study about the history of East L.A., they only mention, like, the Illegals and the Brat. Like you said, the Stains are always kind of pushed aside, and Thee Undertakers, people are like, "Yeah, yeah, whatever." But if people really did their research, a lot of the bands did start a lot of different things, just that, like you said, we were just trying to look out for each other ourselves, we weren't worried about nobody else. I think maybe if it was different back then, and all the bands go, "Hey, let's just always play together," I think that would have

failed. It wouldn't have been fun or exciting. And then you wouldn't be getting these interviews today where you get to hear, "Oh, fuck those guys, and fuck those guys!" That's the beauty of it is you don't have, like, "Yeah, we just played together all the time. We had East L.A. Lollapalooza." It's more like, [snarls].

Like the book, *Land of a Thousand Dances*, they hardly mention anything of Thee Undertakers or Stains, they only talk about the Illegals and Brat. And I think some people gave them shit about that, like, "You guys didn't do your research. How could you just write about these two bands when you had these other bands that were also part of this?" Like you said, that's a great point you made, too, like the Warriors, they used to play the Vex a lot. They played around L.A., they just always... Top Jimmy & the Rhythm Pigs, they weren't really from East L.A., but everybody used to go see them, and they were kind of part of that little... A lot of people were just coming to hang out and just to kind of check it out. [...] used to come into some of the shows, Alley Cats used to play at the Vex thing a lot. So Joe was bringing in a lot of bands from the outside—I shouldn't say outside, but that's how I consider it—and we got exposed to it, and then he would say, Joe goes, "You know what? Got D.O.A. playing. They're from Canada, they're political, I'll have you guys open up for them." And we're like, "Okay." We've heard of D.O.A., and Joey Shithead was like, "You guys are fuckin' bad." They liked us, so it was like, "Wow!" So there was a lot of good things that came out of it, the bad things you just sweep under the carpet.

DAVILA: You were saying earlier, and you mentioned this in your interviews with Jimmy, as well, that people talk about the Vex as this starting point for what was happening in East L.A., when in actuality the scene had been going on for a few years before the Vex ever opened. So what kinds of venues were you playing prior to the Vex?

T. GARCIA: Backyard parties, Rudy's Pasta House, which was in Montebello. Oh, the Montebello Ballroom. People don't even talk about that show, but that was the first big—I think it was even before the Vex—it was the Brat, us, and the Illegals. And that was a mess. It was a great show, but it was when Undertakers got done playing, the Brat started playing. Drummer's brother picks up a chair and throws it at them. But that was a big show for us. So that was early shows.

What was happening before the Vex is that, I think that's why the Vex maybe started, I

can't speak for myself, but I'm sure Joe would explain it, is that you had all these halls that you could rent. So people were like, "Hey, well, let's..." We played at a beauty salon grand opening, Thee Undertakers, and it was in Montebello. East L.A. is close to Montebello, and you've got Boyle Heights or Highland park, and we were doing things all over the place, but that's where a lot of it started in the beginning: backyard parties and wherever you can play. A bar, if you can play a bar.

A. GARCIA: A skating rink.

T. GARCIA: Yeah, a skating rink. We did Circus Circus, and they had the Brat and us playing there, and there's a stage in the middle, and there's people skating around you, and you're like, "Wow, okay." So I think what happened when the Vex opened was that it was an actual spot that was set for a while. Instead of, "Okay, we're gonna do it this week here, this week there." It's like, every weekend there's something there. So we used to go a lot all the time, and that was the cool thing. But it was a spot where bands can always play. Not just East L.A. bands, though, there were a lot of other bands there, too.

A. GARCIA: As Tracy said, the Vex was a club, not a scene.

DAVILA: During that initial run of the Vex, were there still other shows happening in other places in East L.A.?

T. GARCIA: Yeah, yeah. Always. Because if they didn't have something that night there, you'd have something somewhere else. There was a lot of halls on Whittier Blvd. that they would rent out and have bands play. So I think Willie did start a lot of it before the Vex, just renting little halls and having the bands playing there, instead of just doing backyard parties, why don't we rent halls? There was the other aspect you were talking about earlier, business. These guys would have to be businessmen. "We're gonna open up this hall. We're gonna charge a buck for beer. Oh, we've gotta charge two bucks to get in." It was cheap back then. But they gotta make money, they gotta pay the hall, and if they can pay the bands. Back then if we made fifty bucks we thought we were rich, you know, jump in the van, "All right, hey, let's go party!" And then you're like, "Oh, wait a minute."

DAVILA: I don't know if I ever got paid more than \$50 when I was in bands, but I was still in high school...

T. GARCIA: I didn't get paid shit. I was living off of Pepsi and Fritos for a while, I was just like, "All right, there's dinner, let me cut it in half for you." And then again, I think in the beginning the bands didn't realize the better you got, and the bigger clubs you were playing, and then all of a sudden they're paying you 300 bucks at a club, that if we did this every night we could live a little bit. But you can't play every night, plus people burn out on you. But then the Roxy came up, we got to play the Starwood, the Whisky, so we actually got to play the good clubs. I don't know why people complain, "Oh, they were biased against us." It's like, you guys got to get in there, there was an audience there to see us. Don't know if they liked the bands or not, but people are talking about it now, like, "Oh yeah, I remember when I saw them there."

It's just part of music history. It's like the English punk scene, or the New York punk scene, it's the same thing; it was just a little scene that started, a bunch of people, we just started running into each other, just like, "Hey, why don't we get some shows together?" But then, like I said, everybody's like, "Well, you know what, we can't play with them too often, because we want to go do something else." And as you said, as you go through other interviews with people, everybody has their own opinions on what they felt was racist. Or people were biased against them. Undertakers, like Art said at one time, he just goes, "We didn't care. If you didn't like us, we didn't care." We're here to play our music, that's it. If you judge us by our skin or whatever, then that's your problem, not ours.

DAVILA: You mentioned in the interview with Jimmy that a couple times people would say stuff like, "Go back to Mexico," or call you a wetback or whatever, but do you think that that was more... It sounds like maybe you're saying that that wasn't the attitude of promoters who were trying to shut out Chicano bands, so as much as just maybe a few yokels in the crowd.

T. GARCIA: It's just yokels. Because we were at the Vex, we saw Bad Religion, the second Vex, and there was a little backstage area, and there was John Doe and Art talking and everything, and I just happened to look on the wall, and somebody had wrote, "Thee Undertakers go back to Mexico." And I started laughing, and everybody's like, "What are you laughing at," and I go, "Mike doesn't even look Mexican, we don't even speak Spanish, how do they even know what race..." It was just a bunch of yokels. I think if

people were gonna use the racial term, I think it was just a small amount of people who just felt, I wouldn't say threatened, but I don't know...

A. GARCIA: It's just prejudice, or whatever.

T. GARCIA: Like I said, we didn't really understand it, and we didn't even care. There was always... Look at [Ruben Salazar] got shot by a cop through a bar, East L.A. riots. Things happen for a reason. But as far as us, racism against us, we just didn't feel it.

A. GARCIA: You can't dwell on it. If you're going to dwell on that, then what...

T. GARCIA: We used to get shit for wearing rosaries. "You're not supposed to wear rosaries, it's bad luck." We were doing a photo shoot at the Calvary, and the guy goes, "That's bad luck." Look at nowadays, everybody's wearing a freakin' rosary. So it was bad then to wear it, but now it's cool. So, I don't know. It's just weird.

DAVILA: Madonna was wearing them in videos like three years after that. It seems like, I don't know if it's necessarily racial bias, but it does seem like people have certain attitudes about East L.A., like people from the Westside, or assumptions about the Eastside that might have racial bias, but it seems like sometimes that might have some class bias, as well.

T. GARCIA: I think the problem would be, oh, we're gonna bring guns to the gig, or all these cholos are gonna show up, or they're gang members. Because it's not the bands that got that, it's the newspaper saying, "East L.A. shooting, six dead," or "Gang members on the rampage." And like the pachuco riots, right away, "The Mexicans did this," "There's the Mexicans." Art will even tell you, he goes, "The problem is the Aztecs killed each other," so he goes, "We're like the Aztecs, all the bands are killing each other." And it made sense. It was like, we're actually being biased against each other. We're saying the outsider people are doing it, but actually it's like Ang said, the crab pot, they're trying to pull you back in, and we're like, "I don't want to be part of this." I don't want to be in a movement that just involves a race, we want to be in a movement that involves everybody, get everybody involved. I know what you're saying about that, but I think it depends how you look at it. Now if you look at it like, "Oh, they hate us 'cause we're Mexicans," then that's your problem. If they hate you because you suck, because your band sucks, then that's different. That's not racism, that's just 'cause your band sucks, period.

A. GARCIA: I don't know, how do you tell, unless they say, "Get out of here, you spic," how would you know that they're biased against you. Unless somebody says something, how do you know? What, because they didn't book you, or because they don't want you to play? I just don't understand some of the reasoning behind some of the comments that have been made.

T. GARCIA: Like one of our early Undertakers shows, I always tell people this, it was in this weird hall downstairs, I think Joe was throwing it, and it was funny 'cause it was like a dome, it looked like where the Beatles played in Hamburg. And we were playing, a lot of people from my high school were there, a lot of friends of Art. We come up, we used to wear red bandanas for some reason, I don't know what that was supposed to mean, Communist Undertakers. And we're playing, and this wasn't a race thing, they started throwing cans at us, they just hated us 'cause they were like, "What is this?" They just didn't get it, they were waiting for rock bands. And Art gets on the microphone and goes, "Go ahead and throw all the cans you want, we got your money." And they stopped throwing cans. So that's what I'm saying, it wasn't just a race thing. We've always had shit thrown at us, but I don't know if that was just because of punk, or they just didn't get it, but I never took it as a race thing.

DAVILA: So this was in East L.A. where this was happening?

T. GARCIA: Yeah.

DAVILA: I think this comes back to something we were talking about a little earlier. So there maybe seems to be a kind of conservatism in East L.A., or maybe there was a little more at the time, where people didn't seem to like stuff that was different...

T. GARCIA: I think, like I said, when cholos didn't like us, or we would get chased because we weren't supposed to be in that neighborhood, or we didn't look like cholos, or if you're wearing a safety pin, "Oh, what are you supposed to be?" So I don't even think it was about your race, it was just the way you looked, you didn't fit in. A lot of us, in school, didn't fit in. I was bullied, I wasn't a normal kid, I didn't want to be, I didn't want to be hanging out with everybody else. So I think it was more like, you wanted to be in a little clique. So like I said in the beginning when I told you my friend had all these punk records, we used to go to his house and hangout and listen to all these records, and

I'm going, "My god, we should do something like this." Instead of trying to be, 'cause everybody wanted to be rock stars, and Led Zeppelin, this and that. And it was more like, "Well, we're never going to be that good right now, so why don't we do something a little bit simpler." Ramones.

A. GARCIA: I think it's just insecurity on the person that tries to bully. I think it's just self-loathing, or self-hatred, because why would you pick on somebody just because they're different? I've never understood that.

T. GARCIA: Well, that was the nice thing about all the bands is like once we started hooking up with the Illegals and everybody, everybody respected each other, even though we didn't agree on things, or we didn't dress the same or whatever. But it was kind of like a family, because we knew each other, and then when we saw each other at parties, everybody was nice to each other. Maybe after, they're like, "Oh, fuckin' Undertakers," or, "Oh, fuckin' Willie." That's logical. But when you run into people, you don't want to present that in a crowd. So I think it was more like, we had to put a shield in front of us, when we saw each other. But at least it was like you can go to a club, and they go, "Hey, there's Rudy from the Brat. What's going on?" And now it's like, [in sulking voice] "Hey, Rudy," "Hey." Nobody wants to talk to you any more. I think it's worse now than it was back then.

A. GARCIA: Ah, it's just everybody getting old. Cranky.

DAVILA: I wonder if sometimes some of it is related to the fact that there's so much attention on the East L.A. scene right now that it's bringing up some of these issues that people had with each other back in the day, and then that's...

T. GARCIA: It's funny you say that, because it seemed like before 2000, this whole thing was dormant. There was nobody talking about it except Willie, and maybe Teresa here and there, but Art didn't want to talk about it, the Stains, they don't even want to deal with the interviews or whatever. I think Jimmy had a hard time tracking them down. But all of a sudden, you're like, "Why are we holding this back? Why don't we just start talking?" And then, like you said, it's stirring up a lot of memories, a lot people forget about things, and now there going, "Hey, I remember that fuckin'..."

A. GARCIA: And people don't change, if anything, they get worse over the years.

T. GARCIA: But I think it's good, it's kind of like therapy, too. Just like, hey, why keep

it all bottled up? It's like when Alice put her book out, people were like, "Well, you don't talk about the punk stuff too much." I think her book's great. Childhood, punk, after. That's the way it should be. Not just like, okay, I did this, I did that. That's not a good book. People go, "You guys should write a book," I go, "I'm not gonna write a freakin' book." And that's how her blog, we used to read her blog a lot, and she never just talked about herself. But it was interesting that she goes, "Oh, my old friend from this magazine she used to do," it's like "Where are they now," VH1, like Flock of Seagulls, "I'm all fat."

DAVILA: I wonder if that's... People write about the history of L.A. punk and they don't really talk about East L.A. that much. Like Brendan Mullen's book had four pages about East L.A. And sometimes people talk about that as an instance of potential, not necessarily racism, but a kind of exclusion based on the fact that, like I was saying earlier, maybe there's this certain attitude or assumptions about East L.A. that affect the way people talk about it...

A. GARCIA: Well, yeah, a lot of people are definitely afraid to come to East L.A., because it's all media frenzy shit. Yeah, there are bad neighborhoods, but there's bad neighborhoods in Brentwood, for crying out loud.

T. GARCIA: But there was some shit that went down at one of the Vex shows where a bunch of cholos beat up some punkers from outside, and word got out, "Oh man, these guys got jumped." It just takes one bad incident to spoil everything. But that happens anywhere. I went to the PiL show at the Olympic, and I watched these guys with long hair trying to leave in a station wagon and skinhead comes out of nowhere and throws a brick through their window. Is that racist? No, it's 'cause he had long hair and I'm a skinhead. So that's the thing is you have an incident happen, and then all of a sudden you get tagged, "Oh, East L.A., watch out for those bands."

A. GARCIA: The thing with Brendan, maybe he just never went to any East L.A. shows, so he really didn't have anything to say. It almost sounds like it's just like non-knowledge of a situation so he didn't want to...

T. GARCIA: And the bad thing is when they had that *Times* article come out, it was in two different Sundays, and it was just stupid back-and-forth.

A. GARCIA: And, you know, the media, they try to make everything worse. They try to

make it, like they gotta make it exciting, so they throw in a bunch of shit.

T. GARCIA: Willie's trying to make Brendan off like a racist, and then Brendan's trying to make Willie sound like he's the racist, and I'm just going this is childish.

A. GARCIA: Who cares?

T. GARCIA: It's like with Joe and Willie, couldn't you say that you collaborated? Willie got the venue; Joe, he worked for a beer company, so he would get the alcohol and run the business thing. There's a—I wish I could find the picture, I think it was in *La Opinión* or one of these magazines—where they had the Illegals, Undertakers, and the Brat on the stairways in the Vex, all of us. And then I'm thinking, see, people should see that picture and understand. The Stains weren't there, 'cause like I said, I don't know why people didn't want to book them, maybe they were too crazy, I don't know, I thought they were great. I can't remember if it was *La Opinión* or *LA Weekly*, it was an old thing, but it's all of us on a stairway, and it's all the bands together, and that would be a great picture for people to... If you can find that picture, that's a great picture so that people understand, "Okay, look, these people talk about each other now, but look, they're all on the same stairway. How'd you get these three bands to do that?" We did articles in *La Opinión*. The whole scene was, if you're in *La Opinión*, it's a Mexican newspaper, and for them to put Thee Undertakers in there, that was interesting. Harry Gamboa was doing the photo shoot for us.

DAVILA: To go back to Brendan's book, and what you were saying about how he maybe never even went to the Vex. I think that people want to talk about racism, and maybe there's something there. I think there could be, but I don't know if there will ever be an answer to that question.

A. GARCIA: 'Cause he's dead now, right?

T. GARCIA: Yeah.

A. GARCIA: It's like, okay, what if he was prejudice? Does it matter? He's dead.

T. GARCIA: Didn't Brendan give Alice shit for doing the *Vexing* show? Oh yeah, what did he say, "You jumped on the other side?" What does that mean?

DAVILA: But I think people write about the history of punk in England, and they write about the history of punk in New York, and Brendan writes about the history of punk in

L.A., and he doesn't really talk about East L.A. But I think in all of these cases, it seems like on some level the reason why East L.A. hasn't been talked about as much as it should be, maybe there's other stuff going on, but it seems like at least a part of it is just that people are writing about the scenes that they knew, so nobody from East L.A. has done it yet.

T. GARCIA: Well, it's not even that, it's like...

A. GARCIA: Well, I think it is, because who from the East L.A. scene has written anything anywhere. Alice said the only reason the Bags got known so well was because they made it happen. She tells Tracy all the time, "The reason they don't write about you guys is because you didn't get out and promote yourself. You didn't get out and talk about yourself. You didn't get out." She goes, "The only reason they knew about us was because we made it happen. You have to make it happen." And they didn't.

T. GARCIA: And the Brat and the Illegals get talked about more probably because they were more visual out there, as far as their record deals. The Illegals were on A&M Records. But there is...

A. GARCIA: Yeah, Willie's a great self-promoter.

T. GARCIA: But there is a thing where they went to go play Mexico, and Art told us this, and they got on stage and people were throwing full ice chests with beer on the stage at them. They had to run off the stage, they got chased out of Mexico. And Willie goes, "These Mexicans don't understand the Chicanos," and I'm going, "Oh, wait a minute. So you're for the Mexicans... It was your music, Willie, it wasn't about anything else, they just didn't like you." They were getting very disco then, after they kicked Eddie out they just got very keyboard-y, "Wooly Bully," and this and that, and people don't want to hear that, they want to hear aggressive music. Like you said, the Brat weren't very political, and then they started playing "The Wolf," and getting a little bit more, "Hey!" Maybe they took a cue from us, I can't say that. But we were always just, "Okay, what's going to be our next song, what are we gonna do?" Then we started doing like "No Pay." That's when I started going, "This is getting kinda corny." But then Art's like, "But do you understand?" He goes, "People keep saying we're from East L.A., so why don't we add some of this Mexican..." 'Cause early interviews I've told people, Mike used to take us to this bar down the street, we're eighteen, they let us in, there's people all drunk, sniffing

paint, but there's this Mexican band up there all fucked up playing, but they're playing this really crazy Mexican music, and they're all dressed the same, ruffled shirts, and that's why I kept going, "Undertakers, we should dress like that." But that kind of inspired me, like, "Wow, they're all uniformed." But I don't think people, like I told Jimmy in other interviews, people just didn't get us. They were like, "Really, guys? You're all about death and rosaries." But we always go, "Listen to the lyrics, though." Talk about "National Hero," people bullying us around. "Crucify Me" was just people always giving us shit, so why don't you just crucify us? "Street Patrol" is about the police.

A. GARCIA: "Drug City."

T. GARCIA: Yeah, "Drug City" is just, there was a lot of drugs. "Acne" the drummer wrote because he had a bad pimple problem. But the song worked with the kids we played for because we all had acne, and everybody's going, "Yeah, [...] pimples, yeah." So I mean, the songs had meaning. But we never really sang about, "We're Mexicans, nobody likes us." It was more like "America's Dream" was just about we all had dreams, we all come to America, but just because you're this or that, you're not going to get that dream fulfilled. "Victim" is another song about being bullied, because we were hanging around, Art called 'em disco fags. This is where Ang came from, she didn't come from a punk scene, she came from the gay disco La Puente scene. Ask her about that. See, people don't even know about that. A lot of the La Puente people started hanging out to the East L.A. scene because they were like, "Oh, there's this punk scene going on in East L.A."

A. GARCIA: Just a transition.

T. GARCIA: Which becomes the [...]. These three girls she used to hang out with, they used to show up at all our parties, and they would bring crates of alcohol and make drinks and get everybody drunk. Our singer didn't like 'em. He goes, "Ah, fuckin' [...] are here again." I'm like, "What?" "They're gonna get everybody all fucked up." And sure enough, it was just crazy parties. X went to go see us at a backyard party, and some guy got so excited, he pulled a gun out and started shooting in the air. And it was just this weird...

A. GARCIA: Maybe that's why people don't go to East L.A.

T. GARCIA: That's what I was telling you about, everybody all of a sudden, "Oh, guns and knives, and people getting beat up." I seen that in Hollywood, people getting beat up. Or Orange County, this and that.

DAVILA: This is a bit of a tangent, maybe. But one of the topics that I want to get into a little bit if I can in the dissertation is gender issues in the punk scene. So I was wondering, like in the early scene there was Teresa in the Brat, there were Angela and Monica in the Odd Squad, but as you were saying there weren't really...

T. GARCIA: They were like after the whole thing. They had the Clichés for a while, they played one of the East L.A. nights. But they weren't... I think Angela actually played with the Illegals for a little bit, but I think it was the later version of the Illegals. I always tell people, "How do you think Teresa felt?" She was like the only female in the East L.A. scene playing, and how much shit she had to put up with with those guys, being the only girl. And them trying to get a record deal, and the record companies telling 'em, "You gotta look like this, you gotta do this, you guys gotta do this." That could be pretty rough. But there weren't that many females...

A. GARCIA: I know, Alice even said that, too. There weren't that many female musicians back then. If there were, they were the singer. But the actual musicians, there weren't that many.

DAVILA: I think that was true in a lot of cases that in bands there weren't necessarily women playing instruments, which I think is related to expectations about gender. But I wonder if in the specific case of East L.A., going back to that kind of conservatism, do you think that that's something that might have prevented women from taking part in bands? Teresa I know talked sometimes about not getting a lot of support from her parents when she wanted to do music...

A. GARCIA: Yeah. Because I think your parents always want you to be whatever, a doctor, lawyer, a teacher, whatever. And I think anything with the arts, they're just thinking it's gonna fail, and so they don't promote that type of thinking. And nowadays parents are all about, "Do whatever," but back then there were a lot of conservative parents. My parents, they didn't care what I did, but I wasn't into music back then, so they had nothing to...

T. GARCIA: I think there's a quote somebody said, "Guys play in bands, and girls are groupies." And then I saw Alley Cats, and there's a girl bass player, "Wow." And then I was telling you, we saw Castration Squad, and we're all standing there going, "There's all girls up there, what's going on?" And then...

A. GARCIA: See? Conservatism even amongst the ranks.

T. GARCIA: Well then Alice and Patricia, "There's a girl bass player?" Even when I taught [Angie] bass, and we were doing Peace Corpse and Insulin Reaction, people were coming up to me going, "Wow, you guys got a girl bass player and a girl guitar player?" I'm like, "Is this new?"

A. GARCIA: Or guys would come up, "You play pretty good for a girl."

DAVILA: And that still happens.

A. GARCIA: Yeah. Even though we're a much more lenient society, there's still a lot of conservatism.

T. GARCIA: Just a lot of chauvinism, I would say. I know Ricki's played with Alice and us, girl drummer, bitchin' girl drummer. "I didn't think girls could play like that." They're better than guys sometimes.

DAVILA: Yeah, I went to a show in Riverside last night, it was part of LadyFest, and so all of the bands that played had women in them, but I think maybe three out of four had female drummers...

A. GARCIA: So LadyFest is here in California this year?

DAVILA: Well, there's different ones in different cities. So this one was LadyFest IE. I'm not sure if there's another LadyFest L.A.

A. GARCIA: 'Cause we did, Alice did a LadyFest back in Boston, a year ago February.

DAVILA: Yeah. Boston has one, Philadelphia.

A. GARCIA: Chicago, I know has one.

DAVILA: Chicago has one, I'm sure there's a few up in Oregon and Washington.

T. GARCIA: Well, it's funny you said that, because there wasn't that many female musicians, and when you did see one, everybody's like, "Really?" Like the Controllers,

they had Mad Dog playing drums, and she was a girl. And those were early. I mean, people don't even realize the Skulls were from '77, and Billy Bones is still playing. So there was a lot of punk bands that don't even really get mentioned. It's always the Germs, X, this and this. Screamers should have gotten more credit, too. The Screamers were kind of like Thee Undertakers or Stains, they get credit, but not where credit's due. But they were all keyboards.

DAVILA: It's interesting that people want to write out bands that had keyboards. People want to talk about punk as being guitars and heavy drums, and no synths...

A. GARCIA: If you listen to the early, early punk scene, like when the Bags and stuff first started, to look and to listen to some of the music coming out then, you think "That doesn't sound like punk to me." Because you think punk is kinda strong...

T. GARCIA: I told Alice, "I didn't consider the Bags punk." She goes, "What did you consider 'em?" I go, "Punk jazz, 'cause you guys had all these quirky changes..."

A. GARCIA: Well, they almost looked kind of new-wavey.

T. GARCIA: Yeah, their early pictures.

A. GARCIA: They all had bright colors, and weird things. 'Cause when you think of punk, you think mohawks and leather jackets, whatever, and to look at when punk first started in L.A., it was nothing like that.

DAVILA: Yeah. And a band like Nervous Gender didn't sound anything like...

A. GARCIA: Oh, I know.

T. GARCIA: Oh, no, they were... We seen them before. See, people don't understand that Undertakers used to go out and see a lot of bands, and it opened their eyes, like, okay, we thought we were like the Clash, the best band in the world, and then we're going... Or, I'm sorry, the Ramones thought they were the best band in the world until they saw the Clash. I thought we were the best band in the world until we saw Social Distortion. I'm like, "Holy shit, the guy's got a hat, make-up, they look cool, they're playing great music." So it wasn't even a look, but like Art wrote in "Victim," "disco fags," and I go, "Man, do you really want to put that on the record." He goes, "Hey, look at Ang and her friends, they're all disco fags." 'Cause they used to come to the punk shows, but they all dressed all disco. But they would all be... It was the pogo back then,

there was no slamming. And then you got the hardcore scene...

A. GARCIA: Well, because disco was in. And then when Blondie, and then the Ramones, and Pretenders...

T. GARCIA: And everybody goes, "Blondie's not punk."

A. GARCIA: I mean, it was a new wave transition, and then it kind of turned punk-y. That's what got me turned onto the whole different scene was the Ramones and Blondie. And Blondie's not punk, but...

T. GARCIA: Like I said, we got into Iggy and stuff, and Iggy wasn't fast music, but I think it was just the raw energy. And we were talking about punk, how I thought it was an attitude. It wasn't about playing "1-2-3-4" [rapidly, followed by imitation of fast, heavy guitar chords]. It's just the aggression of the music, and if your front man's good, which Art was like, we used to call him James Brown. He's out there jumpin' around, acting all crazy. And even Dan Vargas had wrote, there's a thing in *Aztlán*, Dan had wrote little transcripts of, "The Brat were kind of poppy and people can relate to them," and then the Stains and the Illegals, and he goes, "Thee Undertakers, young kids can relate to them because of their energy." 'Cause Tony was a freakin' nutcase. The guy was just jumpin'. Me and Art had these big James Brown hairdos. And see, like I was saying, we weren't punk rock, we had these stupid hairdos, and wearing these weird things, this and that, and Tony being all creepy. Creepy Tony, we called him.

But that was just the thing. We knew about the Pistols, we didn't want to look like that. The Ramones were great 'cause they were uniform, but that's where Thee Undertakers go, "Hey," like Art said, "We're going to the thrift store, we're gonna be uniform." "What do you mean?" Ruffled shirts, black jackets, black slacks. And Tony used to be in a choir class when he was a kid, so he used to have his choir outfit. And it worked. I think that was our advantage, too. Good music, but they also visually, like Dan said, they visually look like the band. Like you can go, and go, "Wow, that's Thee Undertakers." But there was a band from the '60s called *The Undertakers*, and we're going, "We can get in trouble." I go, "Why don't you just call it *Thee*?" Add an extra "e". "Hey, good idea!" And I was like, "Okay." So even then, we're talking about DIY, it wasn't that, it was more like thinking. Like how can we do... Like the Brat, why would they come up with the Brat? Because Teresa seemed like a little brat when she was onstage. She was pretty

cocky up there. And Sid, he was really into the Clash, had the look. So there was that look, too. And the Stains had their trench coats, and the “x”. Which I think you might have read some interviews where Rudy came out one time from the Atomic Café, and the Stains had tagged his car with the Stains logo.

DAVILA: Oh, this was Rudy from the Brat?

T. GARCIA: Yeah.

DAVILA: Didn't they deface one of Willie's murals?

T. GARCIA: Yes. The Stains were just out there, man. And, like I said, we didn't really hang out with those people, but we'd run into people, and they'd be like, “You guys suck,” and we're like, “What did we do to you?” But I always tell people, I hate to say it, but there was rivalry. 'Cause we were trying to outdo each other, like who's gonna make it out of this whole fuckin' pot? And like Ang said...

A. GARCIA: The crab pot.

T. GARCIA: And I've told people, we did in Jimmy's thing, too, it was competition. And I think there was a part Jimmy had at the *Vexing* thing where Jimmy was interviewing us, and I said, “Yeah, it was a competition between us and the Brat,” because we did play with the Brat a lot. And Art goes, “Yeah, but they could never win.” And I'm like, “Oh, God, this is going to be in the documentary. They're going to hate it.” And there was one time, Teresa was here and I was drunk, and we were talking about something, and I just told her, “You know what, Teresa, I'm going to tell you something right now, Thee Undertakers are the best band out of East L.A.” And she got pissed at me. But I thought we were, because just the music, and the gigs we did, and the members we had, I thought were just more powerful than anybody else around us. I'm not saying it's true, but...

A. GARCIA: In his mind. [Laughs]

T. GARCIA: A legend in my own mind, that's all it is.

DAVILA: To back up for a second to the gender thing again, we were talking about how there weren't very many women musicians. Were there many women participating in the audience at least?

T. GARCIA: Oh yeah. There was always women. And that's the whole thing, disco

girls...

A. GARCIA: Except when the hardcore scene came in, then it turned mostly male.

T. GARCIA: Yeah. The hardcore scene was mostly male. But when we played, it was friends of friends of friends. When Ang and them started coming to see our shows, they were coming from a different scene, disco scene to the punk scene, and then they started meeting people. That's a scene. A local scene. It's like every weekend we can go to the Vex and you'll see the same people, "Hey, how you been doin', what'd you do this week?", blah blah, get drunk. So that was fun. Intermixing. But when we started going outside, playing places where you don't know anybody—Art was good at this—you got make a purpose to go out and meet new people. Like go out after you play, and people were going, "You guys were great." "Hey, what's your name?" I still do that nowadays, "Hey, what's your name?"

Like when I went to Europe with Lydia Lunch, and we did a show in Switzerland, and these guys are coming up to me, going "Hey man, what kind of guitar style is that?" 'Cause I was playing guitar with them. I go, "What do you mean?" He goes, "It sounds like metal, country, rock, Mexican, this." And I go, "Well, I study different guitar styles." "Oh, Okay." I go, "That's how you get good." So that's another thing, too, that's where Thee Undertakers were like, okay we're doing this certain music, and then all of a sudden we're doing "No Pay," and "Zombies," and "Second Set," a rockabilly-type song. And we used to do that live, and everybody's going, "Are you guys insane? You're doing all these different styles." Well, our musicianship's good. Plus, I grew up with '50s, 'cause of my mom. So why not incorporate that in your songs? And it was a great song to play, 'cause people got into it. Top Jimmy and the Rhythm Pigs were kind of a blues/rockabilly thing. Brian Quall was bluesy, but they had that punk edge to them. And that's what you were saying, people don't mention 'em. They were part of that scene, too, just not prominent, I would say.

I'm trying to think of other bands. There was a band, we played at the Pico Rivera Sports Arena, and there was a band called the Vex. And they were a little, young punk band playing. The thing that caught me about the band, though, was he had a picture of the Pope on his belt buckle. That's what made me go, "That's punk. You got a Pope on your belt buckle, okay." So that's just the way people dressed or approached things. But then

'80s, late-'80, '81, everything just started, bands were imploding, and then all of a sudden—Jimmy documents this—all these new bands were playing, but you don't hear about Undertakers or Brat or Illegals, because nobody wanted to get back together. Everybody was just like, "Ah, whatever." And then when all these reunions started, you're going, "Wow, this is kind of fun." It's good once in a while, but I wouldn't do it all the time. The Gears are still playing a lot. Look at the Black Flag reunions. You have Black Flag with Greg Ginn and Ron Reyes, but then you have Flag, which is Chuck Dukowski, Keith [Morris], and Dez [Cadena]. It's like, "Oh, we have two Undertakers, Undertaker Federation and Thee Undertakers," you have to split up the names.

DAVILA: Yeah. I think the Stains are actually playing at the Vex.

T. GARCIA: They're playing tonight. With the Gears. It's just Rudy and Robert still playing. But they got Sean, whose playing, who plays with the Weirdos. Which I actually got to play with them in a garage. I got to try out bass for the Weirdos, that was a freakin' awesome night. You're hanging out with all these old punk bands that Alice talks about, but the only bad thing is that everybody looks old and fat. They look at me like, "How do you stay skinny?" "I don't know."

DAVILA: So it seems like one thing that comes out a lot when we talk about what punk means, it seems like sometimes you're talking about punk being a method to have a voice, to express politics or frustrations or whatever. So not to harp on the whole East L.A. thing, but do you think that punk was maybe a way for kids from East L.A. to have a voice that they couldn't necessarily have in other places? Because, again to go back, it seems like people from outside of the Eastside, and outside of California altogether, don't really have much interest in what's happening there. So there might not be places where kids from the Eastside could speak out about what's happening.

T. GARCIA: I think a lot of it is rebelling against their parents, against their neighborhood, against the way they have to grow up, they have no money, no job. So what better place to do it than through music or poetry or art. It doesn't just have to be music, like Diane Gamboa, voice your opinion with art. Gronk. Like the ASCO and all this stuff when it started, that's voicing your opinion. Except it's a little bit too one-sided to me. But like you said, a kid getting in a band going, "You know what, I fucking hate

my parents, I hate this neighborhood, I'm gonna sing about it." Then you're playing a gig, and all of a sudden you have a hundred kids going, "Yeah, he's the voice because I'm going through the same thing." So, yeah, I think it does make a matter to express your views like that. With the Illegals, they had their versions of how they felt. The Brat, it seemed more like they had their versions. The Stains had their versions. And we had our versions. And even the other bands like Violent Children, or whatever else was out there. Even music today—a lot of bands to me, they really suck—but there are a lot of good bands out there that you listen to their lyrics and you're going, "Wow." Then you got bands that you're just like, they're just writing stories. It's kind of like being a poet, but you put it to music.

So expression, I would say. Like a lot of Alice's lyrics are very aggressive, and deal with a lot of things. Even her book, a lot of things about her dad and stuff. Good example, why was she so aggressive on stage? 'Cause her dad and everything. Why were we aggressive on stage? 'Cause we're so freakin' fed up with family, and school, and this and that, that once you get on stage... When I get on stage, I blank out, I'm just a whole different person. I'm just gonna get up there and just like, [aggressive grunt]. Now when I do, I'm like [pained grunt]. But you know what I mean. You have a chance to express yourself. So what better formula than have a band, and there's people in front of you, and you get to jump around, you're a rock star for half an hour, then after that you go back home going, "God, I'm still pissed. Now what's the next step?"

DAVILA: It's interesting, like you were mentioning, it wasn't just music. There was Diane Gamboa doing art, and Marisela Norte, the poet, was she from around the same era?

A. GARCIA: I don't know, I'm not familiar with her.

T. GARCIA: I haven't heard her name. Diane would probably know about that. Well, there's Patssi Valdez. Sean Carrillo was involved with a lot of art things. He designed Thee Undertakers cover. But like I said, it never came. But see, all these people were cool because they were willing to help each other. Richard Duardo was doing the Brat cover. Everything was not printed back then, everything was done by hand, silk-screened. So that's what a lot of people have to understand, too, is that's where the record labels didn't have printing companies to go to. You can get records pressed, but what about the inserts,

and what about the pictures. You have to have artists do them.

A. GARCIA: Well, major bands, yeah, would have printing things, but small start-ups...

T. GARCIA: Well, Richard was working with Fatima. So Fatima I did consider a label, because they actually had other people, like an artist, the PR guy, the guy that gets the record done, and the promotional people. But it's weird because I don't think they really pushed that Brat record. I don't think it was really a proper release. I know the Illegals, A&M released it and then... Well, because there was a thing in *Aztlan* that said A&M started a Latino A&M Records because the Illegals. It's like Nirvana, all of a sudden, "Grunge rock, gotta jump on this, let's get all these grunge bands and put 'em on a label." Well, that was gonna happen with East L.A. bands, but unfortunately it didn't happen with all the other bands. Which I think would have been interesting if, let's say RCA Records came in and go, "Okay, we want Thee Undertakers, Stains, the Brat, and Illegals. We're gonna put all your records out." That would have been awesome, but that's like a dream.

DAVILA: I think that's where it comes back to some of the assumptions about East L.A., or about who the market is for Chicano bands, or whatever. Or about how to market *to* Chicanos. So, Los Illegals will talk about how A&M didn't market them the way they thought they should have been marketed. They tried to market them only to Latino communities. And you'll hear the Brat talk about when they were working with the guy who produced the Doors, I forget his name...

T. GARCIA: Ray Manzarek.

DAVILA: Yeah. I'm not sure if it was him, or somebody else they were working with...

T. GARCIA: It might have been Bobby Krueger. They were...

[Equipment failure]

DAVILA: ... at all really, so it seemed like there was this idea about who to market these albums to.

A. GARCIA: Like nobody else will like it, so we have to present it only to the Latino market.

DAVILA: Yeah, exactly.

T. GARCIA: If you talk to Teresa, I won't say anything, but she's got a lot to say about that, too. Because that's what was happening with Roadhouse, too, it was like, "Okay, you guys are gonna do this, you're gonna do that, we want this, we want that." And you're going, "Yeah, but is it really going to get us anywhere if you're going to market it just a certain way?" "Thee Undertakers, from East L.A.!" And we're saying, "Who gives a fuck about East L.A.?" It's more like, "It's Thee Undertakers, here." So I think you made a good point, is that they were trying to market it to, "Oh, these Latino bands are coming out of L.A. with records." More like, these are bands coming out of L.A. It doesn't have to be that we're Mexican, or this and that. I don't know. I never fell into that bias thing, like, "If you don't push your Chicano-ism, then you're not Chicano." That's the bad thing with the Illegals. And I'm like, "We don't care. We just like to play." If you write good songs, then it shouldn't matter about your race. It's like you said about females in the early scene, it's weird that you would see a girl playing with a band, everybody's going, "Hey, wait a minute, that's not right, it should be always guys." And just like, "No, it's not gonna happen that way." Things are gonna expand, you gotta expand your horizons. Like seeing Castration Squad for the first time, going, "All girls, all dressed in black, and weird hair, crucifix." And they weren't really good. But they just had that visual look, so it was like, "Wow."

DAVILA: And I think that comes back to one of the main arguments that I want to make, is that Chicano experiences are diverse. We're not all the same person, we approach our identities differently. Los Illegals were very much aligned with the Chicano movement. Although they did challenge certain aspects of it, like they were sort of opposed to a lot of the Aztec imagery, and the way that they felt like it didn't reflect their experiences as young people. Or, especially when Willie was involved with ASCO prior to Los Illegals. They kind of thought that a lot of that sort of indigenous imagery didn't necessarily relate to their own experience of being Chicano.

T. GARCIA: When we used to practice with Thee Undertakers off of 7th and Central, there was a band called Why Nut?, Hey Taxi, and then Stains were upstairs, but they were called Nightmare after that. Why Nut? was a Chicano band. Another band nobody talks about. This was like after, I would say, early-'80s, that whole building that we were

in. And Why Nut? used to go to Mexico and play. So they were a Mexican band that used to play around. But there was Hey Taxi, and the singer and guitar player were lovers, they were gay. And there's another thing about gender. All of a sudden you had these gay punk bands, and people were flipping out. "Wait a minute! First girls, now gay guys." It was just funny to watch this whole ball rolling because all these different bands just started coming out of nowhere, and just going, "Wow." So the whole gender thing was just like, "Gay punk? Is that really cool?" "I don't know." We liked them. They were a great band.

A. GARCIA: But I think in East L.A., it's probably at the time, maybe being gay you were more hidden.

T. GARCIA: It's frowned upon.

A. GARCIA: Your parents, your dad is gonna have a fit.

T. GARCIA: But that's where she made a good point, her gay crowd started hanging out with the East L.A. punk crowd, and the punk crowd didn't really care. They were like, "Oh, whatever." Because it was just kind of like, I don't know, I don't want to say family...

A. GARCIA: Hey, the more people the better. It was like, "Yeah, more people to see us."

T. GARCIA: Yeah, the bigger the crowd, we don't care who you are.

DAVILA: If you were involved with the punk scene, it would seem that you were often a little more predisposed to different ideas than the more conservative elements.

T. GARCIA: I don't want to say the early punk scene was conservative, because I don't think it was. I think it was very...

A. GARCIA: He's not talking about the scene, he's talking about the parents of the...

DAVILA: Yeah, or the community that the punk scene was happening in. And I don't know if this is why, Gerardo Velazquez was the singer of Nervous Gender, I'm not sure if that's why he left East L.A. for Hollywood or not...

T. GARCIA: He might have. 'Cause if people were biased against you, why would you want to hang out with people that are always going to hate you. Like I said, I think that's why Alice didn't even get involved with the East L.A. scene, because I don't think she really knew what was going on then. Plus, she was around in '77 when punk was

exploding in L.A., and East L.A. scene to me was not even started yet. Not 'til, I would say '78, '79. 'Cause the Stains were around before—Jimmy already knows this—they were pretty much the first punk band. I always tell people we started in '77, 'cause we did, but we were a three-piece, kids with long hair, trying to write songs, playing backyard parties, trying to figure out, “Well, what are we gonna do?” Then we bring in Art, he's like, “Cut your hair, we gotta do this, we gotta do that.”

A. GARCIA: He's like a manager, father.

T. GARCIA: So that's what I mean, it became a business. So that's what people don't understand. But like I said, with Alice, yeah, she was born in East L.A., but she doesn't say, “I was a Chicana from East L.A.” That's why, we were talking about earlier, the whole *Vexing* thing just became this stupid, backstabbing, blah, blah, blah, everybody back and forth. I'm like, “It's just a freakin' show.” And to this day, the Claremont Museum is closed now, but that was the best show they had there. It was packed that night when Alice and them were there. And it was a good exhibit. Lot of good photos. But it still didn't represent, unfortunately, I felt. They had Gamboa's stuff there, which was cool. Patssi Valdez, Exene. Then people go, “X wasn't part of it.” You guys don't understand, Exene and John Doe went to that backyard party and said, “The Brat's gonna open up the first night, and Thee Undertakers, you guys are gonna open the second night.” They opened doors for us. So people have to realize that, too. See, they weren't racist.

A. GARCIA: They weren't from East L.A., they were in East L.A. at the time.

T. GARCIA: People kept telling X and them, “Hey, there's a whole scene in East L.A., there's a couple of good bands, you should go check them out.” And they happened to come to that party. And Art said he was in a car with John Doe and them driving around, and then John Doe and Exene said, “Hey, you guys want to open up the second night of the Whisky?” And he was like, “Yeah.” So that was cool. But see, they opened doors for us, and we have to give them credit for that. A lot of bands wouldn't do that for people. And it wasn't because—and this will come to the race thing—it wasn't because of our race. It's 'cause they liked the music. They were like, “You guys are a really good band.” They weren't bringing this like, “We're going to have these Mexican bands, X playing with East L.A. bands.” It was just “X and Thee Undertakers,” “X and the Brat.”

DAVILA: Who organized the East L.A. nights? That was at a particular venue, right?

A. GARCIA: Oh, at the Roxy?

T. GARCIA: The Roxy? There was two different ones, but I can't remember. Maybe Willie did, or Tito, or somebody.

DAVILA: So it was somebody from East L.A. who organized it?

T. GARCIA: I think so, yeah.

DAVILA: Because I wondered if it was, you know, you were talking about X bringing you to Hollywood and not...

A. GARCIA: But that was to play at the Whisky, right?

T. GARCIA: Yeah.

DAVILA: So they weren't making a thing out of the fact that you were from East L.A. So I wasn't sure if it was the promoter, or the club owner at the Roxy, you said?

T. GARCIA: I think at the Roxy it might have been, I don't know if it was Willie or whoever. But, yeah, all of a sudden it was tagged the East L.A. Night. It attracted people. It was packed. I don't know if it was sold out, but it was packed. But the second time we did that at the Roxy with Thee Undertakers, oh, that was horrible. It was like we were just taking our time between songs because Tony can't tune and Mike's like, "More microphone," and I'm going...

A. GARCIA: "Hurry up!"

T. GARCIA: That was when the band was going down. I go, "We're sucking up here." We're getting in arguments with the audience, and I was flipping people off, and I was the only sober one. I was like, "Oh, my god." So that's what happened is, I think, toward the end with our band we just got big heads. "We're the best, we can do whatever." Then when you're playing a shitty show like that, it may sound good, but you're just stalling. "We suck, guys." And then watching the Illegals that same night, and after they finish a song, nobody's clapping. It's not your race, it's your music. You're watching the Brat, and people are just like, looking at each other, "Okay, this is what we came for?" So it wasn't about, like you said, they would place us, "East L.A. Night," but if the bands

aren't good, people don't care about where you're from. They just want to hear some good music.

DAVILA: I like Los Illegals a lot, that first album, but it was different from everything else that was happening, a different sound. I can see how it didn't necessarily gel with crowds who came out to see certain things...

T. GARCIA: Well, like I told you, the whole thing with the main bands that people talk about is that everybody had their own sound. And maybe some people didn't like this band's sound, but liked that sound. The Stains fit perfect with Black Flag crowd, 'cause they were aggressive, and they were like the typical... There was an interview I was reading, they went up to San Francisco and they dressed like cholos, and all the punkers wouldn't even go to the room. They stayed back, "Oh, there's those gang members." But you're tagging yourself. We could have done the same thing. But there's where, like you were saying, people started getting all biased, like, "Oh, shit, the cholos are here." We've done shows where cholos did show up and beat the shit out of other people that were in our crowd. I could just go on and on, we had so many crazy things happen.

DAVILA: It sounded like the Stains kind of did that as a joke amongst themselves.

T. GARCIA: A gimmick, yeah.

A. GARCIA: I'm sure they did it for shock value or something.

T. GARCIA: But it worked. That's the whole thing. You could do something, but if it works, then do it. It's like what's happening with bands now, they have a certain look or a style, and people don't get it, but it's like they don't get the joke.

A. GARCIA: I say if you have the balls to carry it off, do it. Because people might not get it or like it or whatever, but if you're up there rockin' it, then that's all that matters.

DAVILA: So Knucklebone, that was in the '90s?

A. GARCIA: Yeah.

DAVILA: And what kind of sound was that?

A. GARCIA: It was just rock.

DAVILA: Were you playing with, I've heard Jimmy talk about the Chicano Groove thing that was happening, like at Troy Café. Where you doing that at all?

A. GARCIA: I don't think we did Troy. 'Cause the '90s was like Las Tres, they played Troy Café a lot. But we played, where did we play? Kind of Whittier, and just smaller... We did a cable TV show.

DAVILA: Were you still based in Pomona at that point?

A. GARCIA: Yeah. No. We moved here in '87. Tracy, where did Knucklebone play at mostly?

T. GARCIA: God. If you go to my Facebook, you'll find all the flyers. Yeah, go to my Facebook. I have this whole little thing of Skull history, and I found all these flyers, and we played everywhere.

A. GARCIA: But where?

T. GARCIA: Al's Bar, that weird place with the Armenian lady, I don't know. If you look on Facebook, I put up all these Insulin Reaction tapes, Knucklebone tapes. Remember, Scotto even goes, "When you put that up, I didn't realize how much we played." Like I tell people, that's what happened with Thee Undertakers. We played so much that I don't even remember half the shows. "Do you remember that show?" "No. You remember?" "No." We just kept boom, boom, boom. Maybe a lot of it wasn't important to me, but at least we got to play. That was the main thing was that we just wanted to play. As long as we can get out there, it didn't matter.

The Brat, too, they were doing great shows, but like you said, they started getting managers involved and record companies, and they're saying, "You gotta be like this, you gotta dress like this, we want you to do this and that." And that's where your rebellion comes in, like, "No, I don't want to do what you want me to do." But that's what happens if you want to become huge. I think maybe that's why, all these bands, nobody became successful, because they didn't want to conform. And that's the punk attitude, when everybody is like, "No, no, no, I don't want to do this." They were doing that with Thee Undertakers, "You guys gotta do this, do that." I was like, "Okay, I think we can deal with this." But when you got people just not staying inside the budget, and it's getting overspent, it just fell apart and that was it. It's too bad that record, like people go, "Man, if that record came out..." Yeah, yeah, yeah, I don't want to hear it. Yeah,

yeah, yeah, *if*. That's if.

A. GARCIA: Woulda, coulda, shoulda, didn't.

T. GARCIA: Yeah, I'm living now. Not tomorrow.

A. GARCIA: Not yesterday.

DAVILA: I'm really glad, and I'm sure that you're really glad, it's out now.

T. GARCIA: Oh, yeah.

DAVILA: I think for a lot of younger people, my age and younger. I mean, I'm 29 now, but I think for a lot of teenagers who are getting into punk right now, when we look at bands like Thee Undertakers and the Bags, recognizing that these weren't bands that were singing about Chicano issues necessarily, I think it's still inspiring to a lot of people to see that there were these bands out there, that there were Chicanos who were doing punk right from the beginning. Because that's not something you hear about very much. I kind of had gotten away from punk for a long time, and then I sort of stumbled upon El Vez, and then that got me to the Zeros, which got me to the Bags, and...

T. GARCIA: Yeah, the Zeros are from San Diego, but they were Chicanos. But they were one of the early... I saw that there was a YouTube video that has 'em on some TV show, and it was great. I was like, "They're not even punk," their kinda just raunchy almost garage rock stuff, but that's your early version of punk. Like, what's that band called, Death, from Detroit. They're supposed to be the first, original punk band, and Ang goes, "They're not really that good, but..."

A. GARCIA: Well, I saw a thing on YouTube, and I was like, "I'm gonna watch it." And I was like, "Well, it's okay," but I think the song just went on too long. Kind of reminds me of a cross between so-and-so and so-and-so.

T. GARCIA: Like you said, the whole thing that it comes down to is that, everybody you talk to from this scene that's been in a band, whether it be the Illegals, whatever, you're going to hear different stories.

Interview with William Herrón and Jesus Velo
Los Angeles, CA, 8/10/2013

DAVILA: The first question is, if you recall, when exactly did the band first come together?

HERRÓN: It was in the late '70s. I was coming out of doing pretty much a full decade of Asco street performances, and just sort of interpreting traditional approaches to art making and public art, and trying to redefine them, to bust out of the stereotypical notion that seemed to be... It was almost like a plague. We couldn't break out of it, we were pigeonholed. And so it seemed like it was a good idea to put together a band that would challenge that notion, but yet use English and Spanish as a main vocabulary, and a main form of communication.

DAVILA: Would you say that the band was a way to carry on some of the ideas that you had when you were involved with Asco, but just in a different platform that opened up different possibilities?

HERRÓN: Yeah, I always thought it was a lateral transition, at least for me. And recruiting the versatile musicians that I was actually fortunate to hook up with—because I wasn't a seasoned musician, but I had dabbled with music throughout my childhood and my teen years—that actually I was pretty fortunate to end up with the musicians that I did because they were real musicians.

DAVILA: From what I've been able to piece together it looks like it was 1978 when Los Illegals first came together?

HERRÓN: Well, I think the actual formation of the band, when we actually started writing music was in '79. 1979.

VELO: It was trial and error in '78 because they weren't figuring out what they wanted to do... I came in later, I'm the newest member. Well, no, the drummer.

HERRÓN: Yeah, the drummer came after you.

VELO: They were looking for a way to cause a rebellion. How can I put this? A courteous rebellion, and doing the courtesy of letting the community move on. But yet they were rebelling, they were willing to take shit. So by '79 they had their philosophy,

and their art, and their place done. When I was recruited—and I was in a very, very good, well paid, top group—I went to see this band in '79, and I saw the art, the clothes, the idea, the philosophy, the whole encapsulized statement of being Mexican and American and being proud of it. Not running back to the mother country to suck up, not trying to be what we called the *vendido* in those days to America or Britain, which was the top-tier, if you will, of the world's rock & roll music scene. So by '79, they were doing it.

HERRÓN: Yeah, and actually when Jesse came into the group, we had already had some previous gigs and concerts where I played a C3 Hammond, and I played bass on the Hammond organ, and played rhythm, and we played a good half-a-dozen gigs with no bass player. And then shortly thereafter—this was still in early '79—then Jesse came into the group, and at that point, technically then, I switched over to my Farfisa and my Vox Jaguar, which was a thinner sound, because I no longer needed the bass sound that I was getting out of the C3 Hammond.

DAVILA: Those early shows, what kinds of venues were you playing?

HERRÓN: They were all community organizations. They were car clubs, backyard parties, and it was all ground-up, it was all grassroots type of gigs, no pay. But we wanted to put out what it was that we were interested in at that time, which like I said, was really altering the notion of Chicano music.

VELO: Altering, enhancing, and defining where Chicanismo was gonna go. Mexican Americans, second-, third-generation citizens of the United States of America that understand this and can do both. Bilingual and bicultural, and that was the beauty of it. They were looking forward to redefining again, because it was time for the next redefinition of Chicanismo.

DAVILA: I think I recall reading about Asco, and I think it applies just as much to Los Illegals, that part of what Asco wanted to do early on was to say that a lot of these allusions to Aztec mythology and imagery wasn't really speaking to your day-to-day experience. Is that a fair summation?

HERRÓN: Yeah, yeah. And so we didn't make it really obvious that we grew up listening up to Latin jazz, that we grew up listening to Santana, that we grew up listening to a lot of the stereotypical music that was related to our culture, like lowrider music, and

all that. We grew up with all of that stuff, but now we wanted to invent something that brought all those genres together and create a new sound. It wasn't a departure by a huge leap, it was taking some of those elements and incorporating some of those elements, but we still didn't want to sound Latin. We still didn't want to sound too sophisticated. Because growing up in the housing projects, and growing up in East L.A., it still is a very tough neighborhood, and sophistication in terms of music just wasn't part of our growing up. Everything had an edge, everything was dangerous, and so to us, we just felt like, "Well, this is our version of punk music," so to speak. In the late '70s, this was truly what we lived, and it was a way of life. It wasn't a fashion, it wasn't a trend. It was what we lived.

VELO: Realistically, we didn't want to be Latin, but we were Latin. We didn't want to be American, but we were American. We didn't want to emulate British, and whatever the pop culture was, but we were that. And the way was, how do we define ourselves? Well, we just go out and we redefine ourselves again. So we were who were you, but we weren't who were. I know that sounds crazy, but that was the point. We were stuck in a point where, like, "Who the fuck are we?" And the first, and most important thing that I learned through Willie and the icons that we were involved with in our neighborhood, was destroy those icons in order to move on. You're stuck in a chrysalis, and if you want to be a butterfly, you gotta bust that damn thing out, and we had to do it. And busting out, you take a lot of risks. We also wanted to, like Willie said earlier, bring back some of the important that things we loved. He dropped the Hammond C3 and wound up using Vox Jaguar. That alludes to Question Mark and the Mysterians' "96 Tears." So we pulled together their rebellion, put it into our rebellion and our definition, brought it together and used old and new to make something really new.

DAVILA: In what I've read, it seems like there's a little bit of an ambivalence to the characterization of, if people say that you were a punk band. It seemed like there was sort of an identification with the punk scene and some of the punk philosophy, I guess, but it wasn't necessarily how you would define your sound for yourself.

VELO: The only reason they categorized us as punk is because they had no category for us. Much like the census of 1970, there was no category for Mexican American, you were either White or not, it was Black or White. They were stuck with us, and we were stuck

in that thing, and we got a lot of shit for it. But we also gave a lot of shit for it. It gave us a chance to give everybody the finger, and say, “Hey, you know what? You can have your boxes, we’re not gonna jump into your boxes. We’re not gonna go into your niche, we’re gonna do what we want. ‘Cause we’re representing a whole bunch of kids, and there’s hundreds of thousands of ‘em behind us, that are gonna make a difference, and change things, and they’re not afraid to do it.”

HERRÓN: Yeah, so in a way, it was sort of interpreted by the media as being punk because we had attitude more than anything. I remember one of the first concerts we did with Jesus in the band, one of our first concerts, he says, “Hello, *putos*,” that was the first thing that came out of his mouth. And to me, things like that, how we referred to the audience is like we almost disrespected the audience every time we played, because we figured we were destined to fuck up, so we knew, we were already programming ourselves that we were gonna go out there, everyone’s gonna hate us, so let’s just hate everybody fuckin’ back. And that was our approach to what it was that we were doing. We didn’t expect to be accepted, and we understood that we’re not expecting anyone to accept us.

VELO: We expected to be rejected, and yet, the place that was jam-packed was one of the hottest nightclubs in Hollywood, the Circus, which was 50% gay. And that was important. And they loved to call themselves queer. And this avant-garde were rebelling against their status quo in calling themselves queers, calling themselves *putos*. Calling them *putos* meant, “We understand you, we’re as fucked up as you are, and we’re gonna move together in it.” And guess what?

HERRÓN: They loved us. [Laughs]

VELO: They fuckin’ loved us.

HERRÓN: They loved us more than the straight people there.

VELO: Instead of killing us, they loved us. Because we acknowledged it, and that was important. And we realized, “Ah, we found some brethren here.”

DAVILA: So you were seeing solidarity with other groups who were looked down upon?

VELO: And solely by happenstance. We’re prepared, as Willie said, we’re destined to fuck up, we know we’re fucking up, they brought us here for curiosity, and “Hello, *putos*.” And all of sudden it’s like, “Oh, yeah, damn right.” *Putos* translates to queer.

Queer Studies, all that stuff that's happening, it's becoming big now, it started then. In Los Angeles we validated it from the Latino perspective. Whether we knew it or not we were validating their queerness.

DAVILA: So you mentioned that you were playing sort of community events, so this was all in the East L.A. area at the time, and you're also talking about how you expected to be rejected initially. Did you find that in these early shows, when you were playing car shows and stuff, which seem like sort of unlikely venues for punk or new wave?

VELO: Here's what funny. We wouldn't even get to finish our gigs. The minute we'd start a song or two, one gang would find the other gang, they'd be beating the shit out of each other, and we never got to finish.

HERRÓN: Right.

VELO: Next car show, fights. Next car show, fights. We couldn't our ass off. But at the same time, I'm wondering, is it because our music was something new, and was it different, and caused them to have that anxiety to express and release their frustration against their enemies? I have no idea. But, traditionally, we did get hired by these almost pseudo-gang kind of situations with car clubs. The most respectable one we ever did, where we finished a set, was in Orange County, believe it or not.

HERRÓN: Yeah, and I think a lot of our success, surviving a lot of these gigs—because a lot of the gigs were dangerous—was the fact that we combined cover songs.

VELO: Always.

HERRÓN: We weren't over-the-top, "You're just gonna listen to twelve originals, we're gonna shove 'em down your throat." No, we always mixed in, maybe a quarter of our set were originals. Because we felt sympathetic with the audience, and just, "We don't want to shove our original music down your throat."

VELO: Or our politics.

HERRÓN: "We don't want to make you listen to our politics. But we're gonna sneak these songs in..."

VELO: "That you love."

HERRÓN: "... during our set every now and then, and we're not even gonna tell you whether they're originals or not. We're just gonna play 'em in between." But because we played a lot of music that a lot of our neighbors grew up with, and we reinvented those

songs, they were very familiar to a lot of people, so we were accepted, and we were respected. Because we did great covers of music they were familiar with, and *then* we would throw in our originals every two or three songs.

VELO: We showed them, and reminded them of their rebellious time when they were young. We would do “96 Tears,” we would do “Bits and Pieces” by the Dave Clark Five, we would do “Double Shot of My Baby’s Love” by the Swinging Medallions. And they knew these songs, and they kind of liked it, but it was faster, harder, but it still had that little Farfisa kinda organ, Vox Jaguar kind of sound that they loved. And the confusion changed right then and there, it was like, “Okay, I like this fuckin’ version of it.” And that worked, even though it was not something we thought of. We were gonna do it whether they liked it or not, ‘cause that’s part of who we are. And that was part of, you take your identification, you just dress it up, add some whipped cream with a cherry on top, bring it up.

DAVILA: So even though you didn’t necessarily identify with the label “punk”...

VELO: We had no choice. We were stuck with it.

DAVILA: Right. But so you were you performing, I guess, “punk” shows, you were playing with other punk bands—after the car shows. So it seems like this maybe opened up a way to express these ideas that you’re talking about wanting to express, about all of these different influences on your lives, bringing them all together...

VELO: But we never acknowledged punk. When Willie sat with Sister Karen, and thought about a magazine, and eventually an alternative club called Club Vex, it wasn’t with the idea of it being a punk place in mind. We never said Vex was a punk show. We never advertised. You look at one poster, not one of it says “punk,” not one of it. But it was identified that way. And it was attractive to the Westside that way, and it worked in bringing Westside to Eastside, North L.A. all together in one almost utopian nine-month period. So “punk” subliminally was in there, but it was never actually said or put out that way, and we’re stuck with it. And of course, once the thrash, middle-class beach kids with money came in, they defined punk with hardcore and ignorance. They rejected us, thank you, God. I knew we’d be rejected by the middle-class, ‘cause who wants acceptance from those assholes.

DAVILA: So you started playing around in '79, sort of polished your sound, it sounds like, and the politics and the image was already there in your mind before all of this, it sounds like...

VELO: Let me interrupt this before Willie goes on. When I met Willie again, and they brought me into this thing, asking about what the philosophy, the whole thing of Los Illegals is, we're wandering around without any real direction. And it was so good, it was almost a hard-on. How great is this to be in a situation where you have a feeling, "This is gonna change everything in the neighborhood." There was no real direction, the only thing they did have was that he had this great philosophy. Part of Asco's philosophy, to reject your icons, tear down the old, start the new, bring it around again, rehab it, go through and point your figure at what needs to be looked at. So there was no direction, that was the greatest part with me. They had no direction, but they had a solid philosophy.

HERRÓN: And I think most of it was about being part of something that was important, not necessarily something trendy or famous. That would become that. It would just become possibly something important.

DAVILA: When was it that you first hooked up with a label? Did you shop demos around, or was it just someone came and saw you and thought that this was something that appealed to them or could appeal to an audience?

HERRÓN: Well, actually, it seemed to fall into place once the group was formed in a more traditional, static way, where Jesse became our bass player, and we had a drummer, we had all the musicians in place, and we started to perform as a complete band. We were actually studying and working out of my studio, located at Self-Help Graphics on Brooklyn, Brooklyn and Gage, which is now Cesar Chavez. But there was when we decided, "Well, we're not accomplishing anything and getting any gigs outside of car clubs and backyard parties, so why don't we start an alternative to the alternative?"—and that would be the Vex—"and let's start it here," where my studio was at at Self-Help Graphics.

So I went upstairs and had the conversation with Sister Karen, and she agreed to allow us to have every other Thursday as a Vex night, and to bring in groups from all over to play with local bands. That was the agreement. Local bands had to be featured, but we'll bring

in outside bands to expose the outside bands to the East L.A. bands, and for the East L.A. bands to become exposed to the outside groups. So we called it the alternative to the alternative. And I think at that time, the *L.A. Times* became very interested in that concept, and they put us on the cover of the calendar in October of that two or three months of the Vex, the concept of the Vex. So once that happened and we hit the calendar section, front cover of the *Times*, we started getting scouts coming down, A&R people from the record labels, and they started to follow us wherever we played. And at that point it sort of opened the doors for Los Illegals to start being looked at as possibly, and we were coined, “the Latin Clash.”

DAVILA: Did you have offers from a number of labels and you chose A&M over them, or did that just feel like a natural fit when they approached you?

HERRÓN: Well, when we ended up on the cover of the newspaper, we had been approached previously that year by local indie labels, but a lot of the local indie labels, for us, didn't seem like they would really do anything for us, because we weren't really interested in just putting out a record and just being out there. We were interested in major and mass distribution. So we sort of became very selective, not because we thought we had something, but just because we knew what we wanted out of what it was that we were doing, and we were just going to be satisfied with not having nothing because we still felt that the offers were still about having nothing. And then when A&M Records came along, one of their main attorneys, who was Latino, started coming around to our gigs, introduced himself, and then through other entertainment industry lawyers that were Latino, they started coming around, and it was like, “Well, we could do this, we could do that.” They're the ones that connected us with A&M, and then A&M started to come around and scout us. And really, we went through a artist development process with A&M before we were actually really signed. So they started to help us get gigs, and they wanted to see us evolve, and they wanted to see us develop, so they put money into the band prior to us even recording.

DAVILA: When that was happening, they were helping you to get shows and so on, did you feel at that time as though they were making any kinds of suggestions about your creative process, or were they giving you a lot of freedom in that regard?

HERRÓN: They gave us a lot of freedom in that regard. And they actually seemed very curious, more than anything, because our politics were so deep, and I think our topics that we chose to write songs about. I never really felt it was the power of the music as much as it was the power of our words, what we were saying. And I felt that they needed some band to start tapping into the Latin market, because that seemed to be already a seven- or eight-year-old disease, that all the record companies just had no clue, “How do we tap in? Where do we go, and who do we look at?” And I think we presented something that maybe was a European familiar, because there was groups in Europe kind of doing what we were doing, but we were local, and we were speaking in terms of the Mexican and Chicano experience, that they felt like that was L.A., not Europe. So it seemed to be we were at the right place at the right time for that kind of discovery.

DAVILA: And when it came to actually recording an album, did they still give you that same kind of freedom?

HERRÓN: They allowed us to co-produce, so we had all the freedom that we needed to feel like we were that same band. The interesting thing was that they exposed us to Ric Ocasek, who we admired. The keyboard player from the Doors, we had a session with him, and we admired all his virtuosity, and all the color he brought to the Doors, Ray Manzera. And then we also even had a session with Juan Gabriel, and at that time A&M Records was starting a little offshoot, AyM, they were calling it. So A&M had dabbled with Latin groups in the past, tango with Mark Guerrero, and Jimmy Imperial, one of the guitar players that had played along with one of the co-founders of A&M, on his albums, too.

VELO: Alpert or Moss?

HERRÓN: Yeah, Alpert. Herb Alpert. So it seemed to just be kind of a comfortable place to be, to experiment, and they didn't alter any of our material during our demos with David Anderle, and when they introduced us to Mick Ronson, he didn't change anything. In fact, he added. He didn't change arrangements; we had already pre-arranged all our stuff. And A&M allowed us to co-produce, so they allowed us the co-producer credit, and I feel that that's pretty much just saying, “You guys have the freedom to do whatever you want, we're just gonna let you do whatever you want.”

VELO: And the thing of having a glam guitarist as our producer was the fact that he

came from a—not too different from Chicano experience—where in Britain, they made up their own shit, they threw the finger at the status quo, they did what they wanted, they allowed the queering of their art to be part of it, all-encompassed. It was all in there, the art, gayness, everything together, because they were looking for harmony, and that was great. A&M allowed us to use hardcore feedback with timbales, and it was great.

Until we got to the point where we wanted to go even further and use acoustic guitars. Before Gypsy Kings were using drums with their little, we started doing that stuff. The next regime that came in over there were very difficult with us. They had a hard time with us singing in Spanglish. They had a hard time with us using Spanish instruments, percussive instruments, in a way that hadn't been done yet, and hadn't been proven commercial yet. It's commonplace, everyday. But it wasn't commonplace in 1982. And we were stuck with this thing, doing this, and they would just bitch and complain, like, "What the hell?" I remember them calling Willie, and, "What the hell are you doing? You're using acoustic guitars? You need to play that same punk shit with the timbales." But they wouldn't let us grow on. And therein started the problem.

So what we did, and I've gotta give credit to the Asco philosophy, and to my friend, Willie Herrón here, is that they brought in another British producer, thank God. Americans have preconceived notions; British people will not... "Oh, shit, let's go for it." We used crickets, bongos, timbales, everything we could possibly use, cellos, everything in the mix. And it was a great piece, great LP. The powers-that-be, except the owners, were having a hard time with it. They wanted us to finish it, and finish it, and redo it again. At this point we did a tour of Mexico, made a shitload of copies of it, Willie designed a cover for it, and we distributed it for free as a piece of rebellion against the corporate powers at that time. And so it went out all across, to Mexico City, down to Yucatan, wherever people sent their tapes, that's where it went, and that's what we did with this thing.

DAVILA: I'd heard that. So it is in fact on tape in Mexico?

VELO: All over. We called it *Burning Youth*.

HERRÓN: Yeah, *Burning Youth*.

VELO: And it was beautifully done by a producer, British, his name is Wally Brill, who worked with 999. Diversity, not just 999, who was a punk group, he also worked with

Thomas Dolby, you know how Thomas can be real off-the-wall. He worked with jazz players, like Chaz Jankel. Oh, Ian Dury, if you listen to Ian Dury's "Hit Me With Your Rhythm Stick," you'll see so much jazz in there. And he allowed us to be who we were.

DAVILA: So that was one of the questions I have. So it sounds like when it came to making the second album...

VELO: They wanted the first album again.

DAVILA: Yeah. So you were...

VELO: The sales were, first pressing is 25,000, the second pressing another 25,000, plus 10,000. So 60,000 pressings. Which today is cool, but not during the time when Sting is selling 50 million.

DAVILA: So I find that interesting because, like I mentioned to you in the email, one of the things I'm interested in is the ways in which Chicanos get recognition in the United States. So one of the big ones is in the media. Currently we can see this in the way that undocumented immigrants are demonized, and that sort of has a trickle-down effect, I think, on the rest of us in the way that people think about the Latino and Chicano community. But the other big way is in terms of a marketing demographic...

VELO: Always. And there is the irony. Look, immigrants, specifically Latino labor and immigrants, is the heroin of America today. They friggin' love the cheap labor, and they're addicted to it, and they love to hate it and demonize it, and there's no way out of it because they're not going to change. So they are stuck with it, and they want it so bad. It's like heroin. You love the high, but you hate the addiction. America is addicted to immigrant labor. Corporate America specifically.

DAVILA: So in terms of this other kind of recognition that we get, so our numbers are shooting up, there's more of us with spending power, so it seems like there's more of a push for people to try to market to us. And it seems as if this was happening already in the '70s and '80s as the Latino population was increasing. So when we you were talking about preconceived notions on the part of American producers, do you think that there's a connection there in terms of, they had an idea of, "This is something that we can sell to this group of people..."

VELO: Big time. My first and finest example is what happened last week watching a Dodge game on American television. A commercial came out for a Dodge Truck, completely, totally, fully in Spanish. Just stunning. I had to double-check my thing, and say, “Oh my god, they are so sucking up for the money.” And the numbers equal money. Regardless of them paying sub-minimum wages to us, we still have a huge, humongous, outrageous buying power. Once that power’s harnessed, show’s over. But that’s correct.

DAVILA: So when it came to the second album, do you think that this idea of wanting to market to Chicanos in the only way they understood, it sounds like, do you think that that sort of impinged, at that point, on your ideas and your philosophy for what you wanted to do?

HERRÓN: Yeah, I think that we weren’t Chicano enough. And I think we never were Chicano enough. Because we’ve always, I think, embraced our universality. I think in terms of Los Illegals, we’ve always had this idea that we’re world-class creators, and we should just be compared to world-class and not pigeonholed, and not put in a category. And because of that, we couldn’t be, no longer, the tool to tap the Latin market.

VELO: The fact that we were using cellos, the fact that we were using acoustic guitars—before Gypsy Kings, mind you—and melding it with hardcore feedback, electric guitar, and sonic noise, just blew them out... They didn’t know what to do with it. But what they didn’t realize is that was going to be the future, and that was going to work. It was a world-class look at things. They had the chance to see it—not that I’m saying they were glorified through us—but it actually was through was, because that’s who were in our souls and our hearts and our minds. We used these things. And the irony was that we used lots of percussion there. Timbales, percussion, everything else. And it was still rejected for not being Chicano punk enough.

DAVILA: I’ve read about the Brat having that experience of the labels wanting to push them toward more of a Latin rock sound that was more tried-and-true...

VELO: Oh, and they hated that. Oh, poor guys. Love the Brat, hate the fact that they just had to be stuck with it. And they hated it, too. They used to give us a lot of shit for being what we were doing. A lot of shit. And, you know, as Chicanos we’re always giving each other shit. They hated our bilingualness, they hated that stuff. They were good at what

they did. But for a label to actually say, “Okay, now I want you guys to be Chicanos” to the Brat, that’s fucked up. Based on your face. Even though if I shut my eyes, every song they do could have been Siouxsie and the Banshees, which is who they loved and emulated.

DAVILA: I’ve read the interview that you did with Steven Loza for the book, *Barrio Rhythms*, and this is along the same sort of lines. In that interview, I think it was Xiuy who was talking about how you didn’t necessarily feel that A&M knew how to go about marketing the band. They didn’t necessarily know who to market to, or what sort of approach to take when marketing to Chicano communities in other areas, or people outside of the Chicano community. So I was just wondering if you could elaborate on that a little bit, maybe who you thought of as your target audience, how you think you could have been marketed better if they’d, I guess, not had some of these preconceived ideas.

HERRÓN: Well, I just feel that if we would have just been marketed as a band, and not like, “Well, we don’t know how to market them, because they’re called Los Illegals and they’re Chicanos.” I think that stigmatized us at the label, and their marketing department left us on the shelves, because they had no avenues thinking of us the way that they thought of us. Rather than just, “Okay, the Police is here, let’s have them open for them. R.E.M.’s over here, let’s have them open for them,” and just throw us out there. They thought that that’s not what we were there for, they thought we were there to tap into the Latin market, and they had no way to tap into it. So they couldn’t market us, because they had no avenues to the Latin market, and they should have just marketed us with all their other groups, to open up for everybody that was a major seller and on their label as a major artist. And that’s how I think they would have been more successful, financially, to market us that way, than to think that we could only be marketed the way that they had no idea of how to market us. To me, in the end, that’s what I came away with, and I just thought, “Well, we came to this label because we thought they were experts.” We thought they could be the ones that could do that, and it was never about the money, it was just about putting our ideas and our creative thoughts out there.

DAVILA: You said that you felt like, especially with the first album, that you had a lot of creative control in terms of your sound, but when they were sort of trying to market you

toward a specific audience, did they try to push you toward a certain look, or did they try different sorts of strategies that they thought would appeal to who they thought your audience should be or would be?

HERRÓN: Well, an interesting thing, I think, arose from shelving our album in the marketing department, for the lack of a better understanding, is that then A&M Records had simultaneously created AyM to begin tapping into the Latin market, which was under the direction of José Quintana, who then went on to produce Maná. And he approached us with Juan Gabriel as a producer. So we began to listen to versions of certain songs to emulate that sort of a feel that could maybe have an international market appeal. And so we did go in, and we did some demos. We did some demos at my studio, and we brought in a little four-track, and we did some demos, and everything was in Spanish. Unlike our album, with Spanish and English, primarily English, which is what we preferred, we decided, “Okay, well, let’s take a chance. It’s a challenge, and we’re creative people, and let’s just see. Maybe we could have fun with this.” So we went with it, and we did it, and we were, I felt, among the group that we were very palatable, and we were very successful as creative people, to emulate this sound that could be an international sound. Unfortunately, the response we got from it was very interesting, because I felt some sort of compassion and understanding from Juan Gabriel, who was supposedly hand-selected by José Quintana to produce a record that, in his terms, he said that Quintana wanted to challenge A&M, the American album, and show A&M that they could produce us and we could make more money under José Quintana and Juan Gabriel than A&M’s David Anderle and Mick Ronson. And we didn’t like that concept. Personally, I didn’t care for that sort of like, “We’re gonna show them, and we’re gonna fuck ‘em up, and we’re gonna make a better record because we’re gonna do it the way that you guys should do it.” But it wasn’t us.

VELO: They were calling for us to be the fathers of *rock en español*, which we rejected totally.

HERRÓN: Well, it was pre-Maná, like I was telling you.

VELO: Oh, way pre-Maná.

HERRÓN: It was way before that.

VELO: It was way back when there was very little. There was nothing out there. We

eventually became friends with Maldita Vecindad, the guys from Jaguares, and we hung out and stuff like that. And in fact, I remember groups coming in, through Felix and the Katz, coming in from Mexico, and we would help them. Give them a place to stay, lend ‘em an amp and stuff to get them started, so they could take it back to the country. That was really, really cool, because by the time these groups became really famous, and we were in a lot of shit for being Chicano there, they were the coolest ones to come out. Especially [...], and Jaguares, and the other group, Maldita Vecindad, with their song—you’re familiar with the song “Pachuco”? The first Mexican song about a generation gap. It’s a marvelous thing, marvelous thing to read about. And we wound up doing theater pieces with them at the universities. Wonderful thing.

But what Willie’s saying there about them trying to make us, like, “You’re gonna do this, you’re gonna be that,” but they started giving us the worst music. And you know us, you’re not gonna buy us. You can’t fuckin’ buy us. I don’t care. Want to talk about money? \$20,000 in 1980 money to go with the beer company, and they would do billboards, and they would do the kind that meticulously discusses great things, like they do now. And we got there, played the gig, it was so fucked up, everybody was drunk. We rejected it. People came out from St. Louis to see us and we got rejected. And I gave a letter of us rejecting \$750 to play thirty minutes. Fuck it. You can’t buy us. And that was the point that we were trying to make, and they could not believe that that was happening. “You’re gonna fuckin’ reject us?” But everybody wants to, excuse my language, everybody wants to suck our dick for a contract. No, we are so fucked up, and we know we’re gonna fail, we’re destined to fail, we can give a shit.

HERRÓN: So we’re gonna be selective.

VELO: We’re gonna fail on our terms.

HERRÓN: [Laughs] Right.

VELO: We’re gonna fail on our terms and fuck you.

HERRÓN: Yeah, because we have to live with it. We have to live with our failures, so let us select how we want to fail.

VELO: So they got Maná. Maná pretends they’re the Police. They’re nice guys, we’ve met them before. They pretend they’re Police, they even go, “Ee-oh” [replicates the Police’s “Every Little Thing She Does Is Magic”]. And on the American side, I’m

remember them really bugging us—“Oh, look at those pretty faces,” ‘cause we were pretty boys whether we liked it or not, we had no idea. And they wound up getting A-Ha, doing “Take On Me,” where’s A-Ha today?

HERRÓN: A one-off.

VELO: You cannot do a Google report and find them in forty, fifty different books. It paid off in the end. Money’s not gonna us happy. We knew money was gonna fuck us up if anything else.

HERRÓN: Yeah, it was to do things that were important, and not for the money, and not for the fame.

VELO: And every kid out there needs to continue their frigging schooling, painting, writing, whatever they’re doing, and combine it with the rock shit. Unless they’re bullshitting themselves, and want to just be the next guy on some kind of TV show. If you really mean what you say, fuckin’ do it. And not care if you’re failing. In fact, failure is the greatest success you could ever... For us, it’s the best success ever. We’re the biggest friggin’ failure that’s in the *Rolling Stone* rock & roll encyclopedia. How can you do that?

HERRÓN: Well, I think to stand beside yourself and say, “Okay, my shadow’s going to reinvent me, and my physical state of being is failed, so I’m gonna look at myself and then I’m gonna recreate what it is that I already did.” To me it was it like that’s what José Quintana was saying. “I want you guys to make an album that’s just gonna blow your A&M record out of the water.” And I just thought, “Well, that’s scary, man.” To do something better than yourself for the sake of fucking yourself up. But that’s how we always have lived, why would we want to do that. And it didn’t make sense, because, although we all grew up predominantly speaking Spanish as children, and then the English language evolved into our home life because of our education, the school system demanded that we speak English, to me it was like, “Well, why would I want to do a record all in Spanish?” It’s just like, that’s what I want to get away from. Why do I want to go to hear *son jarocho* bands? That’s what I want to get away from. Why do I want to hear *mariachis* at every fuckin’ party that I go to, that’s what I want to get away from. Why do I want to see Chichimeca-wannabe artists reinvent pre-Colombian pictographs and all of that, and then say, “I’m a badass Chicano artist”? It’s just like, that’s hilarious.

VELO: And at the same time, we're doing the same thing with the Americans. Why do we want to act like a fuckin' American Tom Petty band? Why in the fuck do we want to do that? We don't want to do that. We are not one, we are not the other, they are both oppressive cultures that are just dropping, just dropping, just heavy, heavy weights on us. Meanwhile, our numbers are increasing. We want the freedom to be who we are. The way America used to be when Germans could come, Italians could come, and they could establish their American-ness by keeping both of their cultures together, and becoming that triple identity of one country, the new country, and who they are today in that country. And that was a beautiful thing. They brought in the gigantic, monstrous star, Juan Gabriel, who sat with us for two days, and he was killing himself trying to convince us that we should do this, that we could be gods and be wealthy. Where are we gonna go with that? I was gonna go buy heroin immediately after that, after I got rich. What else? There was nothing else to turn me on. The turn-on is fighting.

HERRÓN: Yeah, I remember, too, just getting out of high school and participating in the 1970 Moratorium against the Vietnam War. And all my cousins, all my family members went into the military, and I filed Conscientious Objector, and refused to go into the military for the reason that I didn't believe in the war that the United States was fighting. And once they killed Rubén Salazar, and I participated among a lot of Chicanos in that Moratorium, I realized that both my duality as a Chicano and as an American, I just felt an obligation to respond, and to probably forever create work that is gonna forever change my identity and the identity of the people that identify with what it is that I'm creating. And that, to me, meant that now I have a purpose and have a reason for my art and my creativity, and my music was included in that portfolio. And it hasn't changed. 'Cause a lot hasn't changed.

VELO: On top of that, we were talking about being the most successful band destined to fuck up, and understanding that, looking at the negative points, has been our success. We are in more friggin' ... Do a Google book search on us. You will find more success as a fuck-up, but a rebellious fuck-up, than anything else before. We could have done those albums, and we would have enjoyed that little money for a minute, but what? We have kids that come and camp out at our doors to meet us and talk to us, ask us about what to do. And we ship them up, and send them on their way. If they're not working, we do a

demo for them, and kick them out the door. That is the most gratifying, you can't pay for that kind of adoration, if you want to call it adoration. It's the best thing.

DAVILA: So it sounds like in some ways the label had this idea perhaps that the market for your music, and for your politics, was other Chicanos, other Latinos...

VELO: They were trying to figure out, they wanted to corner the market and what it was, they were trying to discover what it was, and we were the instrument they were gonna play with, and do trials and tribulations with. "We're gonna figure this out. There's a lot of 'em coming, and it's gonna happen big time. Let's take this group, they're good-looking, they're smart, they're intelligent, they play like who knows what the hell that is, but it's different. Let's put them out there and see if we can try to figure out how to get that money." It's all about money.

DAVILA: But it sounds like from your perspective, so you're talking about creating this music as a kind of fight against oppressive cultures...

VELO: Both oppressive cultures.

DAVILA: Yeah. So it sounds like, to me, from your perspective, it wasn't just Chicanos who could relate to those ideas. You're singing about things about your community, but...

VELO: The first, most important band to relate to us was a group of Jewish-Americans called the Penguins. They got us, they understood it, because they had been oppressed, they were also radical. They understood having a triple identity: Jewish, American, and whatever the Jewish-American experience is. And they got us. So they were oppressed, too. And they became our pals. Now they were crazy radicals, with their little red books, chapbooks, that are similar to the ones that they used to use in Berkeley, with the Black Panthers. They had their own, and Willie still has a copy of it, and there would be all this great, wonderful literature about making a better world, through rebellion if you have to, using original dialectical materialism—I hate to sound like a college guy—to get there. It was wonderful.

DAVILA: So I was just asking about who you imagined your audience to be versus who it seemed like the label thought your audience might be, or who they could discover your

audience to be. And it sounds to me like the politics that you wanted to put forward in the music, although it's about the Chicano community, it isn't just for that community, was the impression that I got, so I was wondering if you could also elaborate on that.

VELO: That's why I brought in the Penguins, because you brought in this Jewish group, you brought in the other groups, and we met people along the way from different backgrounds, different ethnicities. You'd be surprised how many people write to us, from Japan, and from Italy. Oh my god, somebody sends me, they say, "You guys, you're in Italian television, and I get you." Wow, it's an amazing thing. It's what the corporate mentality didn't understand that they had there, or what they could have done. Not just for us, but for a lot of things. They are twenty years behind because they fucked up, thinking that they knew what was best on how to market what they were doing. Even though they used us as guinea pigs to see what they would market to, they fucked up. You want to talk about destined to fuck up? They were destined to fuck up.

DAVILA: I think there's a video on YouTube, which I think it's a music video for "We Don't Need a Tan," but it's taped from an Italian...

VELO: R-A-I.

DAVILA: Yeah. And it has all the lyrics subtitled in Italian, which is...

VELO: The original of that is an hour long, and it shows the wealth, the overextended wealth of California, Los Angeles, then it cuts to Los Illegals, and it talks about the working-class, the undocumented. You know, they have twenty-four parties in Italy. And it does a really nice job discussing about it, and it was great. It was great to have that team here. They photographed us in 1980, '81. They had the idea, they get it. The Americans didn't get it.

HERRÓN: Just like Agnès Varda...

VELO: She's a French director. *One Cries, the Other One Doesn't* was her most famous film.

HERRÓN: Right.

VELO: She was married to Jacques Demy, who did *Umbrellas of Cherbourg*. Okay.

HERRÓN: Yeah, so she... It just seemed like we were always embraced by Europe...

VELO: What was her statement about us being triple identities again?

HERRÓN: Well, that we were like clowns on a tightrope, but the difference was that the chairs were on a tightrope and we had our ass on two chairs, on a tightrope.

VELO: On a tightrope with our ass between two chairs.

HERRÓN: So each chair was balanced on a tightrope, and we sat between two chairs, on a tightrope.

VELO: Metaphorically, you know what that means. Culturally, you know what that means. I friggin' love that shit. Oh, this is great. And that movie you can find, too, it was French.

DAVILA: So what was the name of that one?

HERRÓN: *Mur murs*. M-U-R M-U-R-S. Walls, walls.

VELO: And murals, murals. Originally, the working title was *La chute d'Icare*, "the fall of Icarus."

HERRÓN: Well, it's an interesting story, because talking about how Europe seems to understand and embrace a lot of what we were talking about during the time, and then now, you have Asco being world-acclaimed in all these museums beyond Pacific-Standard time. I think it's because, like Agnès, and other Europeans that came and really understood, the Italians and stuff, they understood what we were talking about, I think that it says a lot about the United States, it says a lot about Los Angeles, and California, how insensitive, really, they are to a lot of stuff that's in their backyard. It's when the backyard ends up in some other country that the backyard all of a sudden becomes this interesting thing. Because we're such a common denominator in Los Angeles and California, I think we're grossly overlooked as a people. We are totally, totally overlooked. What we contribute to this country, what we contribute to society. What we have in the past, our history, making Los Angeles what it is. I mean, it's really a thing that, I think it's by design. And I've always felt that that's why Los Illegals seemed like a very important band to put together, our concepts were important, because we knew that that would probably be the most important thing we would ever do in our lives, because there was nobody else that was gonna say it, and nobody else that was gonna do it the way that we did. And we tried to create entertainment from it, and that was even more difficult.

VELO: We knew we were gonna be mortified, we knew we were gonna be stoned, we

knew we were gonna be loved and hated at the same time. And if anything made L.A. popular in the world—in Japan, in China, in France, in Italy, as you’ve seen, and in Germany—it was the Chicanos that did it. Everybody else thought, [in bored voice] “Oh, L.A., oh, Hollywood,” and I’m sure you thought that, too. But guess who’s out there?

HERRÓN: It’s the Latinos.

VELO: We’re being contacted to this day. And Willie, where are you going next month? He’s going to England.

HERRÓN: To Nottingham.

VELO: So the irony of it is the destined to fuck up band is the band that brought the cultural—what’s the word, when you exchange beautifully?—to the rest of the world. And it’s that way because Europe is so close, proxemics wise, with regards to, where the United States between Florida and California, there’s so much vastness. Plus, there’s that ridiculous South in the middle, and the Midwest. There’s nothing like it. There’s no chance to improve. My favorite story: pre-MTV going on tour, what’s normal for us here, well, they thought we were the fucking devil when we showed up in Texas and places like that, with our little, skinny red pants and our mascara and shit, and smart, educated Chicanos. Bilingual, bicultural. It was like the hell for them. It was hilarious. Europe would get it because they all speak two or three languages. But it was—and I’m following on what Willie said—it was, believe it or not, and whether they like it or not, the biggest, most important things that came—except out of New York and Warhol—is the Chicano Movement, and probably some of the stuff that Asco did that’s big in Europe today. Where do you begin? And that’s what’s happening. We, the destined to fuck up, are representing everybody—Whites, rich, poor. Everybody here. Whether we like it or not, we’re representing them. It’s hilarious, it’s the stupid irony of it all.

HERRÓN: Yeah, and I remember in the ’80s, we would go to our gigs, like at the Roxy, the Whiskey...

VELO: These were the prime clubs.

HERRÓN: ... and we would always leave a propaganda piece...

VELO: A manifesto.

HERRÓN: ... that we would print, and it would give you all these statistics, and that the educated Chicanos will inherit the power structure. And to this day, I still connect it to all

the academia that has now got their PhD, got their doctorates, they're Chicanos and they're all infiltrating the museums and all that, and that's why now Asco and Los Illegals have become a very important entity in academia, because the academia is now doing what we did. They're redefining American art, they're redefining it, including what it is that we did thirty, forty years ago, and now they recognize it as a very significant force, it belongs where it belongs. And you got cats like you, cats that are in all the museum echelon that are advocating it, and you got your degrees, you got your education, and now you're saying, "This shit's fuckin' important man, and it should be in the pantheon of world-class art, because it is world-class art."

VELO: You're opening the world up. Realistically, we were waiting for guys like you to finally come up and say, "Oh, yeah, fuck that. Asco, nausea, fucked up, they're great. Los Illegals, destined to fuck up." That's the whole philosophy of things that need to change. And nobody's going to say, "Oh, no, you're fuckin' wrong." It was so-and-so...

HERRÓN: It was Chichimeca, pre-Colombian...

VELO: Nah, fuck that. And we were waiting. We were going to do a whole bunch of shit more. Now, the funny thing is, academia is... We're not playing House of Blues and the Roxy. We could if we really wanted to do that shit. But we're doing the universities now, and it's so great. Because the young professors, like yourself, and I'm giving you props now...

DAVILA: Thanks.

VELO: ... are getting it. And they're bringing it out. Like, "Fuck you, look at this shit. What do you got? Fuckin', the Clash? Fuck that." It's awesome.

DAVILA: I remember you saying in *Barrio Rhythms* that you felt that if the label had marketed you to college students from the start, when the album came out, that that was potentially another group of people who would likely understand the ideas that you were...

VELO: And they didn't get it. We would do USC, and it would be a great crowd. I remember, in front of Tommy Trojan, we would do USC L.A., great crowd. And where do they send us?

HERRÓN: Santa Rosa.

VELO: Places we're going, like, "Why?" They could have... But you can't tell them. It's a corporate mentality. "We know what's best for you, and that's it." But anyway, the point I was trying to make earlier is that the negativity becomes the most productive, producing, positivity. Asco, nausea, Los Illegals, destined to fuck up. You wear that as an honor, and you just go out there with your spear and your flag, and you plant that flag of Chicanismo, and that's it. It's great.

DAVILA: I found it interesting that you mentioned something about the United States doesn't recognize what's in its own backyard. So you were saying you get recognized in Europe for this thing that you were doing because people understood it over there...

VELO: In the world. Asia, also.

DAVILA: So I found that interesting because I've been here for about a week now, and I went to MOCA last week, which you would think in a city like Los Angeles you would go into a museum of contemporary art and there would be a lot of contemporary Chicano art, because...

VELO: They don't get it. It's easier for us, for guys like Willie, to show in the most prestigious, world-class museums than it is to show in our own backyard. How long did it take for Chicanismo... You understand the Asco history. That when they were told "Chicanos don't make art," they went and guerrilla-ized it, and did it in spray-painting. Look how long it took them to finally get...

HERRÓN: A show.

VELO: And when they got a show, they got not just a show, they got a big-ass, it was the biggest thing in town here. Every night there was just streams and crowds of people, it was so crazy. It just never ended. And every magazine, every paper, every person, I was meeting people from places of the world I don't even know. It was a big deal.

DAVILA: Was this the Elite of the Obscure?

VELO: Yes. And you're talking about three or four floors of just stuff, from videos, to hanging bug-men, to beautiful pieces of art, to pieces of film, it just went on. It's like the father and mother that don't realize how great their children are, and what the potential is.

Like, “Oh, yeah, that’s just Bucky, and he’s just playing baseball,” when he’s really a friggin’ world-class pitcher.

DAVILA: And I think that this is something, and that’s what sort of motivates me to do the work I’m doing is that, I think...

VELO: It’s a great reason to exist.

DAVILA: So I feel as though, all the way back to the beginning, so the early East L.A. bands are starting to get their due right now...

VELO: Finally. And we gave them their due when nobody was giving a shit about them any more. They would say, “Oh, those guys, they just play the burrito circuit.” Fuck that. These guys showed up and kicked ass whether people liked it or not.

DAVILA: Or at least a few of the bands are getting their due. Other bands that, for instance, didn’t have recordings out, bands like Girl Scoutz, the Warriors, some of those bands...

VELO: The Warriors were the greatest band. Interracial, greatest band to work with. Brian Qualls was from one of the oldest black families in East L.A., still run the Mt. Carmel Baptist Church, the oldest church in East L.A. Amazing. And to play with them was great. They should have recorded. But they were so high up there, it was like Zeppelin’s people were following them, they were going to just jump onto this big contract. Never happened.

DAVILA: Which is too bad, because I’ve...

VELO: But the problem with these bands was that they wanted success. We were so afraid of success, that’s why we said, “Oh, no, we’re gonna fuck up. We’re destined to fuck up.” And guess who wound up being in the front?

DAVILA: So this scene is starting to get it’s recognition. Jimmy [Alvarado]’s scene, the backyard scene...

VELO: The backyard scene, I respect it. It’s kinda got a low IQ, it’s fast, repetitive, they all sound the same, it’s all thrash, and they never sing about anything that’s... They’re

not going to influence anybody. But they're important because they're out there, and they're not doing shitty music.

DAVILA: And I think that's the thing that interests me...

VELO: Excuse me. *Razorcake* is very good to us. Any time they ask us for a quote, it's this big. The last thing that we did, a couple months ago, it's this big about what we say about something. So we gotta give 'em... We're not happy about thrash, fast music, it's too metallic, it's too we-want-to-be-middle-class kinda shit, we're not digging our own shit, we sound like white bands, if you shut your eyes, that's what it is. But we're good with it.

DAVILA: So I guess what I think—and a lot of those bands didn't make it out of the backyards, which is why there isn't necessarily the same kind of recognition coming to them as there is to the earlier bands, who have recordings, who were able to leave a little bit more of a trace. But I think that's the thing is that a lot of academics and historians see this early scene, they see Los Illegals, the Brat, Thee Undertakers, and they think, “Here's this moment of Chicanos playing punk”—or in a sort of punk style—and then it just disappeared. So there was this moment of Chicanos doing this thing that was somehow not Chicano, like punk isn't Chicano seems to be the impression people are giving...

VELO: What happened is it was hard to find the next generation and pull them up, and say, “Come on, come on, come on, come with us. Do this.” They just never jumped on the bandwagon. They went and they said, “Oh, this looks cool,” and they followed the mainstream, they followed the commercial... We're not afraid to say, “We're fucked up, but you're gonna go down with us.” Like Asco. Asco is Asco, Los Illegals are destined to fuck up. These bands were looking for success, and that's the problem. Once you start looking for that big success, you're fucked. You're doomed. Because you're a Chicano. You cannot be successful as a Chicano in the United States.

DAVILA: Do you want to elaborate on that a little?

VELO: Well, nobody's going to like anything you [...] For example, I'm talking to a friend of mine who's an actor, he's like, “I'm practicing my accents.” “Your accents?”

He goes, “I can’t get a job unless I have an accent. I have to sound like a Mexican who came over, who works, and went to school, and talks like this: [mimics stereotypical Mexican accent] I’ve got to be talking like this because then I can get a job.” You understand? You have to play that part. You’re too American, and it’s difficult. And those bands wanted to be accepted in the mainstream without realizing, fuck the mainstream, start your own shit, like your own gang, and just go with it. And that’s why they failed, that’s why all those bands are stuck in the backyards today, because they’re afraid to be different. They’re afraid of failure. But they should realize, and I know it’s weird, if you embrace the failure, you already failed so you’ve got nothing to lose, fuck it, just go straight ahead. That’s the philosophy here. It’s the Asco philosophy, and it wound up coming to Los Illegals.

DAVILA: Those are all the questions I have. Do you have any final thoughts?

VELO: Let me leave it like this on my end. We have been looking and waiting for the messiah. A Chicano cultural, musical, artistic, messiah. And we think that, just like the Red Sox finally winning the friggin’ World Series, we’re not going to see it in our lifetimes. There is no Chicano band that isn’t sucking up to the mother country, and one of those alphabet bands that speaks Nahuatl [imitates Nahuatl] that’s gonna do it. And we’re still waiting for that to happen. When a band comes out that says, “Oh, that’s who we are, fuck it, take it or leave it, that’s who we are, but we’re going to do something here,” and they have no fear to do it, then we’re going to be happy and can finally rest in our grave. We’re waiting for the next band, the next generation, to stop being photocopies of each other, and to make that difference, and to have the balls to fail.

‘Cause everything depends on you having the guts to fail. That’s my end. [To Herrón] You got a final statement?

HERRÓN: No.

Interview with Ignacio Lopez
Los Angeles, CA, 8/21/2013

DAVILA: The first question is how and when did you first take an interest in punk, and what does it mean to you on a personal level?

LOPEZ: My interest in punk was, I pretty much grew up with it. Living here in Boyle Heights, East L.A., I grew up walking down the street—two blocks away the Brat used to rehearse, and I used to ride my little Huffy bike when I was ten years old, and I'd listen to 'em. My brothers had a band, but it wasn't really punk, but I've always been around listening to it, because they did have records. The first thing I can recall, I guess introduction to punk, was the Black Flag seven inch, the one where the guy is fighting against his teacher, and the teacher's got a chair in front of him protecting himself from the student. And that just totally blew my mind. But I've always been around it. Walking to junior high back in '83, '84, I'd be outside Self-Help Graphics walking home from Belvedere Junior High, and you'd see the guys from the Stains, the Brat was around there, Felix and the Kats, and all those guys. So I just grew up around it, not knowing what it was, not understanding it, but just being around it.

To me it meant resistance, or just rebelling against the norm. Where nowadays, I guess punk, or the form of dressing, is the norm now. But back then it was, especially in East L.A., it was really strange to see somebody with green hair, with... Actually, back then you'd get real fishhooks, they'd have real fishhooks going on their nose and ears and stuff like that. So to me it was just trying to get out of the norm, and although I didn't dress like that, I just saw it around me. You'd see them, and they'd look outlandish, like crazy, but they were pretty normal people, just expressing in that way.

DAVILA: What made you want to start to play in a punk band?

LOPEZ: It was really just issues that were going around. Growing up, I was introduced to punk properly by my friend, George Hernandez, who is one of the great drummers—he lived in Boyle Heights—if not the, personally. He grew up performing in bands like Mised, Media Blitz, and now he performs with Thee Undertakers. I think he sat in with the Stains, he's actually playing this Saturday with Thee Undertakers. But he's just like a world of music knowledge, and hanging around with him, he really just walked me

through everything, and it was pretty amazing.

But what got me to wanting to play punk was just punk—apart from everything else which I liked as well, which was metal, speed metal, a lot of that kind of music—punk had a voice, had a realism to it, had something to say. Where the other ones were making fantasy worlds, and talking about women that you couldn't really ever get with, or some kind of fantasy thing. Punk was real, it was talking about issues that your family was dealing with, that you were dealing with yourself. It was talking about things that I couldn't put in words, but were this person saying it on a song. And he doesn't have to have this incredible, great talent, and so it was like, "Wow, I can do this today." So it was pretty amazing, and it had a voice, so that's what attracted me to it.

DAVILA: When did you start playing drums?

LOPEZ: I started playing when I was around thirteen years old. Like I tell you, both my brothers were incredible musicians, and they... One of them passed on, and he left a lot of great music. And the other one now does orchestrations, like for thirty, forty people orchestras and stuff. So we went completely the opposite ways, but, yeah. I've been playing since I was around thirteen, but just being around it all my life.

DAVILA: So were you able to get a drum set and take lessons?

LOPEZ: Never lessons, just really observing my brothers, and they'd bring drummers in, great drummers, and I'd just watch. And when they weren't rehearsing, I'd go in there and start playing their instruments, and end up breaking things. [Laughs] And taking off after they came back, and they come back and all of their stuff was broken. So little by little, I learned.

DAVILA: Do you play anything other than drums?

LOPEZ: I do, actually. I play a little bit of everything, actually. Just bass, drum, guitar, piano, a little bit of everything. I never really learned to read, or anything like that. I failed every music class I ever took, so that just didn't feel like my way. But I do love expressing, and that's a voice, to me that's a voice I love to use, with instruments. But not on a reading level and all that stuff, I never got interested in it in that way.

DAVILA: Was Kontraataque your first band?

LOPEZ: No, actually. I've actually been in a handful of bands that led up to Kontraataque, and Kontraataque was actually just a project that came from a couple of other bands, and it ended up lasting longer than the other bands. It was guys that were from a lot of the different scenes. There was your punk rock bands around here that were just dirty, dingy, just pissed on your front lawn kind of a band. And then there were the punk bands that were actually saying stuff. Like back in the early '80s it was peace punk, a lot of the peace punk bands. Then in the mid-'80s was positive punk. And then later on, mid-'80s to late-'80s it was a lot of the straight edge scene came around here, influenced by Minor Threat and all that. And then the scene that I ended up playing in with Kontraataque and then was the DIY scene, the Do-It-Yourself scene stuff. So, yeah, Kontraataque was a little later.

DAVILA: So what were some of the bands that you were in prior?

LOPEZ: That were in that scene, Tezacrifico was one of them, Subsistencia, Fronterrorismo, Kontraataque, I'm sure I'm missing something, but I can't think of it right now. A lot of those. Cara de Mil Putasos.

DAVILA: I'm vaguely familiar with a couple of those bands at least, and a lot of them seem to be very political in their music. And to be honest I don't know Spanish, so I don't necessarily what all of their songs are about. But I was wondering, how much of what was going on in that scene was directly in response to a lot of the things that were happening around or directed toward the Chicano community?

LOPEZ: It was 100% going on. For us, it was living in the barrio, in a community... Boyle Heights is really a community that's shut off from the rest of Los Angeles. There's people—probably now because there's a Metro going through here—but before that, there's people that never leave East L.A. They live here, and they stay here, and they find no reason to leave here, and I can see why. And especially, there's people who have immigrated from across the imaginary line, the borders, they find refuge here because there's a lot of people that speak Spanish, or even Mayan dialects, that they don't feel a need to be anywhere else. They feel a sense of community here. I think I went off the subject, did I?

DAVILA: Not really. The question was about how those bands were responding to the politics around things like immigration and all of that in the '90s.

LOPEZ: Yeah, it was direct, because a lot of our parents had to deal with that. The band I play with now called Aztlan Underground—which is not part of the DIY hardcore punk scene, but a lot of our influences come from that—have a song called “We Didn’t Cross the Borders, the Borders Crossed Us.” But I’ve heard people say, “We didn’t cross the border, our parents did.” So with that said, we didn’t have that burden of trying to come over, and try to dodge border patrols, and have to work with the fear that cops can grab us at any minute and just take us away from our families, or from our loved ones, from our house, and things like that. But we still lived with knowing that, with being around that. So we always had that sense of not belonging, that feeling of not being an equal. And so we had a lot of those feelings held in.

And also going to school around here, the school systems are a joke. So they only teach you enough to really work blue collar jobs and stuff, if that, at all. So yeah, we definitely had a lot to scream about. And that was pretty much my role. I wasn’t the front guy with the ability to say words, but I at least had the ability to back somebody up musically that had something to say to the community. Which isn’t even in venues, it was really backyard shows and things like that, where actually even to this day I feel more comfortable performing in backyard shows, ‘cause you’re speaking directly to your community, to your brothers and sisters, and there’s nothing like that. They get stopped pretty easily, pretty quickly, but if you have that magic moment, you have a microphone and you’re directly communicating with the people around your community.

DAVILA: So were you playing mostly in East L.A. then, or were you playing all over L.A.?

LOPEZ: Pretty much all over L.A. That was the beauty of the DIY scene that I was privileged to be introduced to. Really, because I didn’t come from that, but the other guys in the band were more involved in it.

DAVILA: And this is...

LOPEZ: Yeah, Kontraataque, Tezacrifico, and Subsistencia, Fronterrorismo, and so forth.

DAVILA: So were there a lot of the same members between those bands, or was it...

LOPEZ: Just one, actually, Lalo. Lalo used to play in Tezacrifico and Kontraattaque. But it was more like a community. And that's another thing, too, I don't think I've ever seen more camaraderie in a scene than that DIY punk scene of that era. And everybody pretty much went to each other's shows in the community, but the beauty of it is that they were in communications with people from Orange County, with people from West Hollywood, people from Burbank, even out of state. They'd have shows where, even back in the late- to mid-'80s, they would have shows, like this place called Angie's Dust Bowl. They called it Dust Bowl because it was nothing but her backyard, which was dirt, you'd end up leaving with muddy boogers. [Laughs] Those places—which in East L.A. it's really rare, 'cause like I tell you, it's a little hidden city, or used to be, it's a little hidden city in Los Angeles where nobody comes in or out, people mostly live here—but back even in the late-, mid-'80s, they had groups coming from New York, coming from all over the place. And it was beautiful to be able to have a place for them to perform in front of East Los kids, that was really rare and beautiful.

DAVILA: Were you going to a lot of shows prior to joining bands, like when you were a teenager?

LOPEZ: Yeah, I did, because my brothers, again, performed in bands, so if they wouldn't take me, they wouldn't go, my mom wouldn't let them go, when I was a little kid. But I did get a chance to see a lot of groups perform prior, when I was thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, I got a chance to really see a lot of bands. And then going to junior high and high school, you'd get flyers passed around, and you're like, "Where's the next gig?" And I got a chance to see a lot of bands, as well, like that.

DAVILA: So were you going to see a lot of bands like the Thrusters, and some of those other East L.A. '80s backyard bands?

LOPEZ: Yeah, actually the guy I was telling you about, his name is George Hernandez, he used to perform in the Thrusters. He still does actually, they come and go. But yeah, I did, I was a big Thrusters fan. Before that Media Blitz, No Church on Sunday, Butt Acne, No Mercy, Suicidal Tendencies, back in those days. So it was a lot of bands.

DAVILA: So that were kind of your formative years going to see those bands play?

LOPEZ: Yeah. It was junior high, high school times.

DAVILA: You mentioned that there was kind of like networking happening in the DIY punk scene with people from other parts of the city, as well as from out of state. The one band that everyone has heard of, and everyone knows, is Los Crudos. Were they an influential band for a lot of people out here?

LOPEZ: They definitely were. They were the example at the time. Not the only example, of course, but they were doing what a lot of people here were trying to figure out how to do, I guess. And they opened the doors, I think, for a lot of the East Coast, Mid-State bands to be able to come over here. Because they would do it where to come see them was only five bucks, the shirts they were selling were only five to seven bucks. They weren't playing these big venues where it was twenty-one and over, it was always all-ages. So they made it really accessible for people to be able to go up there. And of course what they were talking about was just amazing. So, yeah, they pretty much were one of the bands that really set the example for a lot of the bands here to be able to do it themselves as well.

DAVILA: Do you think a lot of the bands that were happening around that time, do you think that there was networking happening based on Chicano or Latino consciousness?

LOPEZ: I think it didn't start off that way, it started off as just kids being able to express themselves in a way where they were able to voice their opinions and not feel like they couldn't. And actually those shows were a place where they could actually dialogue with each other, where a lot of times it wasn't about the music, it was just about people being able to dialogue, and the bands were just a reason for everybody to come meet. And everybody had their opinion, and every opinion was different. But by doing that, little by little you started realizing, "Oh, there's this band, and they're Chicano as well, and they're talking about the issues that we're talking about." So from there spawned a lot. And it wasn't even looked at in that way, or anything like that, but it was an anomaly. It's like going, "Wow, they're from Southgate, or from somewhere else, and they're dealing with the same issues we are, we should put shows together." And so little by little, the DIY scene, without meaning to, spawned a Chicano punk movement. Which is, I think,

barely now being acknowledged in that way. It was never said openly that it was like a Chicano punk movement. Until now, the next generation is kinda like looking at it from the outside in, so it seems to be, it looks more like that.

DAVILA: And to me it seems like a scene and a moment that deserves a lot of recognition, because it seems like it was a lot of people pushing back against politicians and legislators who were trying to do things that were bad for the community, and it seemed like a lot of people were using punk as a way to organize against that kind of...

LOPEZ: Definitely, definitely. And it's a trip, 'cause a lot of times I talk to people who were in that scene, and they look at what was going on in kind of a negative way where nothing really came out of it, and we haven't toppled a regime and built our own sense of utopia, or whatever. But I don't think it was really about that. It was really just about putting it out there, putting that voice out there, and feeling like an equal, and just some kind of feeling that there's other people that have that—not that they understand it or that they need to—but at least it's not just kept inside of you, it's out.

And the truth of the matter is, at the time, of course, you never really see the changes that are being made until way later. And Boyle Heights is going through a crazy change right now, for the positive. If you look at actually where we're standing now, ten, fifteen years ago, you actually couldn't get from your car to where we were without being hit up, or asked, or done something. Actually, two houses away, as a kid growing up, there was a gang there of thirty gang members. Most of them, growing up they were my heroes when I was a kid, watching them, 'cause they were the cool guys with all the pretty girls, and so forth. And I saw a handful of them die right on this hill. And being able to voice that, and things like that, was definitely a growing thing for a kid who didn't have anybody or anything, a way to voice that.

And just to add to that, Boyle Heights, East Los Angeles is going through a big change. There's so much—maybe for other reasons as well—but the community is really taking back their community, and doing a lot of positive work in it. And it has to do with things like the punk scene from before, where issues needed to be brought out. And not by a politician, not by a teacher, not by an elected official, or anything, but by the community, as well. And that was a tool that was a great tool to do that. And although it wasn't like, "Oh, let's start a campaign," or a group of people, or whatever, just on a level of person-

to-person, or brother and sister-to-brother and sister, community member-to-community member, I think it really helped quell a lot of the difficult issues that we had here.

DAVILA: So it sounds like—people think of DIY punk as in some sense a grassroots, or something that’s sort of centered on a group of people collectively rising to face a certain set of challenges, rather than one person taking the role—and it sounds like that’s sort of what you’re saying was happening, or is happening in this community right now?

LOPEZ: Yeah, definitely. And it did, it did. Somebody doing it just made you feel like, “Oh, well, if he can do it, then I can do it, too, and we can do it together and grow in that way.” And that really in the sense of the word community, that’s exactly what it is. You don’t carry me, but we can help relieve the weight if we’re both doing it, or if more of us are doing it, and together we can solve these issues, or bring them to light at least so the community can help deal with issues and so forth.

And that’s kind of what the DIY scene was about as well. Because, yeah, there was a lot of punks that weren’t very positive, they’ve got a lot of things inside ‘em, and they’re just wanting to cause [...], they’re just wanting to wreck things and so forth. And a lot of times growing up around here, that’s your first emotion, you’re angry. But once you realize it’s not an isolated thing, where it’s not just you, there’s a lot of people like you that are angry, and there’s reasons, then you start realizing that with dialogue comes realization that there’s reasons why you’re angry, that there’s reasons why the issues that are making you frustrated and angry, those things can be fixed, and then that there’s things that are deliberately put there for that. That comes with dialogue. And then you start changing your emotions from just being angry to being angry with a direction, to heal and stuff.

It’s really a labor love, and it has to be, because there’s really no gain, like monetary or anything like that. It’s really something you really give of yourself. And my goal really was communication with community. Is, still is. Now it’s on an international basis now, where we dialogue with Maoris from across the Pacific, and then Nuu Cha Nulth Natives from—well, now known as—Vancouver Island, or Native brothers and sisters from South Dakota reservations and so forth. But really it’s been just communications with oppressed people, and being able to dialogue, and know that they’re not alone, that there’s people resisting, and dialogue for a change for the better. In Aztlan Underground,

it turned to change in that way, but on a spiritual level, as well. But with a lot of the punk bands, it was—Subsistencia had that, as well—it was change, I wouldn't say political because it wasn't, it was a step away from trying to dialogue about politics, because when you start trying to dialogue about politics and religion and things of that sort, you actually push people away. It was more just a dialogue about bettering our community, bettering ourselves, bettering our situations, and having camaraderie with other struggles anywhere, everywhere.

DAVILA: Solidarity.

LOPEZ: Yeah, solidarity with all people's movements. And not only people, our four-legged relatives, and including Mother Earth, and so forth. And so, yeah, that's basically what it was. And again, on me, personally, it wasn't that I had a voice to be able to speak, because my struggle this whole time has been to even be able to communicate the way me and you are communicating right now, and this whole time I've never been able to do that. I've never been able to talk about... Just, I shut down, I always would shut down because I just never had the ability to speak in that way. But I was able to speak, have a voice with my instrument, and be able to back up somebody who did have a voice, who did have the ability to speak. And that's what it was, it's always been about backing somebody up who has a voice to speak to the community. That's always been my role.

DAVILA: Do you think that in a place like Boyle Heights that there are limited opportunities for kids to speak out about the things that are affecting them?

LOPEZ: Yes, there is, and there always has been, but not to a point where it's an excuse. Because you definitely feel the pressure to not speak out, and to not voice your opinions, and not better yourself in that way. But not to a point where it's an excuse where it can't be done, or where there's no way to do it. And I can completely see where someone feels that way, and could probably go through their whole lives feeling that way, and not releasing in that way, not being able to communicate or better themselves in that way. But if there's a will, there's a way. If you really want to communicate about things, you find a way, and you use whatever is in front of you to make that happen. And the punk scene was one way of doing that, music is one way of doing that.

DAVILA: Talking about DIY and the community focus of it... I don't know if you're familiar with Scion, the car company's attempts to appeal to youth culture, and they had a couple videos about punk in East L.A. And Vans, the shoe company, is coming in, I don't know if they have already or if they're going to soon, they're coming into East L.A. to kind of like make a documentary about the backyard scene. How do you feel about those kind of things, where those corporations are coming in from outside and trying to tell a story about the community?

LOPEZ: Right. Well, of course my first emotions would be, "Wow, you mother..., You rat bastards. Again, you're taking something that's beautiful, something that you shouldn't play with, and you're taking something beautiful away again from the community, something that's real." And of course, that's completely true. They can care two bits about a Chicano punk kid trying to find his identity. They just want to appeal to that kid because that kid is gonna grow up, and they want to sell him a car, basically. They want to connect with anybody, to anything that has roots to it, and grasp to it, and try to sell cars. And their way of doing it is basically, they have no idea of any punk scene, they're not interested in any other scene, anything but making cars and selling them. And they hire kids who are probably college kids who want to exploit something. Which is to them, especially if they didn't grow up around here, they don't see the reality of it, they just see, "Something I can grasp on that's cool, and I'm going to get a lot of money from this car company who's going to pay me to do something that I like to do anyway, that I like to do research on anyway." Not caring about exploiting it and stuff like that. So on many levels it's wrong. But it's just one of many things that are exploited. The hip-hop scene got exploited exactly the same way, with shoes, Nikes. With all those big companies, you throw big money at kids who've never had money, and maybe one out of ten of them is going to say yes, and it's understandable. And how can you hate on that, but also how can you agree with it, as well?

DAVILA: To me—and you were kind of saying this already, that they're trying to appeal to these kids so that eventually when they have some money in their pocket, they'll want to spend it on these people's product. And to me what's disconcerting about the whole thing is that there's all this stuff happening right now, there's all this legislation directed toward Chicano communities that are basically saying that we're not a part of the U.S.,

that we're somehow foreign, even those of who were born here, our culture isn't compatible with so-called American culture. So one of the only exceptions is when someone thinks we might have some money to spend, and then they're perfectly happy to acknowledge us.

LOPEZ: Yeah, that makes perfect sense. And the people who write that legislation, and those small communities, that's exactly what they're turning into, they're really turning into the minority. And there's really a race for the minds, and the money, of groups of people, such as Chicano community—or they like to call Mexican American community—that are soon to be the majority. And they would like them to be—they can't help the fact that they're gonna be brown, that their past is in Mexico, or the central part of the continent, or the southern part of the continent, or the islands. But they at least want their minds to fall into that category where they follow the laws and American way of life. Which is basically spend, and preferably with a credit card, to stay in debt, and work all these crazy hours, and keep on trying to reach that pie in the sky that just always seems to be a little beyond your grasp. And with that, they'll be perfectly happy, because no matter what you categorize yourself in, you're still a slave to their system, to their money.

DAVILA: A lot of the bands in the '90s, Los Crudos, the ones that you were in, that were part of that, if I can call it a network, a lot of people were singing in Spanish. I wonder if that was a very conscious decision for a lot of people to do that, and if so what was the motivation to want to do that?

LOPEZ: The motivation was to kind of reclaim... Yeah, it was a conscious decision, and it was a way to feel proud of, although Spanish is not our native language, it's the language that our parents spoke. So it was a way to feel comfortable ranting and yelling in front of a large group—maybe not so large—but a group of people, and saying it in the language your parents spoke. And for a lot of reasons, as well. And I think a lot of people did it because it made them feel unique, in the sense where only a group of people would understand them.

Which, stepping back and looking at it, you would say, "Oh, well that goes kind of against the broad sense of community." You want to include everybody in whatever you're saying, whatever your rants are. But it was a kind of way of saying, "If you

understand what I'm saying, that means you know where I'm coming from. You grew up in a situation similar to what I grew up in, and by speaking this way you would understand it." And it's like saying, "Wow, I get it." And it wasn't for reasons of mostly to shut yourself from everybody else who wouldn't understand Spanish, or didn't speak both languages in their house, or whatever. It was just a way of saying—because I think we felt so pushed away and frustrated because of it, because we spoke both languages and English wasn't our first language growing up—it was unique in the experience of speaking English and Spanish. And even the lingo, which it's a lingo that is separate from living in Mexico or all the southern countries, because your lingo is English and Spanish, Spanglish I guess they call it. It was a little anomaly that only a group of people would understand it, and it was just a way of saying, "I'm speaking to you," like, "If you understand me, then you grew up with the same frustrations and issues that I did." It wasn't a way to close off anybody.

In doing that, though, it tripped out all the other Spanish-speaking countries, punk kids from all the Spanish-speaking countries, including Spain, where it was like, "Whoa, they're in the belly of the beast and their speaking back to us in Spanish, and it's their own lingo, and they have issues, it's not perfect over there. It's not everywhere there's just money and candy bars all over the floor." Where what you see in media, which is in other countries is what the impression they get from living here in the U.S., so-called.

DAVILA: But if they're consuming exported American media, then they're probably not actually seeing very many images of Chicanos.

LOPEZ: Yeah. Exactly. But aside from DIY passing out tapes, passing out reality, that's the only information they get, that's the only visuals that they get. That everyone here made it, that the roads are paved in gold, and so forth.

DAVILA: To go back a little bit, you were talking about how singing in Spanish wasn't necessarily meant to close anyone out. I think you said something along the lines of it was a way of saying to someone else, we sort of share a similar experience. But to me it also seems like singing in Spanish isn't meant to say to anyone who doesn't speak it that you can't listen to our music, it's just a way... To me—I don't know if this was something that you thought about before, or if this was intentional on your part in any

way, and maybe it was—but it seems like a way of saying, “If you *want* to know what we’re talking about, you’re going to have to do the work, and you’re going to have to figure it out for yourself and meet us there.”

LOPEZ: Yeah. And that was the beauty of the DIY scene where they put out records, they don’t put out CDs, sometimes they put out tapes, tapes weren’t so difficult to get back in the early- to mid-‘90s. But on purpose, the DIY scene would make records, and they would have their lyrics either just in Spanish. Yeah, it was like, “Try to figure it out, try to figure us out, try to understand where we’re coming from.” A lot of ‘em were in that mode. And some of them, their lyrics would come in English and Spanish, as well, just I guess to say, “This is what we’re saying, and this is a way for you to understand it.”

DAVILA: Yeah, watching the documentary that Martin made, you watch some of the clips of Crudos playing, and it’s a lot of white kids in the crowd, but they are singing along to every song, too. They know all the words, and they know what they’re about, and it seemed like a really cool moment of understanding, of people trying to approach this community that they might not have paid much mind before.

LOPEZ: Yeah, that’s definitely it, and that’s the beauty of it, as well. Maybe in that sense we take it for granted when you look at the opposite end, of kids from other countries where let’s just say they speak Japanese or just Spanish, where all the stuff that’s being put out there is in English. And you go down there and they’re singing to every word, and they probably don’t understand the words a lot, but they usually make the effort to sing along and at least get the motions, the words, sometimes not understanding what it means, but they care about the music enough to try to do that. And kids that speak English here usually don’t reciprocate that, they don’t do that here. But it’s a trip, we kind of take that for granted, I guess, ‘cause we spoke both English and Spanish, where it was beautiful to have kids that either only spoke English trying to figure out the words, trying to find the meanings, and even dialoguing, trying to make dialogue with us.

[Missing segment]

LOPEZ: ... a couple years putting that together, and it was a lot of hard work to really piece all that together, and then another year to record it and get the artwork together.

And the artwork was actually like a whole booklet. We [Aztlán Underground] really worked on it, and we put a lot of effort into it, but once we were done putting it together we were so spiritually overwhelmed, I guess, that we weren't able to really push it out there as well as we wanted to. So for now, just singles have been working for us, 'cause we put 'em together, and we've been releasing things every changing of the season, marking the summer solstice, the spring equinox and so for. So every year we release at least four songs. And they're just easier to put out, and you put more attention into releasing it. You put the artwork together, everything, instead of doing a lot of songs and releasing them all at one time.

DAVILA: Do you get to tour with that group?

LOPEZ: Yes, we do. I've gotten a chance to travel with them pretty well, actually. We've gone as far as Venezuela, to... Even before I was in the group, they've gone to Australia, and New Zealand, and Canada. I've gone to Canada with them. New York, they've played Europe, we've gone to South Dakota, and Arizona. They've performed in Texas. We've gotten a chance to...

DAVILA: Yaotl mentioned the Arizona thing was a part of, was it a protest against the book banning that was happening?

LOPEZ: Yeah, actually. They banned one of the songs that we do. And so we're pretty proud of that. And actually, we went in there and we performed it there for some kids that... They banned Chicano Studies in the universities, and the kids wanted Chicano Studies that they actually put together their own, they put a place together where they could learn Chicano Studies from their teachers, even though the university banned it. And in support of them, we went over there and performed it, knowing that we could have gotten arrested and beat up. But yeah, we were just floored by their wanting to learn and do that, that that's what it is, we just wanted to support them. And that's really what this group is, just to support all the different movements, not to go in there and like, "This is what you should do," or "This our take on it." And that's really the work of an organizer. It's not to take the lead and start giving out our ideas, it's just to help create a space or an atmosphere where the community can speak their minds.

DAVILA: Did you get to tour with some of the punk bands?

LOPEZ: Yeah. Actually pretty much all of them. Kontraattaque, we went to Chicago, I think we'd go to Mexicali, Tijuana, we went to Arizona, we'd go to Frisco, and so forth. And the other bands as well, we did get a chance to tour like that.

Interview with Kimberly “Kiwi” Martinez
Los Angeles, CA, 8/9/2013

DAVILA: What drew you to punk initially, and what does it mean to you?

MARTINEZ: In high school, it was 9th grade, my mom bought me this CD of the Ramones, and then that’s how I started into it. The Ramones, and then the Germs, and from there on I just started listening to a lot of punk. And right now I’m really into a lot of Spanish hardcore. And I think what is so cool about punk is just that it allows you to express yourself however you want, like whatever you want in the lyrics. And whatever anger you feel, you can release that. And no one is there to judge you. And a lot of people relate to how you feel, too.

DAVILA: Was your mom into punk, too? Is that why she bought you a Ramones CD?

MARTINEZ: No. She’s not. She’s into disco. But it’s funny because she bought a bunch of CDs, and somehow the Ramones was in with the CDs that she had, that she bought, so that’s [...].

DAVILA: Oh, okay. Fair enough. So when did you first start to play drums.

MARTINEZ: Oh, that was maybe like two years ago. Yeah.

DAVILA: And what made you want to start playing drums?

MARTINEZ: At first it just became, I was practicing with Tony. Well, I wasn’t practicing with Tony. Tony was playing, he was in another band called [...]. He was writing music, and he’s like, “Oh, I need a beat. Can you just jump on the drum set?” And I’m like, “Oh, what do I do? I don’t know what to do.” And he’s like, “It’s easy, just do [mimics drum beat].” And I just kept doing that. And then from there on I’m like, “Oh, cool, I’m actually good at this.”

DAVILA: So did you take lessons at any point, or just kinda figure it out as you went?

MARTINEZ: I did, but it just lasted for like two, three weeks because I was going to school, so the schedule was kind of... But it was mostly to learn how to read notes.

DAVILA: The scene here I would describe as DIY. Does that appeal to you as a method of approaching making music, and what about it appeals to you?

MARTINEZ: Well, everything we do is ourselves. And I think it's just, from the point when we started Generacion Suicida, it's been that way. And it just goes to show that we worked so hard. I remember my first show was uhhh, it was crazy, I was really nervous. And I remember Tony making a really pink shirt, and he just kind of threw paint over it. And it just goes to show that if you have... no matter what it takes you're going to dedicate yourself to promote your band. I don't know if I answered your question.

DAVILA: Yeah, I think so. Do you feel as though you would prefer to do things DIY?

MARTINEZ: I would rather do it because I don't want anyone to alter what we're aiming for. This is how we want to sound, and that's how we want to do it. We don't want anyone sitting over there like, "Hey, I can make it better." Just do it ourselves. We know what we want. As long as we have fun.

DAVILA: So when you say you know what you want, are you talking mostly in terms of sound, or does that also apply to the themes that you write about in the lyrics, and...

MARTINEZ: When we're writing music, we all bring something different to the table. When I play drums, I'm a very aggressive drummer, I would say. People say, "Oh, wow, you drum so fast, how do you do it?" And it's how I feel. It just comes out that way. And, everyone's different.

DAVILA: One of my interests in the scene, or the scenes, I guess, that are going on in L.A., is because of the strong presence of Chicanos and Latinos. Is that something that you identify with?

MARTINEZ: I definitely, especially growing up here in South Central, I grew up with a lot of Latinos, and I definitely identify with Chicanos. And it's weird because I was born in Guatemala, and I came here when I was one. So a lot of people ask me, "So, do you feel Guatemalan?" Not really because I grew up here. And I was not raised with my culture, so the punk culture is what I know. Yeah, but, definitely I identify with the Chicano punk culture here. Especially here in South Central. Because it's so different, like in East L.A. it's different from South Central, and West L.A. Even though it's still punk.

DAVILA: Do you think that that identity is something that unites a lot of the bands, or is it maybe just as much proximity?

MARTINEZ: I think it can unite people, but at the same time, I have felt like growing up, if you take a group of people from South Central, and they're all Chicanos, and you go and play in East L.A., and they'll be East L.A. punks, and it doesn't matter that you're Latino, the fact that you're from a different spot, there will be [hits closed fists together]. That's how I see it. But here we'll have friends and [inaudible] It can unite people, but at the same time it can also [inaudible].

DAVILA: Do you think a lot of the Chicano and Latino bands from South Central, do you think there's a lot of openness and intermingling with bands who aren't Chicano or Latino?

MARTINEZ: It depends, because I've met people that run shows, and they don't allow... Well, it's not that they don't allow, but they say a lot of bad things about other races. And I've seen this girl, she's Chicana, but she didn't speak Spanish at all, and she's throwing rocks at a white girl. Some people are like that, but not all. It depends. You can tell who the people are. I don't think that a lot of people are like that. You can tell who the people are.

DAVILA: So do you write any of the lyrics yourself, or is that pretty much Tony?

MARTINEZ: Tony writes all the lyrics.

DAVILA: But you sing on a few of the songs, as well?

MARTINEZ: Yeah, I do. I sing in almost all of them. But he's the one who writes the lyrics. He's a good writer.

DAVILA: What would you say the long-term goals of the band are?

MARTINEZ: For me, I tell them as long as I'm having fun I want to keep on doing it. And as long as I can tell people I'm enjoying what I'm doing, I'll keep doing it. I'm not trying to make any money out of it. I think that the fact that we go on tours, and see different punk scenes, and the fact that they like us, that's crazy, [inaudible]. But yeah, as long as we're having fun. Because if I'm doing something I hate, there's no point in doing it.

DAVILA: So, you say that you don't necessarily care if you're making money or not, but if you were making money, would that be fine, too?

MARTINEZ: Hmm.

DAVILA: I mean, not necessarily big money.

MARTINEZ: I mean, we have stressed about, like, we need money for records, we need money for merchandise. Because a lot of people ask for merchandise. But all of the money we make goes back into that, so if we can make a little bit extra, I wouldn't mind.

DAVILA: If you could make a living from it, would you be excited at that chance? And not necessarily an amazing living.

MARTINEZ: I know Tony would be into that. But I'm going to school to be a therapist, so it would be fun, but I really want to help people in need, too. I volunteer at a homeless shelter, so [inaudible].

DAVILA: Right here in South Central?

MARTINEZ: Yeah.

DAVILA: Okay, so a final question I would ask is who would say some of your influences are as a drummer, and just in terms of what kind of a band you want to be in?

MARTINEZ: Well, when I started playing drums, Eskorbuto from Spain, if you hear the demo, the way I drum is slower than how I drum now, and it was just based on Eskorbuto. Now, it's like now that I feel so comfortable with the drums, I'm just angry, and I think of Gorilla Angreb. Gorilla Angreb is the big one that I can listen to. If I'm feeling down right now, and I'm like, "Oh, I have practice in an hour," I'll put Gorilla Angreb on, and it'll pump me up. And that drummer's amazing.

Interview with Yaotl Mazahua
San Fernando, CA, 9/17/2013

DAVILA: The first question is where are you from originally, where did you grow up?

MAZAHUA: Yeah, actually I grew up right here. I was born and raised right here in San Fernando, California. And I've been living in the same house my whole life, actually, because my parents passed away and I ended up inheriting it.

DAVILA: When you first became involved in music, that was right here in the area?

MAZAHUA: Yeah, right here in the area. My brother, actually, he was this guy playing congas or percussion, like salsa music, so I was exposed to music through him, and then after... What happened was I ended up being what you call a latchkey kid. I had parents, but one worked late-night, overnight, and the other one worked from six to two, and then when he got home, he would make me a cool dinner, but go to sleep, so I was pretty much alone all the time. So as a result, I ended up falling into gang activity, and gang behavior, and I almost died at one point. So that's when my parents had to buckle down on me. But I had a year of just starting getting into rock, and I got into Sabbath, I got into Led Zeppelin, stuff like that, and martial arts and stuff.

And what ended up happening ... Over here in this area, at the time, the demographics were quite different, it was like half white and half Mexican. And as a result, because this used to be orange groves, so you had descendants of the Dust Bowl, like Arkansas and Oklahomans, you had poor whites living here. So there was a lot of racial tension, I grew up with a lot of racial tension. So one of the reasons for joining a gang was not only because I was latchkey, but also because it was like protection from these rogue whites who would harass my family and me. And even when I started wearing the attire that resembled gang attire, I got beat up in front of my house by these people, and they stole my dad's truck. It was like getting terrorized. So, it was even more reason to be protected being in the gang.

But as a result, I ended trying to be all that, and I tried to outdo some gang members, older gang members, and I tried to outdrink 'em or whatever, and challenge them, and they beat me up, and I almost died. So then I almost died, and I was thirteen years old, so I had a year of where I was kind of in limbo. But I still felt like there was something

wrong, like I really didn't... At the time, I couldn't process racism. It was weird, although I was being victimized by the racial tension here, I had a sense of confusion, but also a yearning, like something's wrong, and I don't like what I see.

So when I ended up going to... You gotta understand that back in the day, like right now, cholos are associated with having their heads shaved, but back in the day, cholos would have their hair slicked back, kind of short, but slicked back, it wasn't shaved. So when I got into tenth grade—'cause at that time, that's when you started high school, is tenth grade—when I got into tenth grade, I ran across a group of punks at my school that were all shaved head. And I go, "Whoa." First of all, their appearance tripped me out, and then second of all, I was looking at their folders and their books, and they had four bar symbols, Black Flag, and Circle Jerks, and Germs, whatever. And I ended up asking him, like, "Hey, what's up?" I didn't know the guy, but I'm like, "What is that?" "Punk rock, man." I go, "What? What's punk rock?" "It's music."

So then I just started hanging out with him, and that was like 1980, and I started hanging out with them, I got intrigued. And then I met this other guy, Javier, who I'm still friends with right now, who ended up being part of Aztlan Underground eventually, but he was two years older than us, and he started taking us to gigs and stuff. And the first gig I went to was Dead Kennedys, and I was totally blown away. I saw them at the Whisky, with Jello and all that, and it was just an amazing time. And I started buying records, and I started identifying with the angst, I started identifying with Black Flag, especially I remember blasting "Nervous Breakdown," the version by Keith, where he's "I'm about to have a nervous breakdown." And that really, I'm like, "Fuck, yeah," like, "Hell, yeah," like I felt validated in my own confusion, my own sense of something's wrong. But pretty soon the lyrics to Dead Kennedys were making sense, and they started breaking down, questioning power structures. And then Minor Threat came along with their whole straight edge thing, and I started being straight edge.

And then around late '80, early '81, at school the punks that were hanging out started growing, the DIY of it was like, I don't know how to play music or anything, but with the group of friends we were going to shows with, they ended up asking, "Hey, do you want to play bass." And I was like, "Yeah, I'm down to play bass, but I don't know how to play bass." And they let me in the band, even though I played it with two thumbs. And at

first we were all straight edge, we were all with the X, we were all clean. ‘Cause at first when we jumped in the punk scene, it was about songs like Circle Jerks, “I don’t want to live to be thirty-four,” “Live Fast, Die Young”-type trip, and it was nihilistic. But straight edge brought another, more kind of conscious perspective, self-love, and even though they had songs like “Guilty of Being White,” and even Black Flag with “White Minority,” and it was a trip.

But anyway, let me rewind a little, because I was exploring that whole trip, and I went to Dead Kennedys. And one of the first shows that really blew my mind, because here in this area, everything was so racially divided that there was no intermingling of people of color and whites, and yet in the punk scene, that was something that tripped me out, you seen blacks and whites, brown people in there. But what really tripped me out, I ended up going to East L.A. to, at the time it was Self-Help Graphics, but it was the Vex, and I see the Stains. You see this dude on stage, it was Rudy, dressed to the T like a cholo, with the Pendleton buttoned to the top, unbuttoned like that, with Dickies on, and slippers, suede slippers, and his head bleached red, and pachuco hat, or cholo hat, just rockin’ the crowd. And then you see the bass player and guitar player, dressed like—at the time you could tell, like immigrant clothing, like these high-heel shoes and these bell-bottoms that were already out of style, but in México, Mexicanos would come, would rock that during the time, but yet it was already out of style, ‘cause that was ‘70s and we were already in the ‘80s. And you see this whole white crowd just going off, dude, and I was like, “Damn.” To me it was like a crossroads of being a cholo and rebellion, and also like another world was possible in a way, if you will, because you saw intermixing, you had all kinds of people, like different colors coming together, and it just was very empowering, man. And although I had no clear analysis of how empowering it was, it was just a very moving moment in my own life, in my own self-identity, because it showed who we could be. So that was kind of a moving part in my whole... And even investing so much in the punk movement, because it felt like I was validated as a Chicano who grew up getting beat up by white people, but then seeing on stage four brown heads, completely brown to the hilt, rocking the same crowd that used to oppress me—the majority of it, anyway, it was not all white. But it just was a very moving moment. And I even started dressing like Rudy and shit, it was funny.

But so then that's when we started getting into Minor Threat, and we were straight edge at first. But then a real big impact was the English bands coming out of England that were conscious. First of all, for us it was Discharge, and we became a band like Discharge, which was about questioning war, the realities of war, nuclear arm movement, all that whole trip. But then that was a step for us to get to Crass, and then Crass and the whole analysis of centralized power, and where they talk about Bakunin, Kropotkin, Emma Goldman, it was really an education that I would never have gotten in high school. Punk music really saved my life, empowered me, educated me, got me to another place, understanding. In fact, it got me... Then after the post-punk tip—well, it wasn't even post-punk, it was kind of concurrent—but Southern Death Cult was another step that, because they were this English guy that grew up on a Cree reserve in Canada, they start talking about Native ideals, and then that got me to a place, consciousness, because then I started rocking his posters on my wall, and my dad ends up telling... I had not even a sense of identity, what a Mexican was, and I have this picture of Sitting Bull really big, and he goes, [conversation in Spanish]. It blew my mind, dude.

DAVILA: You might have to...

MAZAHUA: Yeah?

DAVILA: I don't speak Spanish.

MAZAHUA: Oh, you don't speak Spanish? Okay. Sorry. So my father, he sees a big ol' poster of Sitting Bull, and he's like, "What the fuck is that? Why are you into that shit?" Because they were from Mexico City, and Mexico City is like the New Yorkers of Mexico. And I'm all, "Well, 'cause the Natives talk about God is Mother Earth, being connected intrinsically to Creation." And he's all, "Fool, you're Native. Don't you know that, fool?" And I was like, "What?" It was an epiphany, man. 'Cause I grew up being called wetback, illegal, I didn't belong, and here I'm reading the knowledge and story of Native people, and not even knowing what my own identity was. So I'm telling you, music, and punk, it was my whole path, it empowered me. And that's why I still do music now. I'm forty-eight years old, and I still do music, and even if it is obscure, even if people don't understand it, it's still like I know it's a vehicle.

DAVILA: You said you didn't know how to play an instrument at all when you first joined the band?

MAZAHUA: No, not at all.

DAVILA: So did you take lessons at that point?

MAZAHUA: No, it was all self-taught. And after a while I started, one note, one note, and then pretty soon I was just handling. But then like I tell you, I had a background of, I would have to play these certain syncopated patterns for my brother, so he could practice, and so I guess I had an idea of rhythm at least before anything. But I never learned formally. I still haven't had formal lessons for anything. Right now I do vocals and percussion. But I had a solid DIY intro.

DAVILA: Who were the other members of Iconoclast?

MAZAHUA: That's another thing. See, the drummer was half-Mexican and half-white, his name was Nick Hanson. And the singer was of Greek origin, so he had black hair. But our guitarist... Well, our first guitarist was actually Chicano and Polish, but he was only in there briefly. But then we got a guitarist named Brendan Duffy, which I think he was English and Irish, but American. But because we were all black-haired, there was a lot of... Because there was still racial divide within the punk scene, but it wasn't overtly oppressive, it was just the sign of the times, typical white people speak. But they would call us Chicanoclast, because we were all brown-haired, black-haired, but yet the singer was actually Greek, he wasn't Chicano. But they would call us Chicanoclast. But that's how come we're now thinking of doing a tribute to Iconoclast and calling it "Tribute to Iconoclast: Chicanoclast." I don't know if you checked us out on the Web, but if not I'll send you some links.

DAVILA: Yeah, I found your first demo on YouTube, someone had posted the whole thing. But that was about all I was able to find.

MAZAHUA: There is more than that. I'll send you those.

DAVILA: In that band, you had that demo, was that self-released?

MAZAHUA: Yeah, that was self-released.

DAVILA: So how did you go about recording that? Was it just find a recorder and set up in your house?

MAZAHUA: No, we actually rented a studio in Van Nuys or Sherman Oaks, or whatever, and we rented a studio and paid for studio time and all that, and that's what we did. We paid for it, and all that. We were getting pretty popular, actually, at one point, and we ended up opening for Subhumans from England, and Conflict. And Conflict stayed at our house. We had a little commune at my house in the backyard, in the garage, we all lived in there, and had a garden, made our own beer. We were really trying to put that anarchism and communalism into motion and effect.

DAVILA: Was there an independent scene in the Valley, or were you mixing a lot with...

MAZAHUA: No. It was a trip, because everyone would meet at all the gigs, whether it was in L.A., or Mid City, or East L.A., but everyone would represent like confederations. You would have La Mirada punks, you would have Valley punks, you would have Hermosa Beach and all that, you'd have Orange County. So all the punks would converge, but everyone would know their region, like, "Oh, you're a Valley punk," "Oh, you're La Mirada," blah blah, or "You're from West Valley." It was weird, everyone just represented where they were from, but everyone... We weren't isolated, you know what I mean, we were connected. But we had our own little scene here, there was other bands, like there was a band called Public Nuisance, and I think there's one more band I'm probably forgetting. But other than that, for this part of the Valley, it was us two in that time.

But then after that, I kind of got into a post-punk band that's not even on the Web, called the Wankers, that we'd only play every six months, and we would do a performance art piece. We'd put out these flyers, this really thick cardboard with specific kind of art, and it would be a multimedia event with... We'd have performance artists on stage with us, and we'd have one whole set that wouldn't stop for forty-five minutes straight. And we'd have images, slides of a Super-8 going in slow motion. But all these things going on at the same time, and it was kind of based around Situationist anarchism. But it was kind of post-punk, tribally trip. But that was like '86 to '88, and then '88 was like... By '84, though, I was already getting turned on to hip-hop through Run-D.M.C. I was hanging out with this band called Crucifix from San Francisco, and they had a warehouse up in

Oakland, and I got turned onto hip-hop through them, through other punks, which is interesting. And that year, '84, I think that was the year the first Run-D.M.C. album... Anyway, but I digress.

DAVILA: The other band from the Valley, would you guys ever play shows out here? Were there ever shows?

MAZAHUA: If anything, there would be shows in a backyard. Friend's backyards. There was a venue in the Valley called Godzilla's. But all the punks would come to here, too. Everyone played, from Bad Religion to Circle Jerks to the Stains. And it was called Godzilla's, and it was Sun Valley, which is just down San Fernando Road. So there were shows. Oh, and then there was another place called Sun Valley Sportsmen's Lodge, which is next to Godzilla's on the other side of the tracks, and there was gigs there. But all kinds of bands from Oxnard would come there, it was like a whole convergence of all these bands from all around would play in every different part of the city. It was a trip, man.

DAVILA: Were there a lot of punks around the Valley, or were people coming up from L.A.?

MAZAHUA: No, there was a lot of punks in the Valley. There was its own little legion. At one point, this gang called Guerrilla Warfare, and they were like a punk gang. And there was another thing, a crew more like, called Valley Punks, and it was like... Well, like I tell you, more often than not people would just converge and hang out, but it had its own contingent out here. And everyone who was a punk knew each other, it was very tightknit community. And we'd all share rides to buy records on Melrose, 'cause when Melrose wasn't hipped out like it is now, there used to be a very alternative lifestyle kind of vibe there. And it had this place called Vinyl Fetish, and it had Poseurs where you bought all your punk gear. And so we'd all share rides to go down there. You would share rides to shows. So it was very tightknit, every punk knew each other, and every punk would hang out at the gigs together. Regionally, if you will. But we also used to hang out with punks from Venice. Venice people would come out here, or we'd go out there. Punks from Long Beach, they would come out here, party with us, we'd go out there. It was a trip. It was an interchange. And then there was West Valley punk, which

was more uppity. We were working-class punks here, but they had upper-middle-class punks from Porter Ranch. And I would get a girlfriend from there, and it would be a whole class, race issue, problem, 'cause I was a brown person going out with this white girl, white, upper-middle-class, Jewish girl. So it was like parents were anti-me. But I would never even cross their path had it not been for the punk scene. So it was a trip.

DAVILA: Do you think that people in the punk scene would have frowned on that at the time, or was it mostly the parents?

MAZAHUA: It was parents. No, in the punk scene, I tell you, it was like a racially free zone. That's why even in *The Decline of Western Civilization*, there this one part where Darby's all, "Oh, yeah, he's a wetback..." You gotta take it in context. At that time, racial comments were so common that every... I grew up with getting dropped off with my punk friend's mom or whatever, and then she'd dropped me off, "Oh, this is where the wetbacks live, huh?" It was just so common. My teachers would say "wetback," it was just the racial tone of the time. It was used, but in a way that subconsciously made me feel inferior, but at other times, on another tip, it was not done in a way to be... It was kind of almost like 1840s South, using the n-word, they just used it so often. It's hard to explain. It wasn't in a vindictive way. But anyway, that being said, it doesn't mean it was always spewed all the time in the scene. In fact, it seemed like it was a racial tension-free zone in the punk scene. It really was. You had black kids, you had Bad Brains, you know what I'm saying? It was a trip, it was a like a new world, it was like a better world, a rebel world, all the outcasts knew how ridiculous societal norms were that people... And then, like I tell you, within the bands they would start talking about anti-racial... breakdown racism, and be against racism. So it was very empowering, so as a result you had that progressive vibe. As much as we were anti-hippies, it was a very conscious, consciousness going on.

DAVILA: But you still used peace signs in your artwork.

MAZAHUA: Yeah, exactly. 'Cause we were considered peace punks in that band.

DAVILA: Yeah, so I was going to ask if you identified with that label, and if you could sort of define what that meant for you if you did identify with it.

MAZAHUA: Well, the whole thing was that with groups like Discharge who were anti-war, groups like Crass that talked about pacifism... I think Einstein had a quote that was really big back then, it said something to the effect of, I'm paraphrasing, that it takes the bravery of a young man to say no to participating in a war for there to be a peaceful world. So in that regard, we were kind of like militantly pacifist. So although I didn't say, "I'm a peace punk" at the time, I identified with being a peace punk, but I would not declare it. In fact, the band that I mentioned to you that used to exist at the time, and other people, they would take advantage of that. They would challenge our convictions in that we were saying that we were peaceful people, and they would maybe steal a bass, or challenge us, because they were hoping to provoke us to break our pacifist vows. But in that process they would end up taking advantage of us and manipulating our convictions, so it was like we were almost victimized for declaring ourselves pacifists at the time. But in that way, I guess I was. And in fact, like I told you, we had a little commune at my house, and it was called the Peace Farm. [Laughs] It was called the Peace Farm. Although I barely started listening to John Lennon now, if you believe it. And the Doors.

DAVILA: Bands like Crass, were they popular around here, or were you guys sort of exceptional in that sense?

MAZAHUA: I think that our band in particular were probably the most flag-bearers, if you will—which is so anti-anarchist to say that—of that genre. I would say that we were even probably the first peace punk, or anarchist, peace-anarcho band out of L.A. And then came Body Count, or maybe Body Count was right there with us maybe at the same time, I don't know. But they were out of Long Beach. And that's how we started hanging out with this group from Long Beach, because it was the only ones that we... It was weird, we were roughnecks, but we were also peace punks, we were crusties... It was weird, it was kind of a weird contradiction because we were talking about peace, but then we were also very anti-state, and also doing direct actions, stuff like that. So we would do activities that were trying to stop the system, or stop the war machine.

For example, we one time went to, in '84, and Body Count was there, we went to a rally. Ronald Reagan was speaking in Orange County, the Orange Curtain they call it, and we were bringing out his policies in El Salvador, Nicaragua, his nuclear arms stance, and we were protesting. And there was a lot, O.C. has a lot of Vietnamese refugees, and they just

went buck wild on us. A contingent of us was white, Asian, black, and poor white, of peace punks protesting Reagan. And of course, and it was ironic that the Vietnamese just went off, and they targeted the black guy who was with us, and they broke his jaw, knocked him out. So we ended up carrying him, and he got beat down, these Vietnamese went off, it was crazy, the mad sense. And it must be because they were given asylum, and they felt we represented the Communists... And they just went off, and they attacked this guy more than anyone of us, and we had to carry him. We carried him to the ambulance, and the ambulance,—it's a public O.C. fire department—dude, they rolled up their windows as we were getting there. They were like, "We refuse to give you service." It was incredible. And meanwhile we got all these Vietnamese attacking us, and we were in this island, like, "fuck." Anyway, but that's Orange County for you, that's the reality of it.

But those are the kind of actions we did. We didn't care. We'd get down with white supremacists, we'd meet 'em in Glendale at their rallies, and counter-protest and get into rock throwing, even though we were peace punks. But at the same time, if someone came and challenged us, "I'm gonna take your bass, I thought you were peace punks," we wouldn't do anything. It was contradictions, you know.

DAVILA: You mentioned that the tape you put out, and your whole process of learning your instrument, you used the term DIY to describe that. Do you think that for you at that time the choice of doing things on your own in that way, do you think that it was a practical thing for you, or was it more of a commitment to not working with major labels or wanting to avoid working with corporations?

MAZAHUA: No, I think that was the beauty and the driving force of it. Just this realization that you can do it on your own, and you can make your own music, and you don't have to worry about labels, major labels or record deals. What I mean to say is that we weren't even thinking about it. That wasn't even something on our minds. It was just so pure, it came from such a real place of angst and expression. It really, I guess, reflected the times of the Reagan era, and the Conservative era, and also the post-hippie folk trip that just felt like, "Man, fuck all that shit." It was just implicitly almost a motivating force of it. So it just seemed part of the spirit of the time that was a driving force.

DAVILA: And then you had another 7" that came out on Flipside?

MAZAHUA: Yeah. Between that we came out on this compilation called *P.E.A.C.E*, P-E-A-C-E, it was an acronym, I forget what for. But it was an international peace punk compilation.

DAVILA: Was that a double-LP with maybe a blue cover with a red hand?

MAZAHUA: I think so, you seen it?

DAVILA: Yeah. I've seen it, but I don't have it.

MAZAHUA: Yeah, yeah, exactly. And that was really neat. And even that demo, you gotta remember at that time people were just... Even Metallica, Metallica got their start—not to mention them, but just to put it in context—but everyone would share tapes, it was just tape sharing. So our manager, who ended up being a part of Aztlan Underground, he was always contacting people, taking pictures for people, and he was always in contact with different bands, and that's how we ended up getting in contact with this band called Crucifix, who were so sick, they were part of the whole peace punk era. And so he put it out, he sent it to Flipside, Flipside reviewed it, by that, that validated us to get gigs with major players like Circle Jerks. Oh, also our original guitarist, his dad started promoting punk shows, so we actually, probably our first show was a big show opening up for Bad Brains, Caustic Cause, and Circle Jerks at Devonshire Downs. Because his dad was the promoter, it was called KC Productions. And then our second gig, we opened up for I think Black Flag, and it was a big show. And that way, when the demo came out by '82, '83, we were already doing those shows in '80, '81, and then the demo came out '82, '83, pretty soon Goldenvoice, Goldenvoice was already like a punk, DIY promoter, and they were like, "Open for Subhumans, do this show at Fender's." But then beyond that, we were doing Sportsmen's Lodge, we were doing Cathay de Grande, we were just all over, we were just part of the mix, opening for Crucifix. It was just a beautiful thing, it was a great time. I have had a lot of wonderful shows, but that time, the spirit of that time is irreplaceable, it just can't be replaced.

DAVILA: What lead to wanting to do the Wankers, and the sort of Situationist thing? Was that just a natural progression?

MAZAHUA: Yeah, it was a natural progression because it felt... It's a trip, 'cause I saw this punk documentary, and I couldn't agree more, they were like, "It really died down by '85, the real spirit of it." It just felt like it was just poseurs after that, and it felt like it wasn't relevant to bash around like that, we felt like everyone needed to go to another place of expression. And even an interest in different types of bands, like Einstürzende Neubauten, or different ways of expressing things. Even, you saw with Crucifix, an offshoot of them was Trial, and they were very dark, but sick and still conscious in their own way. So it just felt like a natural progression to go to another realm of expressing. And during that time, '85, '86, '88, it was a trip, 'cause Nirvana was playing around in underground clubs. And it just felt like that spirit of that time, like, "F- it, we're not punks, but we are punks." We had another realm going on. And then the multimedia aspect just felt like, "Wow, we could make a crazy theatric, not just the music, but pamphlets"—which comes from the Anarchist influence—"to visuals." 'Cause we would have one side slides of people in cities, their faces, and then the other slide of cows and their faces. Then we'd have tribal people's faces, and how pure it was, and then we'd have pictures of antelopes, free animals, to show that we are domesticated as human beings. Then we'd have slow-motion tragic images of the industrial world, and on the other side images of the natural world. So there were still messages going on. We had a person in this gear, and a person naked putting all these chemicals, like Coke and detergent, which represented humanity in its unnecessary products and industrialized man. But juxtaposing primality and the industrial man.

DAVILA: Was finding out about the Situationists and being inspired tactics, did that also come through punk and listening to bands like Crass?

MAZAHUA: Yeah, absolutely. Because in studying, you read about Situationist tactics and these ideas, so we just wanted to expand on them. And then that band was this guy who was actually Afrikaner, a South African transplant, and then the drummer was Chicano and Polish. But he himself, too, we would just read, we were really into studying Anarchism as a whole. We would have study groups, and we would talk about mutual aid, and we would talk about these concepts, we would talk about syndicates, confederations. So we'd just really kind of discuss ideas, and try to reflect with people, through our music, another world. So that's pretty much how it ended up evolving, trying

to be in this place of...

And at one point, our final show—we didn't know it was going to be our final show, but it was—we constructed a stage made out of a jail, and the jail bars were crutches. So we had this whole show going on, and at the end we, together with the audience, we destroyed the cage with the crutches, and the crutches were symbolic of the crutch of society, and the crutch of dependency of centralized government. But we would encourage everyone to participate, and so we destroyed this thing. But that was pretty much our whole trip, of trying to do it to another level.

And then around that time, that's when the hip-hop scene came up, and then they started talking about race and white supremacy. And around that time, I tell you, I got into finding out that I was Indigenous, and I come across this Aztec dance group, and the Aztec dance group validated my sense of identity and who I was as a human being beyond... It brought me to a path of understanding as a human being, but then it also brought me a path to where I was kinda upset, I was mad. So when I heard Public Enemy, "I'm a black man, and I could never be a veteran," to me it was like punk, because punk was so, "They fill you up with the fuckin' lies, you're the victims of the government's games," you know, same shit with Public Enemy. But I was saying, that's when we were born, because we were like, "Dude, all our people are listening to hip-hop, and we need to come out and bridge the modern aspect of hip-hop with who we are in our roots, Indigenous flutes, drums, rattles, and bridge it, so we can be a mirror for them to see." So it's always been, you know, music is a tool for me, and a lot of people I know, that I jam with, it saved their lives, it saved my life, we were kinda trying to save others. If you will. Not that we were so righteous. Or just get people to question their reality. So that's why. But we were all hip-hop from about '88 to, and we really formally started in '90, and then by '95 we became a band. But our roots come back up, like our punk roots just kind of emerge. So in a way, we're in this weird jazz, punk, fusion area now, hip-hop.

DAVILA: Were you connecting with a lot of the Chicano Groove bands in that scene that was happening?

MAZAHUA: Yeah, well, I really didn't know Quetzal 'til later. I didn't really know them. It was weird, we didn't get no love out here in the Valley 'cause there was nowhere to play, but in East L.A. we got all kinds of love. Because of my student activism we got

a gig at East L.A. College, and that's where we started to play a lot. And all of a sudden Quinto Sol, they were really young at the time, little baby-faced kids, opened up. And we were more at the hard edge of the spectrum, and then Quetzal and them were more kind of, how can I say... You know what I'm saying. We were more, probably from our punk background, in your face, and they were more kind of like a lot of honey in your face. We have a little more vinegar. [Laughs] But we meshed, and we ended up doing gigs here and there and stuff, and we tried to start a collective with them that was inspired by the Zapatistas, but they didn't really feel it, or whatever. But Quinto did, and other bands did, and we created this thing called Chicano Records and Film, which was kind of like... It was interesting how everything went in a circle, because the ideas that I learned as a punk rocker, anarchist ideals of direct democracy, mutual aid, respect for the word, it turns out that those are Native concepts, those are institutions born out of the idea of *calpulli*, which is like Aztec collective ways of community, of family, of self-containing as a mutual aid kind of aspect, and no one is the leader, rather people are the vocal piece. Like Subcomandante Marcos, power doesn't come from the top down, power comes from the bottom up, like the Zapatistas talk about.

And so all these ideas, they're all like pro-anarchism, but anarchism, actually come to find out, in books like by Jack Weatherford, to name one—*Indian Givers*, I think—talks about how these ideas of anarchism, even Marxism, were inspired by Native models. 'Cause for example, when the Swedes came and they first encountered the Huron, they said, "Who's your leader?" And they were all like, "We're all leaders." "No, who's your leader?" "Well, he speaks for us," but they couldn't grasp it. But you see it throughout. You have *tlahtoanis*, for example, with the Mexica, who are the people who were put as speakers, but it's really... The top down did happen, if you will, the most imperialistically close, but even in that, even if you look, the structure of the society was not the same, was with the Inca or the Mexica, or the Maya. But even in that, if you look at the way they became speakers, they had to show self-sacrifice and be voted, they were really, literally voted in, but still you were always fighting... Even on our Facebook, "Oh, you talk about being Native, but they were so bloodthirsty, and they always want to kill people." And I'm like, "Uh, what is this current system? What are drone strikes?" But anyway, it was kind of full-circle for us when we went back to our roots, that the

things we learned in our anarchist days were part of our culture. Part of humanity, part of being a human being. So it all leads to the same road, it's really beautiful. But all of that has been our journey. All of that has been how impactful music has been a vehicle for all this kind of understanding and hope. But we just try to express it still through our music.

DAVILA: It seems interesting that a lot of the bands that were sort of associated with the Chicano Groove thing, a lot of them seem to have roots in punk. So it just seems interesting that kind of independently of each other, a lot of bands started in the same place, or people who would later form bands started in similar places, and then kind of around the same time converged in this other place. I don't know if it was just a process of getting older and just getting in touch with Chicano roots a little more.

MAZAHUA: It's true. I know, it's a trip. And even to this day, who did I find out...

"What, you were a punk? No wonder." I forgot who recently... And that's why it's cool, like when Billy Branch, "Hey, dude, this dude's doing this thing," and I was like, "Hell, yeah, that's a trip," because I feel like it's very important to document, I think. Especially within the contexts of social movements even, it's a stepping-stone, it's a foundation for a lot of things. And that's why I still honor that ethos of punk, because it's brought everyone to another place.

And even all the white punks on hope that I used to hang with, they're the only white people I know who will go to see us play at Chicano Park, 'cause they have that consciousness, they have a critical analysis. At first some were tripped out when I went back to my roots, but after a while you see who is who, and who were really, their mind was opened by punk, and they view it as just a human being thing, and they're the ones who are my friends still. But they're also at another consciousness level, another plane of consciousness in their own lives, and they manifested themselves.

But I think that's the power of music, the power of art, and art is such an unquantifiable important piece of humanity's development. And especially music, you can't quantify. And that's why we want to do a documentary about even our impact. Because even though, yeah, we're not on no major label, we recorded for a while or whatever, but you don't know how many people... Even today, I was at this Native youth conference, and these parents came up to me, "Hey, I saw you here. Wow, I'm here 'cause of what you did, what you do." And so you can't quantify your impact, because it's not like a tallied

up, and you can't say, "Oh, this impacted..." Like Keith Morris, for example, doesn't know he saved my life, by him singing, "I'm about to have a nervous breakdown, my head really hurts." He don't probably have an idea of how, but I bet you he's heard it, I bet you he's heard it from other people that, "Shit, man, I thought I was fuckin' the only one crazy in this fuckin' world, and I hear your lyrics say you're crazy, too, it's okay to be crazy." You were like, "Wow, we're all right." And that's why I was like, "Wow," when you hit me up, I was like, "Hell, yeah, I'm down." 'Cause it needs to be quantified, I think, it needs to be laid out. And whoever you're interviewing that links everything together like you're saying, that's sick. How else would people see that if it wasn't for studies like this.

DAVILA: Yeah. So one of my major motivations is to try to bring more recognition to the fact that punk isn't just a white thing. There have been Chicanos involved, there have been African Americans, everyone has been involved from the start. It wasn't just the Vex bands, Chicanos didn't then leave punk as soon as all of those bands fell apart. It kept going.

MAZAHUA: Absolutely.

DAVILA: And that's an important thing. I think it's important on a personal level, it's important for people like me, growing up in isolation, and occasionally getting called racist names and stuff, but finding out that there were other brown punks out there was a big deal for me.

MAZAHUA: Yeah.

DAVILA: So for other people in my situation it's a big deal, and they need to have access to this knowledge to know that there are all these people like them, who are doing this thing. But just on another level, there's this question of, if no one mentions that there are Chicanos contributing to the whole history of punk all along...

MAZAHUA: Exactly.

DAVILA: I feel like it connects, in a way, to the way that our contributions to American culture all get ignored.

MAZAHUA: Exactly. It's reflective of that. I know, dude. The Stains supposedly told me

that this fuckin' sick album that I heard in '83 was recorded on SST Records, and it was recorded allegedly right before *Jealous Again* was released, and then Greg Ginn fuckin' purposely held it back from being released 'til two years later because he was threatened by it. And by that time they were already imploded. But they were blowing the fuck up, man, they were like, as soon as he'd walk on stage, the whole... Everywhere, Cuckoo's Nest, everywhere, and the guitarist, not to compete, but he was [mimics guitar shredding]... And that's fucked up, and I believe it, especially now reading interviews about how Keith and Greg Ginn are going at it right now, I believe it. But imagine if it hadn't been, it would have blew the fuck up over. But by the time it was released they imploded, and by that time this guy Snickers became the singer, and they got dealt a fucked up hand. But they were blowing the heck up, dude.

And even us, with our own album, we got all these labels about to get signed, for us we felt like we were sabotaged. Because we did this one gig where all the labels were in the house, and all of a sudden this guy—and here I'm all fuckin' Chicano rage and shit, talkin' all this shit—and this fuckin' guy we don't know, never seen in the scene, starts punching out everybody in the audience. Not slamming, just straight punching everybody. No one wanted to sign us. And then he comes up to us shaking our hand, and I'm like, "I don't know who you are." I don't know, I really think that was some fuckin' counter-intelligence shit, it was tripped out. It was just bizarre, just bizarre shit that happened to us.

DAVILA: And this was with Iconoclast?

MAZAHUA: No, with Aztlan Underground. Because we twice got courted. The first time when we were just hip-hop, we were gonna get flown to New York, do a showcase in New York. And then—trip out on this—the owner was ready to sign us because our A&R was fuckin' hot on it, the whole office was, dude. It was Polygram. And then the owner's like, "Okay, don't worry, we're going to fly them in, tell 'em in about two weeks we'll fly 'em in and do a show." And he gave it to the marketing director, and the marketing director was like, "Are they Latino? Are they Native? How come Latinos are doing flute? No one's gonna get it." Like, mother fuckers. 'Cause they already gave us a contract, and they did what they call a drydock deal, meaning that they didn't respond to our amends. We had a lawyer—the same lawyer of Boyz II Men, it was getting nutty.

And they did what they call a drydock deal, meaning they offered us a contract, and then we made amends, and they didn't respond, let it go past six months, 'cause that's called nullifying the deal. And it was because the marketing director couldn't understand... Well, they didn't know where to market it. But we would have trail blazed. And that's what's bullshit, that's why it's always better to go DIY, never even fuckin'... But with the right power, though, the muscle money behind it, we would have trail blazed that identity, that understanding, it would have been fuckin' phenomenal. You never know. So that shit was the first time, and then the second when we had the band, we were gonna get signed again. Interscope, Jimmy Iovine—allegedly, according to the A&R—was playing our shit over and over, and it was a big deal. And then this fuckin' dude... I don't know, dude, I just can't help but think that it was some trippy shit. I can't confirm it, but no one knows this guy, he ends going punching out everybody while we were playing, and it made it seem like he was part of us, but he wasn't a part of us. Bizarre, bro. Whatever, dude.

But we still made an impact. That's why I want to do a documentary, because I want to showcase the importance of art. Our real message is using us to showcase the importance of art, the importance of music and empowerment, and how it is a silent, behind-the-scenes medicine for people. It's a medicine for people, but it's not really known.

DAVILA: To go back to what you were saying about how the first time it seemed like you might get signed, but the guy felt as though he didn't know how to market it. It's a bit similar to how Los Illegals put the one album with A&M, and it didn't really go anywhere because the label didn't really know how to market it. And the Brat was working with a major label, but it was trying to push them to play more Latin rock because they thought that you can't market a Chicano punk band, you have to market them to the Chicano community, and they want to hear this different sound or this particular sound.

MAZAHUA: Exactly.

DAVILA: So going back to this question of recognition, it's like if our community gets recognition it's not on our terms, we get recognition because our numbers are growing and they can sell stuff to us. So it's really about figuring out how best to sell stuff to us, it

isn't about any kind of real...

MAZAHUA: Exactly. It isn't even kind of real validation of the art, but rather how can you make a buck, and go with whatever is a norm and not worry about highlighting somebody interesting who brings another aspect of who we are as a people. You know what I'm saying?

DAVILA: Yeah.

MAZAHUA: Exactly. Absolutely.

DAVILA: With Aztlan Underground, do you do other kinds of community building or political action beyond just stage performance?

MAZAHUA: Well, especially during the height of the Zapatista movement, we were definitely very much involved. And lately, they just had a *la escualita* this week, it was beautiful, and that was very inspiring, kinda put a fire under our ass, like, "Damn, we gotta do more." But what we do do, and always do, 'cause we fuckin' never get paid, we're always doing benefits, and our work is basically, "Can you do this, can you do the Chicano Moratorium?" Our work basically continues in the way that we bring art to the community, and our activism is always about that, and we're always... What did we play recently that was a very significant... I can't remember. Idle No More, for example, we performed an impromptu at Idle No More and their protest in front of the Canadian Embassy.

So we continue, but it isn't with a very defined goal in place like it was during the Zapatista times. Although we continue to... Like recently we played this anti-gang, to divert youth from killing each other in the parks at night, we played there. We just do various activities that have to do with either socially relevant, community-based events, or they're just straight like Idle No More where we're out there saying our piece. Or, for example, we went to Arizona. You know our song got banned by the State Attorney, it was banned with those books, "We Didn't Cross Borders." And so the kids in Tucson Unified School District did a walkout, and they all went to an auditorium or an old club in Tucson where they held a teach-in of all the books that were banned. So we paid our own way, and just drove out there and played the song that was banned. So we're always

somehow, it's just a part of our fabric. But it's not as goal-oriented as the Zapatista heyday.

DAVILA: So, the music and the political action and community organizing are basically inseparable it sounds like.

MAZAHUA: Yeah, yeah. Exactly. That's it right there. Absolutely.

DAVILA: How did it feel to be on the list of banned materials?

MAZAHUA: Good. [Laughs] It felt real good. It felt like, "Damn, we're doing something right, for us to be on your idiotic radar. That means that we are a threat." Because apparently they did an audit, and a lot of the teachers were using our music as part of their curriculum. But it was obviously a way to empower them and have them understand, we didn't cross the borders, the borders crossed us. We are older than the United States. So they felt threatened by that. So, yes, it felt really good. Although they're always talking about the books, and not really the song. But it still says something, I'm very proud of it.

DAVILA: To me, what's happening in Arizona is kind of one of the things that motivates me to want to do this project, because it's not just refusing to acknowledge, it's actually trying to suppress our contributions to American history.

MAZAHUA: Exactly. And invalidate our existence and importance. Exactly.

DAVILA: And I think it's dangerous in the way that, by separating us from our own history it's sort of limiting our ability to challenge the different ways that our interests or history is trying to be suppressed. So, yeah, that's one of the big motivating things for me.

MAZAHUA: Hell, yeah. That's dope. That's good.

DAVILA: Maybe we could back up to some basic questions in terms of giving an accurate picture of the band. So just to kind of talk about the history of Aztlan Underground in terms of when did you form, who are the core members, how many albums have you released. I'll let you tell the history.

MAZAHUA: Well, at the end of the Wankers in '88, we kind of conceptualized with

Bean, who was our former manager for Iconoclast—because he was also participating in *danza Azteca* with me, Aztec dance—and I told him, “Man, dude, we should do a Chicano Public Enemy, and we should bring in the instruments.” So in ’88 we actually started, we were born conceptually, but we called ourselves Escuche Sonidos Lógico, which is like ESL, because in those times in the public school system they had ESL classes for people who were second-language learners. But it was real frowned upon, so we were kinda like we’re gonna take that on as our badge. But instead of ESL, it was Listen to Logical Sounds in Spanish, translated. But then we changed ourselves to Brown and Proud. And we did kind of weird little gigs. Also, the drummer of Iconoclast was first in what was to become Aztlan Underground, he was the drummer, ‘cause we played live hip-hop. And also the vocalist, who was actually Puerto Rican and white—‘cause the second vocalist was Puerto Rican and white, the first vocalist was Greek—and so it was the first kind of pre-Aztlan Underground.

But by ’90 we had hooked up with a friend that used to DJ and stuff, and he had a computer that actually sampled and looped, that was able to loop things. So we went to his house, and we tell him what we’re doing, and he’s, “Oh, that sounds like what my dad tells me about.” “Oh, really?” “Yeah.” And then he goes, “Yeah, I flow actually.” And that’s Bulldog. So it’s Bulldog, Bean—Bean, who used to be our manager of Iconoclast—and me, we formally formed Aztlan Underground in November of ’90, and then by ’94 Zapatistas uprose, and by ’95 we became a full band. In ’94 we met Joe, who’s another in Billy Branch’s generation, he’s in our band, he’s a former punk, too. Joe, he joined in ’94 informally, but then formally in ’95 when we created the band. But in ’92, though, we released “500 Years of Resistance, 1492—Fuck That,” it was kind of like to commemorate the 500-year arrival of Christopher Columbus. And so we had a cassette—in those days it was cassettes—and it was just a cassette single, “1492, Fuck That.” And then in ’95 we released *Decolonize*, which is a nine-song EP, all hip-hop, that to me is a very classic sound, classic album, always will be. I’m very proud of it. And then in ’98, ‘cause we already had a band by ’95, we started doing a lot of gigs. By ’98 we recorded the album *Sub-Verses*, and then we took a whole long eight years to start recording the last album, 2006, but we didn’t release it ‘til 2010, and that’s *Aztlan Underground*, self-titled, which is a total prog-rock, industrial sounding, but indigenous,

Mexica, Aztec kinda hodgepodge. It's very raw, a lot of punk undertones, but it's kind of prog-rock-y, too. So pretty much "1492—Fuck That," '95 *Decolonize*, '98 *Sub-Verses*—but it was rereleased, and released all over—'cause they were still selling records, Tower Records, Best Buy, in 2000, so it was all over actually—and in 2010 *Aztlan Underground*, the self-titled.

And we've been releasing singles online—they're on Soundcloud—these last two years, almost every equinox, solstice, there's lots of singles. This last year we only put out one single so far. But a lot of singles have been put out since the 2010 album, so you can Soundcloud that and Youtube that, a lot of singles. So for the election, we did this thing called "Vote for Nobody," and everybody freaked out because we were just talking about how Obama is still the same trip, people just don't want to follow the paper trail, look at it like he wears a smile, offers a lot of social attention. So anyway, that's where we are, that's what we've been doing. And right now we're trying to work on a documentary, to talk about the things that I was telling you about, because it's really important. That's why this is important to me, too. So that's why I'm feeling that.

DAVILA: And Billy mentioned something, I think it might have been Robert Lopez who was doing this, but I'm not quite sure, it was one of the two of you, he mentioned had a café or sort of space going for a while called Luna Sol, I think.

MAZAHUA: Oh, yeah.

DAVILA: So was that you or Robert?

MAZAHUA: That was probably Robert. But that was a really important space, I'm glad you mentioned that.

DAVILA: Were you there a lot?

MAZAHUA: Yeah, we performed there a lot, quite a lot. And it was cool because... Before that, I'm sure they mentioned to you the PRC and all that, right?

DAVILA: I'm not sure.

MAZAHUA: 'Cause in '95 Zack de la Rocha—he was also a punk, too, he had *Inside Out*. But he's kind of real, he's so reclusive. He has his own punk experience from *Inside Out*, during his generation of punk, 'cause he's like five years younger than me. I guess

they were going strong like '85 to '88 or something, and they were, to me, in the time where punk died, felt irrelevant. I probably shouldn't say that, don't take that personal, Zack. 'Cause I have punk friends who still remained in the scene, and they were like, "Oh, dude, Inside Out was the shit." And it's a trip because he lived in Irvine, and in my student movement days, our drummer, who became our drummer for Aztlan Underground in '95, he in '90, '91 was at a MEChA student movie night in Irvine, from Fullerton they went there, and who sees him in the movie theater but Zack. And he happens to hit up the guy who ended up being our drummer, Rudy, and he goes, "What is that?" "Oh, we're Chicano student movement." And he goes, "Oh, I'm totally about that. My dad is from Los Four." So then he starts hanging out with him, and then we play in '91 the MEChA national conference in New Mexico, and it's a trip because I have a mailing list—because it was before his album dropped—and he signs our mailing list, Zack. So we ended up knowing him like that, on that level, another level. It wasn't like, "Oh, do you know who we are?" We were on the same roads 'cause of punk, too, his consciousness, right?

And so then by '94 he's opening up this center. 'Cause by then they're blowing up, Rage. So he opens up this commune center in Highland Park called Popular Resource Center, PRC. And that's where I met Joe, our bass player, 'cause as an artist, 'cause of his own punk ties and post-art rock friends were doing installations there, and that's where I met him. And he met Rudy—Rudy's the guy Zack approached, who ended up being our drummer. And so we were playing and doing stuff there, and playing with Rage there, all these underground, like Stanford Prison Experiment. And meanwhile he's blowing up, meanwhile he gets connections to Zapatistas and goes right in '94, by '95 we were going, we go in '96, I think, and then '97 again, but we went alone with the people he had already made connections with. So it was all tied in together, but there you go, you see a root of it being in punk rock, to tie in all that. And how you say, all roads lead to... And he helped us out, what he could. But I think also like I tell you, I think he was more marketable because they were multi-ethnic, and they seemed more white, so he was more palatable. But I think an angry brown protest was just too much. But at the same time, we did start getting a lot of love, but then I don't know what happened, like I tell you, it was weird shit.

DAVILA: It's interesting because some people I've talked to, their parents were very much involved in the Chicano Movement when they were teenagers or young adults—other people not necessarily. So it seems like some people were coming into the Chicano Groove sort of era, even if they don't necessarily identify with the scene all that much, some people were coming to some kind of consciousness just on their own. And for other people it seemed like it was kind of this thing where at first they didn't really want to have that much to do with it because that's what their parents had done, and nobody wants to do what their parents are doing. So for you was it more of the former where your parents weren't necessarily involved, and you were just sort of finding out about it?

MAZAHUA: It's interesting that you say that because in a way I'm a little bit of both, because my brothers... See, I'm the youngest, my parents already passed away, and I was the youngest of their brood. And the closest to me is nine years older than me, and then there's one that's thirteen years older me—and he passed away, he died in 1990. But he was part of the Chicano Movement out of Cal State Northridge, which is the biggest Chicano Studies. And so actually, because of him, I went to the Chicano Moratorium in 1970 when that riot went, as a little baby in a stroller, and with my mom and my other brother. So my brothers were rioting, and then my mom and me knocked on a door, and there were still Jewish people living in East L.A., and they allowed us in, and we survived that obviously.

But my brother, because he came out as gay, at the time Marxism viewed homosexuality as a product of bourgeois excess, so he was not accepted by the Chicano Movement. So he rejected the whole... I don't think he relinquished it, but in a way I think in his own resentment he felt that he had to just immerse himself in the gay community. So his distance from the movement translated, and then my other brother just had kids early, the family was apolitical from the time he distanced from the Chicano Movement to his demise in '90. So it was weird, maybe in the subconscious of my mind it probably was back there, but it wasn't so ingrained in me to want to rebel against that.

It's funny you say that, because my own kids, I'm super Native guy, super to our roots, but as a result these guys, my kids, I feel they acknowledge themselves, but I think that maybe because I am so much that, they say, "Fuck you." And I think that's what you speak of, when you talk about the other guys that didn't want nothing to do with it. In my

case, it wasn't bombarded in my face. In fact, I grew up with working-class, older parent experience, so I didn't have them politicizing. In fact, my dad was like a Archie Bunker. But he actually knew what time it was, and he actually agreed with the Chicano Movement more than anything, but he was apolitical because I think he was fearful because he was a resident alien—but he became a citizen at the end of his life—but I think he felt that if he rocked the boat... Because Mexico, if you're a revolutionary, you're getting killed and shit. So he never in my face, in my face. So I didn't have that, and as a result when I did discover consciousness on my own, that made me even more like, "Hell, yeah," I became super fucking Chicano activist somehow.

So I do have a little of that, though, maybe in the recesses of my subconscious, but it wasn't so imposed upon me where I was rebelling or where I was turned off by it, to try to forge my own identity. Because it's very natural for a youth to want to forge his own identity. And in a way, it helped that they were both not so conscious, my parents. Or, they were conscious, but they were not activists, so they allowed me to flower on my own, and feel like it was my own.

DAVILA: It's interesting, too, because what you were saying about your brother, I think that that's—and obviously it's outside of my experience because I'm younger and I didn't grow up out here, and there is no MEChA in Southern Ontario—but I read about, for instance, Alice Bag feeling rejected by MEChA because she was kind of weird and she was into glam rock and she didn't...

MAZAHUA: Fit the mold.

DAVILA: Yeah. And then people talk about other kinds of conservatism within the Chicano community...

MAZAHUA: Yes.

DAVILA: ...because of, for instance, Catholicism.

MAZAHUA: Exactly.

DAVILA: For instance, female musicians weren't necessarily encouraged by their parents because they didn't think that that was the prescribed gender role. Or homosexuality was frowned upon by certain groups because it didn't fit, or it wasn't

sanctioned by Catholicism.

MAZAHUA: Yeah, yeah, exactly. I know, it's a weird waters. And as a punk, I probably would have been rejected as well. I would have been rejected as well, in the heyday of my punkness, had I tried to approach MEChA. They would have been, "Fuck you," and then I would have been, "What?" But because somehow I missed all that, it was weird, I ended up embracing it and not feeling—and by that time there was no signs that I was a punk, I just had long hair 'cause I'd already started growing out my hair in '86 when I joined Danza—and I didn't end up being around Chicano students 'til around '88. So by that time, I didn't have that issue. It's a trip, I somehow circumvented that potential conflict. What I did have, fuckin' professors, on another tip, 'cause I very quickly surged to the top of being a student leader, because I guess I was so fuckin' very inspired by everything that I very quickly became a student leader. But because I was so Native conscious, very about our roots as Native people, the professors were talking shit. I found out that they were like, "Oh, it's the Year of the Indian," 'cause I got voted in as a chair of MEChA. I got nominated and voted in like sweep, dude, and then they're all, "I guess we're gonna have to deal with the Year of the Indian." Like, what the fuck? So it's a whole 'nother fuckin' dynamic, of in a way it's our self-hate, our own lack of comfort zone about what it means to be Mexican.

DAVILA: So these were Chicano instructors?

MAZAHUA: Yeah, were saying, "It's the Year of the Indian, I guess." And you're like, "What the fuck?" No, it's *been* the Year of the Indians, fool. So anyway, that's a trip. It's interesting that you tell me that. I know, I love... When I read Alice Bag's tweets, I'm like, "Fuck yeah." 'Cause I know she wasn't Chicana-conscious as much as she is now back then, but had she been... The closest I got to that was seeing Rudy of the Stains cholo'd out, but bleached hair, dude, I was like, "Yeah." And she was all, "You know what, being a Chicano is punk." She says that. I'm like, "You're fuckin' right." Because it's a consciousness of being like, "Fuck you. We're trying to right wrongs, motherfuckers, and we don't give a fuck." You know what I mean? It's so sick, when I read her shit I go, "God!"

DAVILA: And she's really adamant about the fact that there are so many different ways to be Chicana, there isn't just one.

MAZAHUA: Yes. As it should be.

DAVILA: Exactly. For instance, when people write about the Vex scene, they want to say Los Illegals and the Brat—and they basically only talk about those two bands—they want to say, “Yeah, they were playing punk rock, but they were talking about Chicano politics.” Which Los Illegals were, sure, but the Brat weren't at all.

MAZAHUA: They weren't at all.

DAVILA: So people kind of want to say that everyone was thinking the same thing, everyone had the same goals, which was not really true. And I think that sort of disallows the diversity of the Chicano community.

MAZAHUA: Exactly. And I love that about her, she says that. I know, had my brother had that consciousness as well, he would have been, “No, I'm a fuckin' gay Chicano. And I have an analysis of the system, and it's okay for me to be who the fuck I am.” But instead, in this resistance movement, they were conservative, closed-minded alienators and shit of who he was born as, and it's fucked up. And Rudy, years later, he didn't know, after I was already MEChA chair, I told him, “Did you know my brother Randy?” “Randy was your brother? What happened to him?” I go, “Well, he came out of the closet.” And he's like, “What?” I go, “Yeah, dude. But he says that he left because he said that he was told that in Marxism it was a product of bourgeois excess.” And then, “That's bull crap, I would have always accepted him, he's such a great person.”

But that's the mindset, that's the lack of evolution that was going on, yet it was supposed to be a progressive atmosphere. That's why even EZLN alienate people, because he's all, “Marcos is a gay man, Marcos is a Palestinian,” because he's saying all the disenfranchised, all the people. I have that even in Native communities, like “I don't know about Marcos.” Like, “What?” In the Native culture there's Winktes, actually the shamans are supposedly gay, like “Why are you tripping on him?” And I gotta admit, I myself—this is my own dad's mentality—I was also judgmental to my brother. But during his lifetime, I got to express my bullshit mentality to him, and my brother schooled me. And that's how I come to know all that shit, because when he did school

me, I was right on the cusp of going into the Chicano Movement, and so I did have these old school, indoctrinated ideas of homosexuality. And then he schooled me, he was like, "I was born that way, the Chicano Movement alienated me." So I was like, "Wow," opened my mind. It's just a trip how within movements that are supposed to be progressive or towards another realm, we still have oppressive... Even anti-Native, like I tell you, Chicano professors going, "This is the Year of the Indian," to even orientations. It's a trip. It's that imperfect world.

Interview with Mark Ocegueda
Santa Ana, CA, 8/20/2013

DAVILA: First question, when did you first get interested in punk, and what does it mean for you?

OCEGUEDA: I first got into punk right when I was like fifteen. I was introduced to punk by my cousin, who was into punk, and he gave me some CDs. It was like Subhumans, Conflict, and the Misfits. And from there I just learned about different bands on my own. And to me punk meant... I don't know, it was just different for me because before that my family was into gang stuff, and my sister was into gang life, and I was kind of going towards that as a place for myself to have a space or a community to be in with. Because my family was really messed up, so I didn't have a... And I was doing that, but there were specific incidences when I was in crews and stuff in middle school, and I was tagging and all that, where it got really violent. And one friend actually stole my mom's car, and to me that's when the gang stuff didn't really have anything of value to me. And once my cousin introduced me to the punk stuff, the whole style of it, the ethics behind it appealed to me a lot, and I felt like it was something that I could get into to... I guess right now that I reflect on it, it was like something I could get into to develop an identity, and just feel more comfortable with myself and how I view the world, and I'm all confused, it was a way to organize my life. 'Cause I didn't have a centralized family to organize my life around, or they didn't teach me stuff like that. And I needed something like that, and that's what punk was. So through that you make friends that are into the same thing, so that's how I got into it. And I was playing in bands in high school, and things like that.

DAVILA: Was that what kind of motivated you to want to take up music?

OCEGUEDA: I wanted to take up music 'cause it was something that really, really, the music meant a lot to me. Especially when I first started finding out about Los Crudos, Spanish-language punk music, like Eskorbuto and things like that. And to me it was just cool, one, because it was really cool to me because I can write about things that matter to me, like the bands before. And so I remember, I asked my dad, like, "I really want a guitar so I can start learning, 'cause I want to be in a band," and all this stuff. And they

bought me a little cheap guitar, and they all thought it was really weird, like no one in the family plays loud, distorted music. No one's into that. Like you're either in gang stuff or you're just a generic kid. You're kind of weird, I guess, that's what I get the feeling from my parents. Especially when I was in high school when I went vegetarian and all that, too, they were like, "What the hell? The music's influencing him way more than it should, and it's just really weird." But I really wanted to play music because I got to make friends out of it, I really learned how to—now that I think about it from the vantage point of now, back then I didn't realize it, but it was to make friends, to feel like I can get along with some people, to play with bands that I liked, things of that sort.

DAVILA: What bands have you been in? I mean, you don't necessarily have to name all of them if you were in eight bands in high school or whatever.

OCEGUEDA: I won't name all of them. The three bands that meant anything, I guess, around here, the first band was Restrained, and that was a vegan, straightedge band. I was not vegan or straightedge, but my friends were, and I played with them because to me it was cool because it was a really political band, and I've always felt really politicized. And that's something that punk gave to me, that really politicized identity, I think. So that was the first band in high school. I quit 'cause I was going to college, and I was a whatever student in high school, and I really wanted to take education more seriously once I got into college, so I quit just to focus on that. And I was always smart, like I was in IB courses, like advanced type of courses, in high school, but I never took them seriously. And I really wanted to try to apply myself because, that was really important to me because I came from a family where there was no education, no one had an education. My dad is an immigrant from Mexico that came from Guadalajara, he stopped going to school in the second grade. My mom didn't finish middle school 'cause she had a kid, my older sister, when she was like twelve. So that's why I decided to stop punk for a while, and just focus solely on school, to try to really see what can come out of it. 'Cause I was kind of miserable at that point in my life, I was just like, "eh."

So I was in that band. I was in this other band called Hordes, which I formed towards the end of college, and now I'm in Pesadilla Distopika, which is just punk, Spanish-language punk. And this band right now has meant the most to me 'cause it's all Spanish lyrics, it's more like, I have more creative control than the other bands. Like always maybe the

music, but now I have more control in terms of artwork, lyrical content 'cause I'm singing, and the way the music sounds.

DAVILA: What's the significance for you of singing in Spanish? Is it a political decision, or is it community, or influences?

OCEGUEDA: It's, one, because it's a cultural thing, and to me I want to reinforce that part of who I am, and singing in Spanish does that to me. And I think I can reach different audiences 'cause of it, in terms of doing it in English. And that's what I wanted to do, and I always wanted to do that, and I never had the chance to do that with the other bands. So I wanted to reinforce the cultural aspect of it, the language, being able to reach an audience that doesn't necessarily speak English, so being a part of that Spanish-speaking community. So, yeah, doing it in Spanish is important to me. And to me all the best bands, the ones that really spoke the most to me, have the most integrity, are the ones that sing in Spanish, like Tragatelo, and Sin Dios, Crudos, Harto, Kontraataque, all those bands.

DAVILA: Do you think that they kind of spoke to you more because they were singing about issues that were more relevant to your experience?

OCEGUEDA: Yeah, definitely. Like, way more. The messages in those songs came through way more than the ones in English. Not to say English ones didn't mean a lot to me, too, but I guess I always paid more attention to those bands. 'Cause I felt like I could relate to it more, and it just appealed to me more in that sense, because it was like, "Oh, these are Latino people making music, and they're doing it for other people that are like them, that can also speak Spanish." So that's cool.

DAVILA: What kind of themes do you write about in Pesadilla Distopika?

OCEGUEDA: It's nothing new. So one is about vigilance and surveillance of the border, especially right now, it seems to be super intense. One is just about feeling super alienated, like no matter what you do, you're just stuck within all these institutions that make up society, and it's really hard to gain any sense of autonomy because of that. And especially I felt more urgent about that because I've been in grad school, and institutional education and all that has really made me kind of cynical about a lot of stuff. That's why

punk has meant a lot more to me now. I also do things that are not political, too. So I put myself in different characters. One is just about someone, the way I used to really feel in middle school—and I think a lot of kids feel like that today, especially Latino kids—one was just about feeling desperation all the time, and anxiety, and never knowing how to navigate through school, or please anyone, stuff like that. And immigration, stuff like that.

DAVILA: My interest in what's happening out here is that there seems to be this whole community of bands who are Latino or Chicano, who are singing in Spanish at least, often singing about issues relevant to their communities. Do you think that there was a conscious effort made for all of these bands to kind of come together, or was it kind of just a more natural...

OCEGUEDA: I think it was more of a natural thing, to be honest. 'Cause no one, at least from my experience, no one ever discussed it and said, "We're just going to be Spanish," it was just kind of naturally happening. I think a lot of bands are following in the steps of the bands that did it before us, like in the early 2000s, and the '90s, like Crudos, and Harto, Kontraattaque, like I was telling you, because it just seems like a natural step to do it like that. But there's also bands that have been doing it in English, too, but I think for the most part, especially recently, it's been half-and-half, it's been like half Spanish and half English. There was even a band, I forgot what their name was, but they were also doing songs in Indigenous languages and stuff, and that was pretty radical for that, because it's not privileging Spanish.

DAVILA: Was that recently?

OCEGUEDA: This was like five years ago, and I think they still sometimes play. I forgot their name, though. I don't know why I'm drawing a blank on it. But, yeah, they took a whole different concept towards punk music. And they were incorporating Indigenous types of song styles with punk. So, that was kind of cool. But it may have been conscious, but I think for the most part it was just like a natural thing for them, and us to do, for me to do.

DAVILA: So do you think that a lot of these people have a strong sense of Chicano consciousness?

OCEGUEDA: Yeah. I think there is, and you'll see that for the really political bands, but there's also bands like Generacion Suicida that doesn't really sing about that. They're more about singing about boredom, things that youth feel, and they have songs about love. But they also have songs about police brutality or whatever. And there was Drapetomania, they had songs about police violence, stuff like that. So there's that political aspect to it, too. So, I think there is that consciousness, that ethnic identity consciousness behind it. So, yeah, I would say yes overall. But it's not strictly limited to that because they sing about things that are just everyday things, like seeing a cop beat the shit out of someone, or something they feel, or just really liking a girl, or being bored.

DAVILA: Which I think a lot of that stuff is still political in a particular way. Like, you don't necessarily have to be singing about Obama's drone wars to be political.

OCEGUEDA: Yeah. And it's more indirect because it reflects what they're doing every single day, and they're not saying it explicitly, 'cause if you're just bored and that's what your song is about, it reflects what living in a certain part of the city is like where you can't really go out and do something in the way that other people can do, or maybe you don't have recreational opportunities that people that come from more privileged backgrounds do, or things like that. Or you just don't have the money for it.

DAVILA: Do you think that that kind of lack of access to activities and stuff, do you think that that's something that kind of pushes people towards punk in a way?

OCEGUEDA: Yeah, I think so. For me, I felt like that 'cause it's not like I was out joining a sports team or going to, I don't know... It was either—the only type of thing I saw my friends doing was skating, as recreation. And outside of that, there were some kids that got into organized sports, but not my friends, I didn't really click with that crowd. So I got more along with the people that wanted to do punk with their free time, with their leisure time.

DAVILA: It seems like something that people have been alluding to, but not really saying is that, or at least kind of how it appears to me is that punk sort of gave people a

voice who didn't necessarily have much of a public platform to talk about their feelings and their political—in either the big sense or in a more personal is political sort of sense—people who don't necessarily have a space to talk about things, punk seems to provide...

OCEGUEDA: Yeah. For me, I didn't know how to voice my opinion in traditional spaces, like a classroom, or some type of community organization, or things like that. So, to me, I found my voice more through song and music, and through relating to other people's songs, and going to shows. And that's where I learned how to become more outspoken. 'Cause I didn't really know how to do that in traditional spaces. Once I got to college, I kind of forced myself to not be like that, and try to learn how to navigate through those more traditional spaces, like a classroom. 'Cause I really, really took education important because of my family background, like how it was so fucked up, like there was a lot violence when I was little, drug violence and stuff like that, and I didn't want to live a life surrounded by that. And I knew it would mean a lot for people like my mom and dad to pursue something greater than an average type of, I don't know, like a really shitty life that they lived. But what I was saying, what were you...

DAVILA: Voice.

OCEGUEDA: Yeah, punk provided that for me I think.

DAVILA: Along those lines, as well, the scene right now could be described as DIY, but I wonder if you think there's possibly a difference between the way that people talk about DIY as ideology versus DIY as more of a practical concern. Like, do you think there's sort of an extent to which DIY is sort of a natural progression for people who come from areas with few resources and stuff like that?

OCEGUEDA: Yeah, I think doing it yourself is obviously the cheapest way to do something because you don't have the resources to go to someone else to help you do it. What was the other part of the question?

DAVILA: Comparing it to people who think of DIY strictly as a refusal of the mainstream as opposed to a sort of practice.

OCEGUEDA: Okay, so I don't really know how to answer that question, but this is sort

of how I've seen DIY. DIY is doing your own shows where there's no middleman, or you're working with someone where your integrity's not compromised. If you're doing the show, you can get the money to split it with a cultural center and the band that's touring, and that way the band's not going through any organization that's comprising the integrity of punk and your ethics. And also doing your own shirts, and having another DIY person that has a screen printing press, or just printing them yourself. That's DIY. But for me, the ethics part of it, like the ideology part of it, that's something that I apply, too, in my everyday thing, I don't just apply it to punk. I apply it to my education, and I've applied it to the way I've navigated through college and grad school, and I think that ethic has carried me through that, because I've been in punk, and I've learned how to... So I guess that's where it becomes applied to my everyday life outside of punk because I'm applying it to mainstream things like a PhD program. And I think that's one of the biggest reasons I've survived so far, is because I've had that grounding in it. I don't know, maybe that's...

DAVILA: No, I think that makes sense. Do you think that, compared to other people in your grad program, for instance, who don't necessarily have the same kind of upbringing that you did, do you think that maybe they don't think of it in those terms because of their privilege doesn't require them to?

OCEGUEDA: I think their privilege negates having to turn to something like a DIY punk community, or knowing that ethic. From what I've seen, a lot of people in graduate school come from places of privilege, they have families that have been involved in professional backgrounds, like attorneys, doctors, whatever, and they can already talk the talk, they know the vocabulary of a big institution like academia. And for me, I had to really learn a lot of that on my own, and I had to navigate through that on my own terms, and with the help of selected few professors that really cared and really supported me. But, yeah, 'cause it's super rare to meet punks, and even more so Latino punks, in academia. There are some, and it's really cool when you do meet them. But yeah, I've used it in other ways that they can understand because of their places of privilege.

DAVILA: Do you do other stuff, too? You put out tapes, right?

OCEGUEDA: Yeah, that's a project that I'm kind of getting off the ground now. I'm

trying to press vinyl now. I've organized shows. I'm doing the band stuff. And releasing records is going to be a cool project for me because I couldn't really do that in the past, because of lack of time and lack of money and all that. But now as I'm getting more resources to actually do something like that, I'm trying to take it on because I know that it would mean a lot to bands, especially when they can't do it themselves. Because if you can be someone that can support the scene by putting out a record, distributing it to different distros, it would make a particular part of this scene that I care about more meaningful and more visible to other punks throughout the country, the world. So, yeah, I'm gonna start doing that. I've done tapes, like we self-released our own tape. Right now I got two records in line to get pressed. No, actually three records. So I've been doing that, organizing shows, trying to put stuff out under a record label that I'm trying to start.

DAVILA: Do you have a name for the label already?

OCEGUEDA: Oh, yeah. It's Verdugo Discos, Verdugo Records. And that's just kind of like the nickname that's given to my city where I'm from, Verdugo, which is San Bernardino. I guess the name came from white people calling it Berdoo, but the West side of town called it *verdugo*, which is a play on Berdoo, but it also means "executioner" in Spanish. And one of the big gangs, the biggest gang from there, adopted it as their gang name. But to me it fits along with the aesthetics and the imagery of punk. And, you know, it can be violent, but also powerful for your own identity, like an executioner, so that's why I adopted that for that particular project.

DAVILA: When you organize shows are there certain kinds of spaces that you prefer?

OCEGUEDA: Yeah, spaces that are usually punk spaces. I don't like bars, I don't like doing shows there, and I never have done one there. If it is at a bar, I would want to do it if they were splitting the money in a really good way that's gonna help the band. But I prefer punk spaces, like DIY spaces, where it's all-ages, where the person that owns the space or is providing the space is a punk or knows about punk ethics. I also like cultural centers, cultural centers are cool, but you run a risk there by bringing bad attention to it. And usually cultural centers are multi-faceted spaces, where they do classes and stuff like that. So I don't like bringing the potential of someone drinking on the site, or having the cops show up with that happening. But I like cultural centers. I did one at El Centro, in

Santa Ana here, a couple months ago, and that went really good. I want to try to do more there. But I prefer places like that. Like Blood Orange Info Shop is a cultural center, it's a like an anarchist meeting space, things like that, a community library. Things like that. And then there's places where it's just strictly for punks, like [the warehouse].

DAVILA: Is there a distinct scene in the IE?

OCEGUEDA: Kind of. It's not as centralized as L.A., or even Orange County has a better scene. But the IE is more fragmented, like there's not one particular spot where everyone goes for shows. It's not the same as having the warehouse or a place like Mass Media, things like that. There is, but it's not as united, I guess. There's some people in San Bernardino, and a couple people in Redlands, in Mentone, some people in Colton and Riverside, and then very little in Fontana, and then for the most part, there's not really that much in Rancho and Ontario. There is in Ontario, but I don't really know any of them, and they don't really seem to come out to shows. Tonight we're kind of the only ones from the IE, whereas the rest are from Orange County and L.A.

DAVILA: Do you think there's a fair amount of show swapping between bands from L.A., Orange County, and the IE?

OCEGUEDA: Kind of. The IE is underrepresented, there's not that much bands coming out of there, and if there is, they're not on the L.A. or Orange County shows that much. My band right now, we're kind of like one of the only bands that gets on the L.A. or Orange County shows. I haven't seen many other IE bands get on that. But then there's the hardcore scene, like hardcore is different. There's different sets of hardcore shows. Like Soul Search is from Corona, which is in the IE, and they're a big name in hardcore, and they get on almost all the L.A. and IE shows, but they're not on the more underground, DIY shows. So it's just different, 'cause there's different types of scenes, like there's the hardcore scene where it's different types of music that punks aren't really into. Some are in both scenes, but yeah. But to answer your question, it's mostly dominated by L.A., and then Orange County, and then Inland Empire is very, very less visible. Because there's not really that strong of a scene out there.

DAVILA: How many releases do you have, you had a few with Hordes...

OCEGUEDA: Hordes had a demo CD release that we did ourselves, and we just passed out at shows. We had a record label, King of the Monsters from Arizona, put out a 7", and that record label was cool because they paid for everything, and it was a big help for us in getting our name out and playing shows, and just having people know who we are. And that was a cool label. Mike Genz did that, and he put out the Locust, Man is the Bastard, stuff like that. But I didn't really like Hordes, I didn't really like that band at all. Not at all. Because, like I said, I didn't have creative control of lyrics and lyrical content, and the stuff that Jacob wrote I wasn't really that into. It was things that I really didn't care about or relate to. But I wanted to play shows, and just be around people that I enjoyed being around. And at that point I wasn't really thinking about it too much because those were his lyrics, I wasn't the one singing. But that's why I kind of didn't like it. And then towards the end of it, it was just, shows were getting real violent, and it was just senseless violent, and I didn't want to do it any more. And then this current band, Pesadilla Distopika, we did a tape release, and then I'm going to release our record.

DAVILA: Is that coming out later this year?

OCEGUEDA: Yeah, hopefully. As soon as I get done with exams, I'm gonna focus on that a little bit more.

DAVILA: How do you do your recordings for this?

OCEGUEDA: We find someone that records punk bands, and we pay them whatever for their services, and that's about it. And then we put it onto tape. But for the record it's a different thing, like you gotta get it mastered and all that. We're going to have a friend, he was in Knife Fight and different other bands, he'll probably record this upcoming record.

DAVILA: Does he have a proper studio?

OCEGUEDA: It's funny, some people have proper studios, like really elaborate ones, and they'll record your band for whatever, not that much because they know you're a punk band. But then some people just record more like real raw recordings, like [the warehouse]. And those are really cool recordings, it's really, really DIY. Like when we

were talking about DIY, [the warehouse] is DIY. I personally like not too raw of recordings because I like to hear a lot of it in more detail, like the music side of it, so that's why I record with different people. But who knows. I don't know what I'm going to do with this upcoming one. I've been thinking about that. I might record with Nick Townsend, who was in Knife Fight. And I like his recordings, 'cause they're not too raw, and they sound real... You can make out a lot of the music a lot better than a really raw recording.

DAVILA: Did you go into a studio for this last tape?

OCEGUEDA: Yeah, it was just a small studio, it's not a really elaborate studio, it's just a little room, and he has a computer in the other side with mics hooked into it. So, yeah, we went into a studio to do that.

DAVILA: Did you record all playing at once?

OCEGUEDA: No, we separate the tracks, things like that. No one really does, some bands do it, but it's more of a normal thing to record all the different tracks separately, like guitars, drums, things of that sort.

DAVILA: You said you liked the experience of working with the label that put out Hordes' 7"?

OCEGUEDA: Yeah. It was cool 'cause he did all the busy stuff, like working with the pressing plant, telling them how much to get, and then he paid for it. Which is cool because at that time, we didn't have the resources to actually pay for all that. And he believed in our band, that he could move all the records that he pressed. So it's like he did all the work, and that was cool to me. I didn't have to worry about distributing the records to different places, things of that sort. So to have someone do all that work for you is flattering because they're supporting you, and otherwise you have to do it yourself. Which is nothing wrong because you'll make more money off of selling them yourself, but I don't really care about all that. We never made money as Hordes. I don't think any bands make money really, unless you're a band that blows up, with hype and stuff like that.

DAVILA: What kind of arrangement was it? Like did you get paid a percentage of sales, or did he give you just a chunk of the pressing?

OCEGUEDA: He pressed at first 300 of them, and he sent us 50 of them, just for when we played shows, that we could have something to sell. And if we ran out we'd asked for more, and he'd send us some more. And that was about it, he didn't pay us anything for sales. But we didn't really care because there's a record out, and that's something that we can have, and it's a tangible item that you can have at shows, and people can buy. And if they buy it, then that's cool, 'cause you're not gonna make money off of it, you're not gonna make money off of punk in general, and even if that's your goal with it, then that's kinda weird, but it wasn't ever our goal. But it was cool to have those records for him to send us because we could sell some eventually, it could be like ten bucks, fifteen bucks for gas on the way home or something like that, from a show or something like that. That was about it. So that's how it kind of worked. And he still has records, but I haven't had a reason to ask for more, which I probably should 'cause I don't want him to just have a bunch of records left over.

DAVILA: How many copies of each record to you plan to press for your label when you start?

OCEGUEDA: I'm gonna do 300 first for ours, for this band's record. I'm gonna do 300 for a 7" for Ekolalia, and then maybe 200 for Abortion Reels, which is my other band that I'm in. Which I forgot to mention. But I don't really consider that my band. I'm in it, but it's not my band, I'm playing my friend's songs. But yeah, number-wise, that's what I want to do. I just need to find the time to really get on it, and right now I can't do that because of grad school.

DAVILA: What are your some of your objectives with Pesadilla Distopika?

OCEGUEDA: That band is to sing about issues that matter to me, because that's something I've never been able to do with other bands. So singing about things about my community, my Latino community, or immigrant communities, things like that. And just to sing about them so I can have, for myself, at least a platform to voice my frustrations out, things like that. Because to me that's where punk comes from. It's about singing about things that piss you off, that make you angry, and that's what I'm using that band

for. I'm also using it because I ended the other bands, and I want to have something to be able to do with my leisure time outside of grad school. Because I'm not really into other things aside from going to shows and playing music, and I've been doing it for a long time now, so it's just natural to me now to be in a band. And if I'm gonna be in a band, I should make it something that means a lot to me. I guess that's the objective of this band. Eventually touring is something that's an objective for the band. Just to be able to go play with other bands that are cool in different cities, network with this band, like have friends in different places that are cool people that get where you're coming from, that feel similar about what you feel, if it's about politics, or liking the same types of bands. Stuff like that. Because it's cool to know people in other places that are in cool bands, too, and that's why I want to be in this band.

DAVILA: When you press it are you going to try to get it distributed in other places besides California?

OCEGUEDA: Yeah. So with the tapes that I made for this band, I sent them all different places. I sent them to New York, some places in New York, different distros in Washington, some are in Spain, some are in Canada right now, some tapes are in Mexico now. Friends, I'll wholesale them to friends. Or we played one show, and this guy from Guadalajara was like, "Oh, I'm going back to Mexico next week, I want to take five tapes so I can sell them at a little [...] in Guadalajara," which is like a little swap meet type of thing that he has where he just sells stuff. And I'm like, "Yeah, take some." To me it's like just sending them everywhere. Someone from Spain hit me about sending them tapes, so I'll be sending 'em all over. Which is cool 'cause it's going all over the world, that's what's really cool about it, distributing it, that people in different parts of the world can buy it if they want it.

DAVILA: Do you have particular distributors that you use?

OCEGUEDA: No, no. There's little distros like what I'm gonna do. I'm labeling my little record label or whatever, it's not really a label, but I'm putting it under the guise of Verdugo Discos, and I can trade with [the warehouse], and take some of their tapes that they make, and they'll take some of mine. And I can trade with the guy in Washington, Rust and Machine, and I can take some of his tapes and he'll take some of mine. Or I can

just wholesale him some tapes. And I did that with this other guy in San Luis Obispo, something like that. He just always bought some, and he would also run out and take some more. I sent some to Grave Mistake Records, which is on the East Coast somewhere, I think Baltimore or something, I don't know, but he took some. So I'm the one distributing to different places. It's not like I give them to someone to do it for me. And it's really easy, you just send them an email, or meet them at a show, tell 'em what you're about, that's about it. Or you send them to different record labels in the area. Like if I'm in L.A., I can leave some at Amoeba, if I want to leave it there. But I can leave some at [the warehouse], I can leave some with Tony from G.S. Or I can leave some tapes here at Mass Media, or Dr. Strange, things like that.

DAVILA: And this is usually, you give them wholesale as opposed to consignment?

OCEGUEDA: Yeah, they'll just buy it straight off of you for two bucks instead of the price that I sell at our show, like four bucks. Or they'll trade different tapes with you. I'll take some and I can sell those later. Or you can do what's called, I forget what it's called, but you can just give them the tapes for them to try and sell in their little store or whatever, and when they do sell you can go pick up the money that you agreed upon to collect.

DAVILA: Do the stores in L.A. who do that kind of deal, is it a good arrangement for the bands generally?

OCEGUEDA: Yeah, it's cool 'cause you can just have your tape there, and people will always see it when they're looking through stuff, and someone might just be curious and take it. And if it doesn't end up selling, you just go back and pick it up. You don't lose money, it's just there.

DAVILA: Are there certain stores that you avoid because they want too big of a cut?

OCEGUEDA: Not really. I only say, like, "Oh, charge this much," or sometimes I'll say, like, "Don't charge more than four bucks for a tape." But I understand if it's a record store and they need to survive, and they might charge \$4.90 or whatever. But I usually want them to sell them for what I would sell it for, which is like four bucks, and I'll just take two bucks, something like that.

DAVILA: There's a question I wanted to ask, but I think I lost it. It must have been something to do with distribution stuff.

OCEGUEDA: Yeah, I don't know, it's just like distributing is cool 'cause you get to know what different people in different parts of the country are doing, like what bands they're putting out. And if you see 'em at a show because the band is touring, it's cool because you can always say "What's up?" to them. Because punk is a really powerful network.

DAVILA: I think that's actually the question I was going to ask. I talked to some people about scenes where people are sort of networking, it seems like, around the fact that everyone is Chicano or Latino, or everyone is singing in Spanish. And some people seem really resistant to that, like they think that these bands are kind of self-segregating in a way. Do you think that there's any truth to that?

OCEGUEDA: Nah, I don't think so. I've traded with different distributors that are white people, and they'll just take it 'cause they like the band, and they think it's cool. 'Cause I don't think language, it may play a part in it, but people pick up Japanese records all the time over here, they pick up records in Portuguese, like there's La Misma from New York that sings in Portuguese, right, and I've never heard people say, "I can't..." But I don't think I answered the question, though.

DAVILA: I guess they would say the same thing about a label like queercore, or...

OCEGUEDA: Oh, like if that's what you're strictly about, then why are you limiting yourself?

DAVILA: Yeah.

OCEGUEDA: No, I don't think so. I haven't felt that. Maybe people think it and don't say it because they don't want to say it. But I haven't felt that. It's been cool 'cause since doing this band I've been in contact with way more people than I had the opportunity to be in contact with in the past with the other bands. So I've been talking to Rafael in Vancouver, who was in Fracaso, who lived in Venezuela, but moved to Vancouver. I'm talking to people from Mexico and Spain that want to trade. Or I've been hitting up this one guy who wants to do art for us, and he lives in D.F., in Mexico City. And that's cool,

like he wouldn't have done that if we were an English-speaking band, or maybe he would have, but it's obviously more accessible to him if it's in Spanish. And to me that's cool 'cause being someone that identifies with a Mexican identity, or something, that's cool to me. But I haven't felt like I'm self-segregating with this band. Because for the most part punk is still real, predominantly English and white, I think, at least in the United States. Looking outside of Southern California...

DAVILA: Yeah, I was gonna say...

OCEGUEDA: Because Southern California is an exception.

DAVILA: To me it always felt more like all of the Latino hardcore bands in the '90s were singing in Spanish and networking with each other because they shared similar experiences or interests, but they also, it at least appears to me, they were kind of in solidarity with other punks in their own particular issues. So for somebody to call themselves Chicano punk or Latino punk, or queercore or anything like that, it isn't necessarily—to me anyway—it doesn't seem like a thing that's meant to segregate so much as a thing that's meant to say, "This is a part of who I am and I want this acknowledged and respected within the scene," kind of thing.

OCEGUEDA: Yeah.

DAVILA: I don't know if you feel similarly?

OCEGUEDA: I'm not sure how to respond to that, but that made me think of, I've heard stories about where some people got mad, there used to be a Latino Punk Fest. There was quite a few of them. There hasn't been one recently. I think they're having one in Texas this year. Todo Destruído is doing it, I think. But I remember when they would do Latino Punk Fest here in Southern California, some people didn't like it 'cause—and even some Latino people didn't like it—because they thought it was like, "Nah, punk shouldn't be just doing the Latino Punk Fest, it should just be punk, and that's what it should be. You're dividing the scene by doing a fest like that." And so that could be alluding to whatever you're talking about, like what you're kind of trying to get to, I think, because some people didn't like that, that they were just having a Latino punk fest. But to me it

was cool to have that, because it was a space for your own bands, or this particular community of bands to have a space to play a show, and showcase your music.

DAVILA: And anyone was welcome to go to the festival, right?

OCEGUEDA: Yeah, anyone was welcome to go. But the main focus was Latino people in punk. And some of the punk bands sing in English, but there were Latino people in the punk band. But some people thought, like, “Nah, you’re alienating people, or pushing people away because you’re just saying Latino,” or whatever.

DAVILA: I guess to me it doesn’t feel like it’s meant to be alienating so much as to say, “We’re doing this thing to kind of unite our community. You’re welcome to come, but you have to respect our community.”

OCEGUEDA: Yeah. Some people think that because it’s a culturally specific type of thing that it’s bad. You hear this argument in everything, like with culturally specific museums or whatever. You have Ladyfest that’s a space to particularly showcase one segment of the scene or something. And then you have a queercore fest or something. I’m not sure. I’m on the camp that thinks it’s cool to have, if you’re going to do a Latino punk fest or a compilation of just Latino punk bands, then that’s cool because I’m really interested in that type of music, and to have just a space for that, which there’s sometimes not enough spaces for that in the overall scheme of punk, it’s cool.

Interview with Erika Santillan

Los Angeles, CA, 8/22/2013

DAVILA: The first question is when did you first get interested in punk, what made you get interested in punk, and how do you define it for yourself?

SANTILLAN: Cool. I think I was probably in elementary school, just my brother listened to Nirvana a lot, and it was cool to be a little kid listening to that, you felt different. And I just looked up to him because a lot of his friends played music, and I liked the idea of playing shows in people's houses, like having live set-ups. A different sound, though, because we're used to live *cumbia*, or *rancheras* and *norteñas*, and stuff. But this was different. Also my parents listened to the Doors and stuff like that, so there was the rock feeling in our house, I think. There was an openness to that, so I kind of grew up with people around me who were playing music, and listening to Black Flag and different things like that, like Germs, X, being in L.A. And being the only kid in high school—or I felt like the only kid in high school that knew who X was, it was wild, it was crazy. I'm not gonna lie, I loved *Dookie* and Green Day, listened to a lot of that stuff. I felt like X was different, though. It was like this oldie, this gem, or something. And then one of my brother's friends, his name is Raymond, I feel like I give him a lot of credit, because I feel like he's like a girl germ, was really into Riot Grrrl, really knowledgeable, and listened to a lot of that music, so I was exposed to that. And then, honestly, I think it was the Sleater-Kinney record that got me into wanting to play guitar, because I was impressed by it. I think it was *Dig Me Out*. Started playing music with my brother, and having the chance to be the one putting on shows and stuff, going into different communities. I lived in Lennox, but we to Hawthorne, we went to Inglewood, we went to South Central a lot. I remember being young, and I was playing bass in a band called the Counts with my brother, my sister was drumming, and close friends, we were all in this band, and we would go to different spots and play. So, yeah, I think it was just a mixture of that.

DAVILA: So what would you say that punk means to you?

SANTILLAN: Punk is, to me, just being out of the box, just being passionate about thinking for yourself, analyzing yourself and the world, and being critical, but in a way to

help make things better. Punk is like a rebellion, and sometimes it can be a really free space, somewhere where you exist, and you give yourself voice to the things that...

Different punk bands talk about different things, but I get really moved by bands who talk about social justice issues, like Los Crudos and Sin Dios, bands like that that had messages. And so for me it's like this freedom to exist, freedom to express, and have voice, but in a musical way. It's just different.

DAVILA: So you mentioned Los Crudos, bands like that that were singing in Spanish, do you think that they appealed to you even more than other bands in a certain way?

SANTILLAN: Yeah, because just the fact that they're singing in Spanish, it's like unapologetic. I grew up in the United States, I'm first generation, in my house I heard Spanish all the time, and in school English was enforced. And listening to bands like that meant that, who cares? This is the one time, this is this one space that you can have where it's appealing to you and your culture, and almost like acknowledgement. There's an assumption that everyone here's an English speaker, but in the United States there's a lot of immigrant populations, and there's a lot of languages.

DAVILA: Do you think that that's something that influenced the decision for Weird TV to do songs in Spanish?

SANTILLAN: You know what, knowing that in retrospect, like me thinking about how I ended up in a Spanish-speaking band is crazy. Me and Lizet would have these conversations, like I asked her, "Are you intentional about that?" She goes, "I was and I wasn't. I was just writing my poetry," and the way she expressed was in Spanish, the thinking was in Spanish. She's also from a first generation Mexican mother descent. So it just came out. She wasn't sitting there being like, "We're gonna be the only band in Olympia that's gonna sing in Spanish." It wasn't even that. I think it was, maybe because the way she felt and the way I felt when we met each other in Olympia, like predominantly white scene, like, "You're a Chicana, I'm a Chicana, I see you." And then, "Hey, you play music, me too, let's hang out." That's how informal it was, but it meant a lot to me. I was surprised, at the first practice sessions, they already had a song, John, Ben, and Lizet already had a song, our song, "Sufrir," they already had the bones, the structure. And I was listening to her sing in Spanish, and I was like, "Whoa." 'Cause I

think that was around the time I was actually writing that paper I mentioned to you for that class, and I was in my own space thinking about my own identity in that scene, being in Olympia and being in the minority. And then meeting her by chance, she was singing for this Black Flag cover band, they were called Licorice Pizza, and she was fronting that band, and that was the first time I saw her. And I was fuckin' blown away, like, "What the fuck? Who is she, where did she come from?" I've lived in Olympia for five years, and I've never seen this person. So, yeah, she told me that it just came out, like when she met me it was just the time for her, too. Because she was feeling that kind of isolation, as well, like, "I'm around a bunch of white dudes, and white people," that you love, but at the same time you're like, "Damn, there's not a lot of brown people around." So I think when we actually started playing, it was reinforced, like, "Yes, there's so much power in this," 'cause all of a sudden we would play shows and the Chicano kids from campus—you know MEChA?

DAVILA: Yeah.

SANTILLAN: All the MEChistas would come to the shows, and there was a stronger representation of people of color at shows. And it was cool, it was interesting, because they would, in the middle of songs, be like, "[...], *jotra, otra!*", or say something that no else kinda knew what it was about but us. And Lizet and I, I think we would respect that, honor that, like that's fuckin' dope, like mixing it up a little bit.

DAVILA: Was that kind of a weird transition for you coming from here—I guess I don't know that much about Lennox, but I'm assuming that based on where it is, there's probably a fairly substantial Chicano/Latino population. And Lizet came up from Houston you said?

SANTILLAN: She was born here in L.A., and grew up in Santa Ana, and then I believe when she was nine they moved to Houston with her family. When I met her, she had just moved from Portland. So I guess you could say she grew up in Houston for most of her life, until she was about eighteen or something.

DAVILA: But at least in a place where there was probably a much larger Spanish-speaking population than Portland or Olympia.

SANTILLAN: Yeah, for sure.

DAVILA: You said you had lots of friends who were white, and that wasn't an issue in the sense that, you know, you liked them all, but was it kind of a weird transition going from a place like L.A. to a place like Olympia?

SANTILLAN: Yeah, totally. Total culture shock. At first there was this resistance to it, but it was also my own understanding, my own learning process, and accepting, but also being critical about which white friends I would have. You know what I'm saying?

DAVILA: Yeah.

SANTILLAN: I don't know, it was a little weird, for sure. I couldn't speak Spanish most of the time. Unless I was in a Chicano-centric, or somewhere—we had to hold space. It wasn't here, you can just walk anywhere and you're embedded. Over there it was, there was culture shock for sure. But that's what I'm saying, those moments where I met Lizet, it was like, "Whoa!", here we could talk in tongues or something.

DAVILA: Has anyone ever told you that they felt alienated by the fact that you were singing in Spanish, because they couldn't understand?

SANTILLAN: Honestly, no. I was kind of surprised by that, kind of surprised that there wasn't a lot of that reaction. Because it was a pretty white scene. I would say everyone that liked our band was pretty respectful about it and enjoyed it, enjoyed hearing... Or those are the personal responses I would get, people telling me about what the music kinda did to them, or put things in perspective a little. They would enjoy hearing it in Spanish, and honestly a lot of them, I think, sparked their own interest to learn some Spanish, or at least understand, look up lyrics and stuff and figure out. Or ask, and be like, "Whoa, that's really different."

DAVILA: I mean, that's what I have to do because I never learned. So I have to look up the lyrics and stuff, too. So for me it's kind of sitting in the middle, where I think it's awesome that people are doing this because it's representing a community that I'm kind of a part of, even though I'm a little bit removed because I don't know the language. Do

the other guys in the band know Spanish?

SANTILLAN: No. See, that's part of that, too. I felt while we were forming songs, and forming friendships and the bond that we did build, a lot of that personal learning revealed itself, too, because John really, really wanted to learn Spanish, and so did Ben. And when we went to Mexico they would try so hard to be in the space, try not to rely on us too much, for example. And of course it was a lot of helping, translating, but I think they were more inspired by it because it was a such a different culture, and the way Ben described it, a "beautiful" culture, he loves Mexican culture.

DAVILA: So when did you first start to play an instrument?

SANTILLAN: I was fifteen when I first picked up a guitar. My friend Marcos, who I also give a lot of credit to—I never went to music school, but those were my informal teachers, my best friend Marcos. He's a left-handed guitarist, and we still play music. He's also living in Lennox. I started playing on his electric B.C. Rich left-handed. And then when I was sixteen, my brother was forming that band, the Counts, and they needed a bass player, so they recruited me, and that's basically where I learned. Because I had some instruction with guitar, it felt easy to transition. And I really liked it, I mean I stuck with it.

DAVILA: So basically you didn't take formal lessons, you just kinda learned it through...

SANTILLAN: Community, yeah. My brother, his friend Raymond, who I called a girl germ, Marcos, my first teachers. And then I started listening a lot, and figuring out power chords—some of my first power chords were Misfits, like "She", and a lot of Bikini Kill.

DAVILA: And did you have other bands here in this area before you moved up to Olympia?

SANTILLAN: No, it was just the Counts, and for a little bit this other group the Council. The Counts transitioned into the Council, different band, different sound. And then that's it. I moved to Olympia, and I got really involved in school, I was in the Political Economy program throughout my whole time there, so I was really into activism, and just being really involved in Olympia. And then really through my junior year, I was like,

“Hey, I really miss playing music with people.” So I started playing with my friend Ollin, now he lives in New York, in Brooklyn, and he wanted to play drums, so we started this group called Black Guns, just me and him, played some Johnny Cash, and played some other stuff, and Misfits. We did that for like a month. And then he moved back to Brooklyn. And then I met Lizet maybe two weeks later, and she was like, “We’re looking for a bass player,” and I was like, “I play bass.”

DAVILA: So basically almost immediately after you met her, you started playing with the band?

SANTILLAN: Yeah. It just started as a hangout, we exchanged numbers and I gave her my number, and she called me maybe the next weekend, and we arranged a time and day, and I took the bus to east Olympia, and met up with them, and it just stuck. It was really informal, we were not really strict about it, just started hanging out.

DAVILA: And how long had they been going before you met Lizet?

SANTILLAN: I think just a few weeks. ‘Cause my understanding was that Lizet had just moved from Portland, and that’s around the time I met her, after that Licorice Pizza show, and then John followed shortly after. I think they were neighbors in Portland, or they were friends before. And, yeah, John moved after, and the three of them, Ben, John, and Lizet, had been talking about a band, but they didn’t have a bass player. So then I started jamming with them, and it just stuck.

DAVILA: Was this in 2010, or around there?

SANTILLAN: We started jamming out, practicing around 2009, and then around December, January 2010, we recorded that demo. So it had been three or four months that we were playing before that demo.

DAVILA: And that was self-released?

SANTILLAN: Yeah. Definitely.

DAVILA: How many copies did you do?

SANTILLAN: The first press I think was fifty, and then we followed up with another

hundred, which we ended up, like I said, we took some of those on our tour down to Mexico.

DAVILA: And John is the drummer and Ben the guitar player?

SANTILLAN: Other way. John plays guitar. John recorded that, by the way.

DAVILA: Oh yeah?

SANTILLAN: That's John. Those are his recordings. It's cool because it was a four-track, it was dope.

DAVILA: And did you play live as a band, or one at a time?

SANTILLAN: We played live as a band in the basement. We call it the birthplace. And then Lizet recorded vocals separately.

DAVILA: And then that last song that's sort of a noise collage?

SANTILLAN: That's John.

DAVILA: I really enjoy that one.

SANTILLAN: Yeah. I do, too. A lot of people do. That's John. "So ladies, put your make-up brushes down."

DAVILA: And when did meet up with the guys from Perennial?

SANTILLAN: Well, we were all friends. Ben lived in the house where Hayes's brother lived. Chuck. He plays in Milk Music. And Dave Harris, who plays in Gun Outfit, and Dan Dwyer, who plays in Gun Outfit, too. Dave Harris also plays in Milk Music. They all lived in the same house basically, and that's where we had band practice in the basement. So Hayes was already doing his Perennial because he's in Son Skull.

DAVILA: Did he ask you to put out the 7", or did you ask him?

SANTILLAN: He basically asked us. He was really supportive from the beginning.

Hayes really dug our music. I think he was inspired by it, too, in a lot of ways. And, yeah, he pretty much funded the thing, and we helped with the recordings.

DAVILA: Did you go into a studio for that one, or was that in the basement again?

SANTILLAN: For the 7"?

DAVILA: Yeah.

SANTILLAN: Geez. It wasn't even that long ago.

DAVILA: Or if you can't remember for the 7", did you go into a studio for the 12"?

SANTILLAN: It was a basement studio, yeah. Our friend Dave Harvey, he lives in Olympia, he recorded Son Skull, too.

DAVILA: On something a little bigger than a four-track?

SANTILLAN: Yeah, dude, like a studio. He's a professional audio technician. But really low-key, really DIY, and awesome.

DAVILA: And so Perennial is pretty much just Hayes running it himself kind of thing?

SANTILLAN: Basically. Hayes's brother use to help a lot, but I don't know, I actually don't know where his brother, his brother is Chuck, and I was thinking about that today, where is Chuck Waring?

DAVILA: Milk Music might be out on tour right now.

SANTILLAN: I think so, yeah. They've been doing really well. I miss those dudes. They're really nice.

DAVILA: So you had the 7" and the 12", do you know how many copies of each of those came out?

SANTILLAN: To be honest, I think the 7" was 500, and I believe it's all sold out.

DAVILA: Yeah, I think they're both sold out actually. I think I had to buy my copies on Discogs.

SANTILLAN: Really? The 12" is sold out?

DAVILA: Maybe it's not. But I might have bought my copy on Discogs anyway.

SANTILLAN: That's cool, though. I had no idea. I don't even know how many of those were printed.

DAVILA: So you were saying you grew up around here, so you were going to shows, like punk shows in South Central and Lennox, and in those areas...

SANTILLAN: Inglewood.

DAVILA: So were these backyard shows?

SANTILLAN: Backyard shows, definitely. Just people's backyards, yeah.

DAVILA: So were these mostly neighborhood bands playing?

SANTILLAN: Yes.

DAVILA: Was it a fairly young scene at the time, like a lot of kids...

SANTILLAN: I would say we ranged from, for example, my sister was twelve or thirteen, and there was people that were twenty-two, twenty-four, like my brother.

DAVILA: Do you think that a lot of the people who were in the scene with you, are they still involved?

SANTILLAN: No. Not too many. My friend Freddy Espinoza, he plays for this band, I think they're called Stranger Kids, but they back up Teresa from the Brat. They back her up when she plays here in L.A.

DAVILA: That's awesome.

SANTILLAN: So he'll play drums for her. What is it, Teresa and the something. They call themselves something, Teresa and the... I never seen them play.

DAVILA: Yeah. I don't think she goes by the Brat any more.

SANTILLAN: No, she doesn't. It's Teresa and the something.

DAVILA: So what was the typical backyard show like when you were going to them?

SANTILLAN: A lot of drunk young people. Dirt, beat up grass, a mess. A lot of fun. I remember the shows at my mom's house. I was really fortunate to have a mom who would open up her backyard for a show 'cause shit would be crazy. Kids smoking pot and stuff. But she felt like, they're in their neighborhood, in someone's backyard having fun on the weekend, making music, why not?

DAVILA: Was there ever trouble from neighbors, or cops showing up?

SANTILLAN: You know, being younger—I mean, I'm only twenty-seven now, I'll be twenty-eight in October—but ten years ago, I feel like, at least in Lennox, there were so many shows. And in Inglewood, too, so many shows. And in Lennox, I feel like—I call it

Little T.J. for some reason—noise wasn't an issue because everyone had parties every weekend at incredible noise levels, and people didn't trip, people didn't say anything, and cops would seldom show up. But in Inglewood, cops would show up, or a fight would break out, like punks against psychobillies, I remember psychobilly crews at shows, and stuff like that. Shows would go on. But I see now, there aren't very many shows. And the friends that stayed behind—because I moved for a while—they told me it was a steady decline to nothing, a total depression of no spaces in the community where music takes place. But that's just one part. If you look at South Central, they still crack there. People are still active, as you know. And there's spaces that come up, like the [...] warehouse. The record shop used to be in South Central, before that it used to be in Lynwood. So it's changing, but it's still here. But now I think that there are less backyard shows, I think there is more of that policing.

DAVILA: Do you think that there might be kids doing backyard shows, but that they're just younger kids so you don't really hear about them that much?

SANTILLAN: I think so, I definitely think so. I say that because, I'll joke around that I'm riding my bike around Lennox, 'cause it's so small, and I'll see young kids that look like seemingly punk rockers, and I'll be like, "Whoa, there's still kids that listen to punk here, that's dope." You see 'em in specks, though, it's not like how it used to be. And my little sister actually told me—she's twenty-two, and she still lives at my mom's house—she told me that maybe like three weeks ago or something, there was a show, a punk show, like a block away from our mom's, and I was like, "What?" She's like, "Yeah, dude, and they told me—'cause I went out there to ask those kids what's up." It was this crowd of kids just walking down that block, and she went and asked one of them what was going on, and they were like, "Oh, there's a show, there's this kid down the street, and he wants to have regular shows," or something. And I actually told my sister, "Hey, we should go next time and meet this dude, and see what's up." Collaborate or something.

DAVILA: Maybe you wouldn't necessarily know, but people talk about the East L.A. backyard scene a lot, it's gotten a little bit of recognition, like somebody got an article about it in the *L.A. Weekly* or something, and there's kind of like some recognition that

East L.A. has this backyard scene that's kind of been going on, cycling through different generations since the '80s. Do you think that that's true in South Central, and Inglewood, and Lennox, and places like that as well, and it's just that nobody's really heard of it?

SANTILLAN: You know what, I don't know. That's an interesting question. I think East L.A. gets a lot of recognition because you hear about it in stories, like social stories, you know, movies, books, personalities. And East L.A. Even the way, "East L.A.", you know, has a Chicano-centric vibe. And there's a lot of Chicanos everywhere, there's a diaspora obviously, even just in L.A., but, I don't know. South Central, as an example... I don't hear about Lennox in the media, except maybe Ice Cube had it in one rap line. But South Central does get a lot of media recognition, there's movies, there's music...

DAVILA: Yeah. But it's always about hip-hop, it's always *Boyz in the Hood*, and stuff like that.

SANTILLAN: Yeah, exactly. N.W.A, *Straight Outta Compton*. I don't know, I don't know what it is about East L.A. Maybe it's historical, but so is South L.A., in its own way, in its own right. But I think I would agree with you, there are waves that just keep happening. Like right now there's a big wave in South Central, I think. And even just being here, I feel lucky, too, because I just moved back from Olympia, and I wasn't sure what I was gonna come into coming back here. I went through my own culture shock, even if I grew up here.

DAVILA: So how long have you been back in L.A.?

SANTILLAN: It'll be three years in December.

DAVILA: And have you been involved in any bands down here?

SANTILLAN: No, not formally. I mean, I jam every Friday with my buds in Hawthorne, near Inglewood. And we just mess around, we record stuff, do a lot of poetry and instrumentation. During Halloween, Musica Para la Destruccion, these guys, they put on, are you aware of the Halloween cover band? They're basically shows.

DAVILA: I think I've seen some of the videos, like Destruye y Huye did the Vice Squad set.

SANTILLAN: And Poliskitzo did Eskorbuto one year. And so the tradition lives on. Why

I'm mentioning it is 'cause some buddies of mine, this year we want to do X, do an X cover band. It's weird, they just played recently, too.

DAVILA: Yeah. The free show at Pershing Square?

SANTILLAN: Were you there?

DAVILA: No. I don't remember where I was, I wasn't there, though.

SANTILLAN: Okay.

DAVILA: If you haven't been playing in bands, have you been coming out to a lot of shows since you've been back?

SANTILLAN: Yeah, I do. I love just being in a live music space. I love listening to live punk bands, I love listening to live *son jarocho*, the music I was describing to you earlier. Just the environment, being in a live music space is something that's awesome and that's uplifting to me. So I do, I come out a lot.

DAVILA: Do you feel like there are any recognizable differences between a scene like the one in Olympia versus the... Because they're both DIY scenes for the most part, but do you think that there are things that set them apart in certain ways? Other than the fact that a lot of people here are brown?

SANTILLAN: It's two different cultures?

DAVILA: Yeah.

SANTILLAN: Yeah. I mean, just the different cultures. Just the environment, the physical environment is so much different. In Olympia I want to say people are just chill, chillier. And, I don't know, maybe it's all the green, maybe people are just more chilled out over there. And in L.A., there's more fast pace, a lot of aggression in this city for sure. It's crazy, but that's why it's punk, like think for yourself, stand out, don't be that way, you know. But I think just the cultural differences. Like the language, the food you eat, the food you grew up eating influences you, it's just a part of your culture, the family structure. In Olympia, a lot of people there, just in that concentration of land, people are college-educated and affluent, and in South L.A. not so much. There's a lot of people

living in poverty, haven't graduated high school, high unemployment rate, a lot of health issues, just terminal diseases, and all kinds of stuff.

DAVILA: Do you think that those kinds of differences shape the way that people in the scenes think about DIY in any ways?

SANTILLAN: In a way, here is like, "make do," and you do it because you want to, and you do it 'cause you do it, you know, you're like, "No one else is doing it." And maybe over there in Olympia, it's a DIY mentality... I don't know what's different about it, but it's still DIY like you said.

DAVILA: And I don't mean to imply that one is somehow more authentic or anything, and I also don't want to reduce Olympia's scene to Calvin Johnson and K Records or anything, because there's so much more going on than just that stuff. But when you think about somebody like Calvin Johnson, his approach to DIY it seems—which has been really influential, which is why I bring him up—it seems like it's in some ways kind of like a more ideological thing, where it's about, "Let's do this thing because it's somehow more pure than approaching things through a corporate mentality, or a mainstream mentality." Versus a lot of the stories that I've read about bands from East L.A., or that people have told me who I've interviewed since I've been here, it sounds like more of a practical thing. Which isn't to say they don't have the same mentality of "Let's do this for ourselves, let's stay away from corporate sort of structures," and stuff like that, but it seems to be informed by a practicality of like, "This is the way we kind of have to approach it."

SANTILLAN: Yeah, I get what you're saying. I want to say a few things to that. Yeah, I think you're hitting something 'cause I've thought about that a lot, me being here and being the only college graduate in my family, and now having this pressure of like, "Oh, I have to make it." But coming back to reality, leaving the bubble of Olympia, being like, "Dude, I'm still faced with the hardship of finding a job, I'm still in the low-income, I'm still in the poverty bracket," why am I comparing myself or having these expectations that I have to be this predominant model just because I have a college degree. But that's not the reality, like I don't think I'm ever going to be affluent, so why should I try to force myself to fit that when I'm never going to be that. And that's when you're like,

“Fuck that, I’m still punk, I’m educated, it doesn’t matter how much money I make.” It doesn’t matter. It does, but it doesn’t, you know. I still want to go back to school, and I still want to get a better job and stuff like that.

About Calvin Johnson, and that twee scene, that twee feel to Olympia, it’s like cutesy, popsy, indie scenes, and stuff. But the punk scene that came out of Olympia, even in recent years, in the last five to ten years, has been amazing, and I think that that has been a choice of like, “This is a different thing, this is a different feel.” And it even has, I don’t know, I’ve been hearing the word “Pacific Northwest Punk” coined a lot, I think maybe ‘cause when I read stuff about Weird TV, they compare the Wipers or Nirvana, or they’ll drop something like, “It definitely has that Pacific Northwest edge, punk feel,” or something.

DAVILA: I guess maybe I could see that. I don’t think you guys sound all that much like the Wipers, but I feel like there’s a certain kind of edge to it that I could see where someone makes that comparison at least.

SANTILLAN: Yeah. But just the tendency, too, that Bikini Kill, or Riot Grrrl is coined, or referenced when they hear us. Which I don’t have a big issue with that, I grew up with Bikini Kill and stuff. But it’s interesting when that happens.

DAVILA: Was Riot Grrrl a big inspiration for you when you were learning to play music?

SANTILLAN: Definitely. For me it was. ‘Cause through the music I was learning a lot about feminism. I think a lot about that, looking back, and it wasn’t just the music. It was awesome and very appealing that I saw these girls, girls my age or whatever, that were making music, and putting out records, and writing zines, and stuff. And I thought that was fucking awesome, I didn’t know about that, who does that? And I was just a high school kid, everyone feels isolated in high school. So it was very influential, where I was like, “I’m gonna play guitar.”

DAVILA: I want to ask about the sort of gender dynamics of the scene when you were growing up and playing in the Counts, but I’m not quite sure how to phrase the question. So maybe I’ll just say that, how would you describe the dynamics of the scene?

SANTILLAN: In an intimate space, like my mom's garage, I felt there was that equality, like that respect, that mutual appreciation. Because my brother wrote a lot of the songs, but I would complement with vocals, or I would write interesting bass lines or something that complement each other musically. So there was that respect, and I felt like my voice was definitely valued in that. But outside of that, when we're in a party, or in a show, it's different. Predominantly sexist space, unfortunately, that's what it was. And the expectation, like, "Oh, you're in a band, you're in this band?" Like, "You're a girl playing?" Not a lot of females were doing it. But there always has been, there's always will be female musicians.

DAVILA: I think that female musicians get those kinds of comments and questions no matter what, but do you think that some of that had to do with being in a working-class community, because sometimes those areas can have a kind of conservatism to them.

SANTILLAN: Definitely, yeah. Especially because the assumption was that I was doing this against my parents' will, for example. My mom bought my guitar, she invested in this, so I had that support. And a lot of my friends, peers, their parents couldn't afford it, or their parents were like, "Hell, no. There's no way you are going to be hanging out at parties where loud music and sex happens." Those were the conceptions. Even my dad—my parents were separated—and he would get so upset, like we'd be out, and so he would get mad at my mom for that. She knows that we're with my brother, we're in the community, just playing music. There was that conservatism from him, that that wasn't cool, especially 'cause we were girls.

DAVILA: Were you Catholic when you were growing up?

SANTILLAN: Yeah, we grew up Catholic.

DAVILA: Do you think that had any influence on his feeling about it?

SANTILLAN: Yeah, I think a little bit. I think his fear was that we would get pregnant or something crazy. I think that was his whole take, that he didn't want us to be influenced, and sexually active, making shitty decisions, or falling into drug addiction, because it is very real. But it's interesting that my mom was cool about it, right?

DAVILA: Yeah.

SANTILLAN: She was like, “Hey!”

DAVILA: Well, you said she was interested in rock ‘n’ roll, too, like the Doors and stuff?

SANTILLAN: The Doors, Creedence Clearwater Revival. We listened to a lot of Motown, too. I grew up on a lot of Motown, that’s lilke my influence.

DAVILA: So maybe she had a little bit more... well, I don’t know, I’m not going to make any assumptions about your parents.

SANTILLAN: Right.

DAVILA: A little more understanding in the sense that she was interested in the same kind of...

SANTILLAN: Yeah. And she used to watch us practice, and she got really happy when me and my brother did collaborative vocal stuff. She would cry, she would be so happy and proud and stuff. But my dad has opened up about it.

I think they both kind of freaked out that I had just graduated college and I was gonna go on this epic tour to Mexico with Weird TV. They were like, “Fuck, you need to be working. You’re out of college, be serious.” And it’s like, “No,” you don’t just get this opportunity every day. This is an opportunity that is a plan in action, and it’s happening, I am going. But the will of the universe, it happened. I got a job, and I told them that I had to go to Seattle to help my friend transcribe this book, ‘cause he was working on a book on incarcerated youth in Washington, so I had this epic lie about it. But they believed me ‘cause they were like, “Oh, look at her résumé, her background, yeah, she’s been working with incarcerated youth, she just got out of college,” so it was reasonable to them. And I went on tour for three months, and then came back and had my job. It was awesome ‘cause I could prove to my parents you can still be an artist, or I could still do the music thing, and hold a job and be responsible how you want me to be responsible. So they kind of opened up about it after they saw that, that we made it to Mexico.

And when I showed my mom—we got published in Martin’s book, *Get Shot*—she saw it and she was like, “Whoa.” She kind of made this joke, like, “Where’s the money? Why don’t you guys get money, royalties for this or something?” And my dad loves the demo.

He thinks it's really tripped out. He actually had the nerve to ask me if we had smoked pot when we recorded that thing 'cause especially that last song, "Gloria/La Llorona," he's like, "What the hell?" I guess he hadn't put the dots together, he was like, "Who's playing bass?" And I was like, "That's me," and he's like, "Wow." In Spanish, he was saying, "[...] From one to ten, I'll give you a twenty," like a rating for the tape. He was really stoked on it. And I was really surprised he actually listened to it. I gave it to him as a gesture, like, "Hey, I created this, you should have it forever, keep it, I don't know if you're interested in it, but go for it."

DAVILA: So I'm not sure which question to ask next. I want to ask both about the tour in Mexico, like how that came about, and also about your work with incarcerated youth. So maybe we can talk about the tour of Mexico first, and then we'll come back to the other thing.

SANTILLAN: Sure.

DAVILA: So, yeah, how did that come about?

SANTILLAN: I think the 7" had just been released, and there was informal, around the coffee table talk about going on a tour, but just West Coast. And I then I was like, "why don't we just go to the Southwest, why don't we go to Tijuana, we have friends there." And so little by little it just started building, and we realized that, around that time, some friends had just returned from Mexico, or I think Hayes was around us at the moment about going to Mexico because Son Skull had gone there a few years prior, and that there was an opportunity. Because there was a friend who could set it up, he was in I think Texas at the time, in Austin. So he had presented the idea, and Hayes talked to us about it, and then the friend also contacted us. We're like, "Hey, if you say it can happen then let's do it." So we put it on the plan, "Yeah, cool, Mexico." But until we actually saw the dates, and confirmed locations, it became real. But it was just an idea, it started off just West Coast tour, and then it expanded 'cause there was an opportunity. Someone was like, "Hey, this dude wants to book bands right now, there's an opportunity, he has like five places you can go." And we went all the way to Mexico City, and then back to Arizona, back to the States.

DAVILA: And what was it like playing down there?

SANTILLAN: It was fun. I had a lot of fun. There was mixed responses. I think the one that I liked the most was people were surprised that we would be singing in Spanish.

“You come all the way from Washington, and you’re singing in Spanish, that’s crazy.”

Weird TV, I don’t know what they were expecting. Probably expecting, of course, English lyrics or something, especially a U.S. touring band. They didn’t know what they were in for, and neither did we, we didn’t know. But it was cool to hear that, like “It’s really an honor that you guys are a really good punk band, first of all, from the U.S., and all of your material is in Spanish. Do you guys ever translate?” And we’re like, “No, all our material is in Spanish.” They’re like, “That’s really cool, who writes?” And it’s like, “Lizet is the writer, she writes all our songs.” So that’s awesome, people were thrilled. And then in Querétaro, that’s like a D-beat scene, and doom metal and stuff like that, and dudes were not into. They were not into it. I think we were too poppy compared to what they’re listening to, militant punks. They liked one song, and it’s on the 12”, it’s called “Mentiroso,” they really liked that one.

DAVILA: I do, too, actually. You were saying people thought it was cool you were singing in Spanish, but did people ever say anything about your accents or anything like that?

SANTILLAN: Yeah. Especially Lizet. I’ve had the privilege to be able to travel to Mexico. I haven’t gone in a few years—well, I go to Tijuana frequently, I have a lot of friends there—but I spend more time in the land, you could say. So I had a lot of the lingo previous to going there, and I could interact with the young people, and help us out a lot with navigation. Because Lizet would never want to speak, like be the speaker, when we would get to places. I was basically doing most of the work, if not all, when we didn’t have our driver-slash-translator. His name is [...], he lives in Texas now. But before he joined us on a leg of the tour, I was doing a lot of it, so after a few days, I broke in, but the first few days of course I was totally insecure, and I would encourage Lizet to just be more open to it. And you’ll learn by doing, and if you fuck up you learn even more. So I think little by little she started getting more comfortable about it.

But people would definitely know that we were from *El Norte*, from the north. She used to get picked on for some reason more, maybe because she’s a little bit lighter than me,

but for some reason they would call her *guërra* or *gringa* or something, they would use those words like *guërra* or *gringa*, and she would get so pissed. And I feel her because in the U.S. we don't get seen as that. You would never call me *guërra* here, I don't have that privilege, I don't have that standing in the United States, on this soil. But over there because we weren't Mexicans from there, or had learned the language, and even just our accent and how we dressed, they knew we were from here. And so they would point it out, and it would sometimes be okay and sometimes not.

DAVILA: And was that the only extended tour that you've been on with the band?

SANTILLAN: Mhmm. Yeah, pretty much.

DAVILA: So other than that, mostly just sort of Pacific Northwest, and sometimes Northern California as well?

SANTILLAN: I would say West, yeah, a lot of Northern California. We have a lot of fans there, and our shows do pretty well, and it's just a lot of fun, and I think it's just for some reason easy to just go there, and hang out somewhere, practice, and just hang out in the city, or go to Oakland.

DAVILA: Are there any plans for more recordings in the future, or is that just kind of a question of if you'll ever have the time?

SANTILLAN: I think it's a question of if we'll ever make the time to actually do it, and meet somewhere again and do it. The way the 12" happened was just that. It was my first summer, so I moved back to L.A., and it was my first summer here, but I chose to spend it in Olympia, I left for August. And everyone did the same. Lizet, I forget where she came in from. John was living there, and so was Ben still. So we basically committed to spending a whole summer, like the whole month of August, practicing and writing songs, like "Mentiroso," and "Arañas" was also a song that John, Ben, and I wrote, and then Lizet had to write lyrics for it later. She was able to listen to it way later. We committed to being in one place, and just doing it, and then she joined us maybe the last two weeks of August, practiced, and then we recorded that thing in one day, maybe two days. Yeah. And then she came in and had to do vocals. Yeah, that's basically, John, Ben, and I recorded the music, we put those tracks down, and then Lizet had to come, wherever she

came from, I forget, she was traveling, she came from somewhere and met us in Olympia, and for two weeks just worked with it and wrote the lyrics.

DAVILA: And so to go back to the other thing, you said you worked a lot of with incarcerated youth, was that part of the program you were doing in school?

SANTILLAN: Mhmm. So like I told you, I studied Political Economy at Evergreen, four years, but basically the last... I was in Americorp, so for four years I was part of this program called Gateways for Incarcerated Youth. For a period of time I was doing it for college credit, and for another period of time I was a program assistant to get my work-study. So when I first started I was just a tutor, going into the institutions, helping translate for this kid, 'cause he was gonna face deportation soon. And it was awful, I had three weeks to work with him, just kind of counseling him, kind of like what he would expect, just reading documents. But it was impossible, really we just got to know each other, and he told me his story, and I counseled him on some legal stuff, like legalities, and not to sign anything without his lawyer present, like if he's not consenting or understanding, he can deny unless he has representation. So just things like that. And that was really cool. And then I don't know what happened to him, I think he did get deported.

And then because of that experience I joined the program full-time. And I got into it for credit, for school credit. So what Gateways does is provides education opportunities to incarcerated youth, ages fourteen to twenty, in two high-security, maximum-security institutions in Washington. They're both like an hour, one is an hour, one is forty-five minutes from Olympia. So we would get on busses, vans, and go to one of the schools and have class there. Sometimes we would have cultural workshops, so the African-American kids would get in one group, the Indigenous, Native American, American Indian kids would get in another group, and Mexicans, and the white kids, and do cultural heritage stuff, like talking about culture and exploring that. And then we would have class, so we would seminar, write papers, do presentations. Are you familiar with popular education?

DAVILA: Not really, no.

SANTILLAN: So just the idea that everyone is a holder of knowledge, everyone has

something to contribute and share. And just going from there, and finding a common interest for a theme that the kids wanted to learn about. And they wanted to learn about sports and history. So our teacher—he's one of our best political economy professors, his name is Tony, he was running the program at the time—with his guidance we chose a book called *The People's History [of Sports in] the United States*, by David Zirin, and basically the book talked about the history of sports in the United States from the inception of baseball and football, but talked about it with a lens, with a perspective of historical context and what was happening politically and socially in the United States. So some examples were how the three Olympic runners, I think they were runners, they were African-American, they showed solidarity with the Black Panthers, how you couldn't separate politics from sports because it's embedded. And now how sports is a different industry, and is so marketable, and so commercialized, that it's different from when it started. Like football, for example, was also modeled after war strategy. So the president at the time, I forget his name, it's quoted, Zirin did his work, it's quoted that football would prepare the men in the field for war. So when they were drafted, or it was time to go fight. So a lot of patriotism, nationhood, homage to the State, it was rallied through football. And now it's very different, it's commercialized, you don't talk about, you're not training for war any more, it's this different mentality. So it's interesting, that book really brought up a lot of interesting things, a lot of interesting points, and it was cool because it was in a language that the kids were totally into it, they were learning about sports, they were getting history lessons, and expanding their idea of sports. And he talked about capitalism through "C.R.E.A.M.", the Wu-Tang song. So kids were like, "Whoa, for reals, that's so poetic, it's really cool, I get the point, I'm learning." So we did, I did that with a lot of my peers, we got really close as a community, we did that for four years. It was cool.

DAVILA: Is social justice work something that you want to continue doing?

SANTILLAN: Definitely. But it's like an underlying current. I think at this point I've been exposed, there's no way to go back and close my eyes any more, so it's like an underlying current. But I'm a musician, and I'm a passionate about working with youth, and giving back, and telling stories. I like to write a lot, too. So I think that whatever work I do, it has to be on that side,. Helping people empower themselves, not me

empowering them, giving tools to self-empower and really think about things, and think outside of yourself and outside the box. It's cliché, but I think that was something I really got from going to college is learning how to be analytical and critical, and it's okay to be cynical.

Interview with Joe "Vex" Suquette
Los Angeles, CA, 8/21/2013

DAVILA: I'm interested in trying to clarify the history of the different locations, because people tend to only talk about the first. So I was just wondering if you could provide a sort of timeline for the different locations.

SUQUETTE: I started doing shows since 1976, different places, under a different promotion name. So actually the very first Vex, I was doing big shows, I was doing huge shows in all these big auditoriums. As I started getting more popular, I started running bigger venues, and the bands started changing, and so on and so forth. I got more exposed to a lot of the other stuff that was going on, such as new wave, rockabilly, punk rock. And it was all new because of the scene, the way it was, disco was pretty much dominating all of the '70s, and toward the end of the mid to the end of the '70s, that's when new wave and punk rock started emerging. And I've always been a promoter of live music. And with that I started meeting a lot of the musicians and bands that were playing out in the area.

So finally I came to an area in downtown L.A., actually the MacArthur Park area, there was this apartment there called the Morrow Apartments, and my sister was a manager of the apartments, and down below it, in the basement, they had this ballroom, a small ballroom. So I started doing bands there, and I started changing them around, and eventually the Hollywood bands started picking up on it and approaching me, so what I started doing was mixing the East L.A. bands with the Hollywood bands, just to get the East L.A. bands some exposure. But after a rundown with the police, and so on and so forth, I had to change that, I had to stop it. But even though I was doing smaller-scale groups there, I still continued to do bigger events elsewhere. In '79 I changed the production name from Hard Rock Productions to the Vex. And then I kept on doing shows under the Vex name at that point.

And then a few of the bands I knew from East L.A., one band in particular were the Illegals, and one of the guys had a rehearsal area, or I guess maybe a gallery, you might even say, there at Self-Help Graphics, and I seen the whole set-up, and I knew what was going on there, a lot of arts and so on and so forth. They really didn't have, even the artists didn't have that much notoriety, nobody really knew anything in East L.A. So I

decided at that point in time that maybe it was time for a publication, so I started thinking about it, brainstorming it, and then finally I approached some of the artists that were out of Self-Help Graphics of my ideas, and they're, "Yeah, that sounds great." So I approached Sister Karen, and I told her about this thing, too, and she said, "Yeah, go ahead and do it." So she gave me Thursday nights to do shows there. And that money was going to go to funding the publication, and that's how Self-Help Graphics were involved. 'Cause I was still doing shows other places under the Vex name. For some reason or another, in history they said the Vex started at Self-Help Graphics, which it didn't, but at the same time, the only reason why I used Self-Help Graphics at that time was for the publication.

So I started bringing more and more bands from Hollywood, Orange County, and elsewhere, all over the world, really, coming in, and I started mixing 'em up. Finally I decided to go ahead and, in 1981, after... Actually, in the last of '80, we had a show at Self-Help Graphics with Black Flag, and I had just done them the week before that at the Vern Auditorium, which was very successful, because every Black Flag show at that time was ending in violence, and that was the first Black Flag show that ever went by well. So the following week I had a Black Flag show at Self-Help Graphics. Prior to that time, two weeks prior to that time, I had approached Sister Karen a few times regarding security, 'cause I wanted to use my security for that show. But she insisted that she couldn't do it, she had a contract, and so on and so forth, and that kind of really sent the red flags up for me. And then after several times of trying to persuade her to go with my people, she wouldn't do it, so I asked for fifteen security guards from her security. I never seen the guys, nothing or ever. She brought in her secretary and told her, "Make sure Joe has fifteen security guards," and she goes, "Okay."

So the day of Black Flag, by six o'clock the entire parking lot was full with people, approximately 800 people, and they were still coming. I showed the doors weren't going to open until nine. So it was going to be huge. Finally, like around 6:30, two security guards show up, little Mexican guys, maybe 5'6", 5'7", 150 pounds. So I asked 'em, "Where are the other guys at?" And he goes, "There is no other guys, there's just us two." So I said, "My god." Back then you had pagers, no cell phones, nothing like that, so I'm trying to get a hold of my guys, but it's already too late, nobody's responding. So to make

a long story short, I decided to cancel the show. Some punks tried to get into the building because they didn't have money, they went into one area, they knocked over some tables, and the Sheriff came at the same time, so they were able to get them out, and no real big damage was done. So that ended that. The following Monday, Sister Karen was there, had to board up everything, and she wanted to know what happened. So I told her, "You only sent me two guards." And she goes, "No, I didn't. I sent you fifteen like you asked." I go, "That's what I thought, too." So she called in her secretary, and told her, "How many security guards did you ask for Joe?" And she goes, "Two." And she goes, "Why two? We asked you for fifteen." And she said, "Well, I didn't want him to lose any money." [Laughs] It was like, when you have a huge show, punk rockers, and you have kids who are like 6'4", 6'5", big dudes, and you have a couple small, little Mexican guys, it's not gonna work. These guys have no idea what they're doing. So that's what happened to that show. The money that I raised for the publication, I gave to her for repairs, and so on and so forth, and she didn't want to take it because she felt totally responsible for it, but they're a non-profit. Nevertheless, even if they were non-profit or not, I gave it to her anyway, she was a beautiful lady.

And so in February of 1981 I opened up the first Vex. Self-Help Graphics wasn't the Vex, it was just another venue that I used. The first Vex was on Brooklyn and Mott. It went there strong for maybe about a good eight months, nine months, and shows were great. I did everybody there. Talking Heads played there, the B-52s played there, all the punk bands, Social Distortion, and so on and so forth, and Bad Religion, Adolescents, T.S.O.L., Black Flag, Circle Jerks, everybody. Then there was a drive-by, and a local kid got shot and was killed at the Jack-in-the-Box across the street from the Vex. And even though back then I was doing all these shows in East L.A., I would say at least maybe ten percent of them were Chicano, the other ones were all white and mixed and stuff like that. But the majority of the people that came there were white, from Orange County and Hollywood, wherever. But for some reason or another, they were just not interested, or they were just tripping out, it wasn't their music, or whatever the case might be, so it didn't click too well.

But after that incident, I decided to move the Vex again. I didn't want to take any more chances, I didn't want any of the kids that came to the Vex, or anybody, really, to get

hurt. At that time, I had so much going on with all the bands, nobody at that time before that would ever cross the L.A. River. East L.A. was considered a no-man's land, you go there and you die. And the shows that I was bringing there were attracting by the thousands every weekend. I created pretty much a culture clash of people there, that it became almost like a circus. The kids would line up from nine o'clock in the morning. The shows didn't open until eight or nine o'clock at night. They would start lining up to get their seats. People from the neighborhood started driving down the street just to look at the kids, their haircuts, clothing, so on and so forth, it was like a circus.

The great thing that happened, also, was that, because there were so many kids, all these mom-and-pop restaurants were getting filled in by all these kids wanting to eat, and stuff like that. It turned out that some of these restaurants, you would have half of Hollywood over here, half of Hollywood over in this restaurant, you would have Orange County in this one, you would have L.A. in this one. So they kind of had their group restaurants that they go into. And I knew that because I would go in there, and I would sit down and talk to them, eat with them. It was very endearing because you had these white kids coming up to these moms and people that were running them, and they were very much Hispanic, Mexican, and a lot of them didn't even speak to them in English, but these kids knew, and at the end of the dinner or whatever they ate, lunch, whatever, I heard people say, "Bye, mama," or "Bye, mijo," it was kind of a collaboration with the kids, and stuff like that. So it was very cool the way everything was working out.

Any place else, back in that time, there was a lot of riots after the shows. But the kids respected East L.A. They knew that the gangs wouldn't permit it. So anything that happened, it could turn into a real bad situation. So they knew, so they would get up and they'd take off. It was bad anyway, kids' cars were getting broken into, and stuff like that, but that's something that's hard to prevent.

But what did come out of it was that even though I didn't have the publication, it turned out that because of all the shows that I was doing, the media came in, like crazy.

Newspapers, magazines, television, radio, whatever, came in to see what was going on in East L.A. It became huge. Even Self-Help Graphics became huge, and all the artists became really big, because of all the media that came through the Vex. And the bands got bigger, the crowds got bigger. I had a venue that held almost a thousand people there, on

Brooklyn and Mott, pack it in with 3,000, you would have another 2,000 outside wanting to come in still. The fire department hated me, so did the police department. They came, and they would block off the streets because the kids were pouring into the street. And it went on like that until that incident with that kid.

I remember that night, I talk about it all the time when I get interviewed, it was a sad situation because one of the punk rock girls came upstairs and came right to me and said, "A kid just got shot." I crossed the street, he was laying there by himself, and I kneeled down in front of him, basically over him, and I was looking straight into his face. I was trying to find out where he was hit. And I remember he was looking right at me, and he was pretty much looking straight through me, he was laying on his back, and he was pronouncing the words, "Mama," 'cause I could see the way his mouth was moving. He had saliva that turned into bubbles, tinted with blood, and then I seen him expire. I remember going upstairs, the Adolescents were playing—even Tony will tell you this—and I got Tony's attention, he walks over and I told him what happened, I told him, "Get everybody out the back." He goes, "Okay," and he told them what happened, "Everybody go out through the back, show's over." I couldn't continue the show with somebody there across the street dead, and he understood that, and I'm sure the kids did, too, 'cause they left real quick. After that I said, "The hell with this, I'm outta here."

The second place was in '82 in downtown L.A., on Oak and Washington, and that place was a fabulous place, beautiful place. Had a mezzanine, big, huge, stage, and the crowds came for the bands. Some amazing shows were there. That went on, I didn't have a real strong lease, so eventually after a year I had to pull it out of there, and I wound up right here in El Sereno, on Soto and Huntington Drive, where we continued to do the shows there. And that went on 'til about early '84, and we did some amazing shows. Damned played there, Clash played there, everybody played there. Red Hot Chili Peppers, all the bands from L.A. Later on, all the bands became huge. But it was an amazing time, like no other. I don't know if the industry would ever allow it to ever happen again, because it's pretty much all industry now. The music's changed, and I don't think it'll ever become music from the bands any more, 'cause they don't want to share any more. It's unfortunate because you have so many good musicians, so many great writers that could change all this, that will never get the chance to express themselves artistically. And it's a

crying shame.

I'm back now after thirty-something years, and I get a lot of bands that are complaining about all this stuff, and I've been approached by certain companies that I don't care to mention wanting to buy me out, and big promotion companies that are here. And I've been solicited to sell my venue and the name. But I'm not that kind of a venue. This is an art center, for the kids, and for the community, and for the musicians, and for the artists, and so on and so forth. So we're not that kind of a venue, which I'm sure is raising a lot of hell with those guys because they don't want any competition, they want to control everything. So right now it's a thing where I have to start considering my expansion. This time I'm here to do all that that I was doing, plus work with the community, and the children that are here. I eventually want to open up a battered women's shelter down the road here. I'm also looking at another space right now, and I've already approached them to open up another Vex in Santa Ana, or Fullerton. So I'm ready to start moving forward. I hope by all of this that I'm doing, it will help create something where the musicians start feeling like, "Hey, we can start writing again, and we don't have to be under the shadow of industry music," and knowing that they can't do anything with their talent.

DAVILA: You mentioned a publication a couple times, what was that going to be?

SUQUETTE: It was going to be basically like an *LA Weekly* that was basically going to feature what was going on in East L.A. with the artists and the musicians, anything to do with art. There was nothing that was going on, the *LA Weekly* wouldn't come into East L.A. So there was nothing really to show what was going on in East L.A., other than I was doing it. So basically that's what the magazine was about. From Self-Help Graphics I recruited photographers and writers, artists, and obviously the musicians were there. So with that, we were able to go out and start getting all this information. And when we finally got it together, I wasn't there at my meeting at the beginning, but when I got back, something went on, and the artists got pissed off, and the person that I left in charge to get that thing became big-headed and people boycotted him, and out the whole thing went. So to me it was like I said, the hell with this, I'll go ahead and try it someplace else. At that point, I was already at the point of ending my relationship with Self-Help Graphics and opening up the first Vex, and pretty much that's what happened. You know, you have a lot of wrong information out there. I've had people try to steal the

name from me. They claim the name for themselves to say that they were responsible for it, and so on and so forth. Everybody knows in the world who the Vex belonged to, and who started it, and who did the shows, and so on and so forth. These guys took it upon themselves. What happened was that in '84 when I retired the Vex, there was so much interest in it still that I wasn't there to talk about it, so they took it upon themselves to start saying things. So a lot of the stuff that was said is pretty much fabricated, it's all fabricated, because they weren't there at the shows, so how would they know? They fabricated everything, and really it's a horrible thing, as far as I'm concerned, to lie, and to pretend that, to take the credit from somebody that's done so much work. It's a lot of work to do one show, just one show is a lot of work. A lot of money, and heartache, and sweat, just, it's a lot of work, period. So that's what happened.

But like I said, what I didn't do with the publication the media did for the area, which gave East L.A., and Self-Help Graphics, and the artists and musicians all this attention. Now Hollywood was opening the doors to all the bands that were playing in East L.A. The Roxy was hiring them, Lingerie, Cathay de Grande, and so all these bands were being hired from all these people. So anyway, this went on, and things got better and better, and then unfortunately things started getting worse again because of the economy, with Reaganomics coming in. And the clubs started closing down all over the place, the law was after all the punk clubs. In Orange County, the Cuckoo Cuckoo's Nest got closed, Godzilla's got closed, Whiskey and Gazzarri's had to change their line-ups of bands that would play there 'cause of the riots that were being created, and things got really nasty and out of hand. Me, I survived because I moved around a lot. But, like I said, eventually I just got too burned out. Like I said, there's a lot of work involved, and I just got totally fried, and I just said no, it's time for me to let it go, and that's what I did.

DAVILA: And so with the later locations, did you still have the same kind of emphasis of trying to mix East L.A. bands with bands from other parts of the area?

SUQUETTE: I always did. My whole thing was to work with the bands from here, and give them, at the beginning, like I said, they were the opening bands, and after that became bands that would either headline or were in the middle. So I always gave the bands from the area help, because they needed help, they needed recognition. And as far as I'm concerned, they're just as good as any of the other bands. A lot of the bands also

helped a lot. X was great at helping them out. The Blasters, when they heard Los Lobos, they helped them out a lot. They got them signed to I think Rhino Records. So they, because of the Vex, Los Lobos got its help into Hollywood, and because of the Blasters, they helped them out to get their first record label with them. And now they're huge, as you know. And a lot of the other bands got signed, but unfortunately it didn't last.

DAVILA: That's something a lot of people talk about with the first Vex. Sean Carrillo had an essay in *Forming*, I think it was called, which was an art exhibition about punk in L.A., and he had a piece about the Vex in the catalog. And there are a number of similar things out there. So people talk about that as being this moment of kind of intercultural exchange, Eastside and Westside coming together in sort of unprecedented ways. But do you think that that continued throughout the history of the Vex, in the other locations?

SUQUETTE: It didn't even happen in the first one, to be quite honest with you.

Unfortunately, me, I was very disappointed with a lot of the stuff that was going on in East L.A., all the little clique-ish stuff that was happening, and that continues happening even now. I think Chicanos ought to back each other up. And even though they might not like what's going on, because everybody doesn't like that kind of genre of music or whatever, it doesn't matter. If it's positive, if it's something that's attracting media, any news that's good news is good. And if they don't understand it, they should just stay home.

But no, back then there was too much squabbling, and backstabbing, and it's still going on now, but it's just, to me, a lot of these guys that talked about what you're talking about weren't even there. And to me it's like, I hear all these little stories, I read all these things about how they were there when Black Flag destroyed [...], but just like I said, these guys weren't there. How the hell do they know that? It was a bunch of B.S. to me, and this how it went on, and went on. As far as Sean Carrillo's concerned, I really didn't see him too much over there. I brought him in basically because he was a writer. And then after I left, I read different stories about this and that, and I just like raised my eyebrows on it, but he's gone, and I don't want to really elaborate on that too much.

DAVILA: Okay. I don't know if you've read some of the stuff that Jimmy Alvarado has published in *Razorcake*, but...

SUQUETTE: Yeah, I read his stuff, and I wasn't very impressed by it. As a matter of fact, I was kind of turned off by that stuff. And he kind of coaxed me into believing that he was writing for somebody else, but pretty much he was in the camps of Willie Herrón and these other guys that were trying to take the name from me, and stuff like that. And they had a panel, a Vex panel at one show that [...] did, and I showed up unannounced pretty much, and I turned that thing upside down. And the thing is that it's like those panels—this is where I'm getting at with all that stuff—is that those panels were always about people that knew Willie, that blew smoke up his ass, and that really weren't any part of the Vex. So to me, that whole panel, I said, "What do these guys have to do with the Vex?" I was there, I was sitting down with the people in the audience, I go, "What do these guys have to do with the Vex?" And when I came to Jimmy Alvarado, he says, "Well, I didn't go to the Vex, but I lived in City Terrace." Well, what does that have to do with the Vex? How can you get guys on the panel, a Vex panel, that have nothing to do with the panel? So it turned into, I had to prove my point of who I was and that I'm back, and I'm taking back the crown. I'm that kinda guy. You want to butt up against me, don't grab the bull by the horn unless you're gonna get stabbed with it. That's who I am. And I talked to Jimmy, he came down here, the Black Flag show that we had here, and I told him, "I'm surprised to see you here," because pretty much those guys are kind of boycotting me. I don't care.

DAVILA: But I think that he's one person who does seem to try to emphasize the fact that the Vex continued on after the first location. And he does say that it served this important function for a lot of bands, not just from East L.A., but from other parts of the city, who couldn't get into clubs in Hollywood, but who would come place the Vex...

SUQUETTE: Well, the thing with that is that you have somebody that created a name, and then you have a bunch of jackasses going around saying that they continued it, and then they're taking credit for everything I did. Bullshit. I don't care what you say, how you think about it. That is total bullshit. You don't pick up somebody's name after all the work they've done, and then continue it and take all the credit for everything else. You don't even use that name any more, as far as I'm concerned.

DAVILA: Well, I think that what he was saying is that the locations that you were talking about, like Brooklyn and Mott, and the one on Soto St., I believe, he was saying that those locations that you were running still created this important function for a lot of bands who could gain valuable club experience that would then help them to find inroads into other venues, so I think that...

SUQUETTE: Well, I think that, to me, a lot of promoters came in afterwards, not a lot of promoters now, to me it's like I think a lot of them are using... I'll tell you, Goldenvoice, when I closed the Vex, they used to come over, because Goldenvoice was really getting going, they would come over to the Vex all the time to get the names of the bands, and so on and so forth, and when I was going to close, I seen the guys and I said, "Come next week, and I'll give you my black book." To that point I remember seeing every single show that they did, they copied, to the T, with the bands that I had, and they did shows with those same groups. So I pretty much started those guys, which, okay.

But as far as bands that played places that played the old Vexes, and stuff like that, I don't know too much about that. Like I said, I've seen the Vex name on shows that were created by these guys that were trying to take over my name, and continue in the name of the Vex, which is totally fucking bullshit. Never was I even mentioned in any of those interviews, which is like total Chicano bullshit, and that's what it is, that's what it's come down to. And instead of saying of Joe did all this work, this and that, they sat back and they said, I'm doing all this stuff now, and even when I opened up this place here, even the *LA Weekly* made a comment like, "And then by the way, it's also being run by the guy that really did the Vex." So they weren't fooling anybody.

It's really, as far as I'm concerned, an embarrassment. Some of this stuff went into the archives in museums, by these same guys. Now when has the archives of museums turned into tabloids? How do you fix a damage like that? What does it say about the Chicano person in general, that we're a bunch of liars that are willing to backstab our own kind? How do you straighten out that kind of a problem, that kind of a lie? Especially in the archives of these museums. It's a sad thing. It's a really sad thing. And to me, it continues, all this little clique-ish crap, because these guys back up their friends, and stuff like that, instead of supporting the Vex like they should, they don't. Here I am in East

L.A., kickin' ass, and these guys should be here saying, "Let's make this happen." But unfortunately, this is what's been going on since back in the '80s.

DAVILA: So why do you think that it's important to continue to talk about the history of the Vex, in terms of kind of ironing out your stake in it, and in terms of the overall importance of the different locations that you ran, in terms of East L.A. and the Chicano community. I guess...

SUQUETTE: Why do I continue to do shows here at the Vex in East L.A.?

DAVILA: Not just why do you continue to do shows, but when we're talking about all of these kinds of arguments about the history of it...

SUQUETTE: Why do I keep bringing that up? Because you asked me. [Laughs]

DAVILA: No, I don't mean it in any kind of way like that, I just mean what is the significance of it, do you think...

SUQUETTE: The significance of it that I'm trying to point out is that, basically Chicanos should back each other up. They should be here, embracing what we have here, the culture, and what happened out of this place. Everybody needs a place like the Vex. The Vex is huge here. I opened up and right away, man, the bands came from all over the world. They came. They could have played at the Nokia, they could have played at the Fonda, they could have played at El Capitan, no, they want to play the Vex. They want to be on the history, and they want to be recognized as being a band that played the Vex. It's huge. I'm all over the world. The bands know me from all over the world. They come from Ireland, they come from Europe, they come from everywhere. So that's what the whole thing is there.

As far as the other stuff's concerned, I don't even like to talk about it, but when I have a chance to, to me, it kind of makes me very frustrated because it still is going on, even now. You brought up Jimmy Alvarado. I saw him that one shot, and he asked me, "I want to interview you," and I go, "No, you're not going to interview me. You had your shot, and you blew it. Everything that you did was totally not very kosher because nothing was true. You lied to me about what you were going to do, and then you continued to support

the lies that were already said, because you knew the guy, you wanted to back him up.”
When you bullshit, I’m sorry, I don’t hang out with bullshitters.

DAVILA: To further that, are you invested in the history of it also in the way that this was a significant moment for the Chicano community, that there was kind of a lot of...

SUQUETTE: I’m in the Rock ‘n’ Roll Hall of Fame, man. It’s huge. The Vex is not just in the Chicano community, all over the world. I’m big. It’s huge. Everybody knows the Vex. People from Japan, all the way to people in Argentina, into Europe and into Africa. All over North America and South America. It’s big. And I just barely started. I’m barely at the tip of the iceberg. But what I’m doing now, it’s more humanitarian than anything else. Everybody thinks I’m just back to doing the club stuff, they have no idea what I’m doing now. Going to build orphanages, women battered shelters, I’m a designer and developer is what I am. And I have a lot of major things. I think, seriously, the Vex was just a passage to get notoriety, to create what is laid out in front of me. Back in the day, the reason why these guys were able to infiltrate it with all this stuff was because I didn’t give interviews, no pictures, or nothing like that. I always believed the glory belongs to God, man. You might see me one way, but that’s the truth, that’s where it belongs to. If it wasn’t for Him, I wouldn’t be here. And I know what He’s leading me to. I’m not a pious man, a religious guy, I’m not like that, I don’t even know why I’m chosen for this thing. I know something’s happening. My artwork falls in line with construction and design. I’m fucking great at that. And I knew when I started doing all that stuff that it wasn’t meant for me to make a bunch of money for myself, it was a calling to me. That’s where I’m following. Kind of weird, huh?

DAVILA: Yeah. So, I’m interested in hearing about what inspired you to open it back up again, and what you hope to accomplish.

SUQUETTE: Like I said before, I’m not a religious man, I’m not crazy, and a lot of stuff has happened to me, dreams, and so on and so forth, even before the Vex happened I had these dreams of something happening, a lot of déjà vu, and stuff like that. And I’m pretty much on a path. It’s very unusual, because it’s kind of mind-blowing even to me, I just didn’t realize that something like this would be happening to me. When I came here, all these shows started happening. I need to do bands, shows because it supports the

building. I'm getting my 501, and I need to support the building until I start getting funded. And a lot of the shows that I'm gonna be doing are gonna be basically shows that I've done in the past, but most of them are gonna be done with artwork and working with the community, the children here. There's a great need for a space like this for kids that are out there in El Sereno. Self-Help Graphics is in East L.A., Boyle Heights. Plaza de la Raza is over there in Lincoln Heights. There's nothing here in El Sereno. And I'm here for that reason, and that reason alone. It happened that way because this happened that way.

DAVILA: Are you from El Sereno originally, then?

SUQUETTE: City Terrace.

DAVILA: City Terrace? Okay, yeah. And that's just right over there, right?

SUQUETTE: Yeah.

DAVILA: I think it's really important that the Vex continues to be talked about because in the sense that, I guess my motivation for doing this project is that I think that people don't recognize how much of an involvement Chicanos have always had with punk. Which I think parallels the way that people don't tend to recognize a lot of the ways that we contribute to American culture. And so I feel like the way that people have written about the Vex so far—and when I say the Vex, I mean the events that were happening at Self-Help Graphics because that is mostly what people write about—it seems like people write about it in this way that says here's this moment of a few years where Chicanos were involved with punk, and then that kind of passed. Which I don't think is true...

SUQUETTE: Well, see, the thing is when the Vex closed, even the bands will tell you, the golden bridge that I created to Hollywood went down, too. Even with the artists. I ran into some artists a couple of years ago, and I asked them, "How's your career going?" He goes, "Well, it never did anything." I go, "Why?" He goes, "Well, nobody ever gave us a chance." Well, nobody's ever going to give anybody a chance. You gotta make your own. You gotta open up your own doors. You gotta make your own thing.

One thing about the Vex, when everybody talks about it now, is that the Vex started the L.A. art scene. I started the L.A. art scene by bringing down the media and exposing all

these fantastic artists that were coming out of Self-Help Graphics. Sister Karen is a queen. She was blessed. There was one article where Jesse Velo from Los Illegals said when they were running with the name of the Vex, that they got their blessing from Darby Crash, the Vex got the blessing from Darby Crash. The Vex never got no blessing from Darby Crash, the Vex got the blessing from Sister Karen, as far as I'm concerned. She allowed me to do this thing there, even though the Vex was already running and kicking ass, her blessing because of who she was, it was inspirational, because she just was an amazing lady. I didn't know her that well, but when I spoke with her she had this smile on her face, and she listened to everything I said, and she goes, "Okay." She believed it. "Go for it, let's see what you do." And that's what I did. I took it further than that, and it is what it is.

DAVILA: Well, those was all the questions I had. Is there any final statement that you want to make about anything? About the history of the Vex, about the history of punk in East L.A.?

SUQUETTE: Well, music, like everything else right now, it's unfortunate that it isn't being played enough. Industry has pretty much taken over all the music that you listen to, it's programmed into you to listen to it because there's nothing else being piped out. You have all the oldies stations that play the same old rock 'n' roll from back in the '70s, and so on and so forth. You get bands from the '90s, which, great, everything was fantastic, but the truth of the matter is that other than what you hear on the radio, or more through Internet is kind of helping that, but there's no real big scene, or big enough radio companies to push the new music that's out. And very honestly, there'll never probably be until something really happens. People always ask me, when I'm back now, "Where do you see music going to? What's going to happen now? What new scene is going to come up?" Hell, I don't know. I don't have a magic ball. I know what I know, and I know what I can do, and it's just basically tapping into that right source that'll kind of put it altogether. Back in the '80s you had KROQ, you had all these stations, these certain DJs, like Rodney on the Roq, that would play new wave and punk rock and stuff like that, that helped support that scene, and right now there is no scene because nobody's helping it, supporting it.

The kids that were the grandkids come to the Vex now. "Oh, my grandfather used to

come here. My dad used to come here.” And you hear a lot of that, you see a lot of that. And it’s still amazing that even some of the—well, it’s not amazing, it’s fantastic—that some of these bands are still playing, and when I see the guys I recognize them. I don’t remember hardly any of the fans. I went to a couple places, picnics, and so on and so forth, where the fans were there, and they recognized me, I felt bad because I didn’t recognize them because I didn’t really correspond with them. I corresponded with the bands. As a matter of fact, this thing with Jimmy Alvarado, they did a video—and he wasn’t honest about telling me what it was for, or else I wouldn’t have done it. And after the interview, his cameraman came up to me, I was sitting inside this house that was the guitar player from Thee Undertakers, and I was sitting there, and these guys come and ask me, they go, “What’s so special about you?” And I go, “Nothing’s special about me, why do you ask?” And he goes, “Well, it’s like this. We go interview bands, and normally,” they said, “the promoter does a show, makes some money, pays the bands, and he’s gone.” I go, “And?” He goes, “The thing about you is that we start interviewing the bands, and they start talking about you. So what’s so special about you?” And I said, “Nothing. But if you want to know, you should ask them, what are you asking me for?” And it’s like that. I had a great friendship with all the musicians, and I still do. I talk to them like their brothers. We bonded back in the day, and now when I speak to them still, it’s like total respect, total admiration, happy to see that their doing great things. And it’s like that, and I’m blessed. I’m blessed to be that way.

Unfortunately, when I’m doing these shows, honestly, you could ask me, “What was your favorite show?” I have no idea. I have no idea what the bands sound like. I was always working my ass off. Seriously, I have no idea what the bands were like. Show comes, I’m in the corner someplace waiting for the bands to stop playing because now you got to worry about the crowds and shit. So it was always like that with me, and it kinda continues, but now I got more people involved that are running the place here that I can trust, so I have more time to sit back and enjoy the bands and the music that’s going on. So, I got some, now here at the Vex, I have some amazing curators. It’s run by Omar Holguin and Steve Gates. I have a great staff with Morgan Picard, who is big in her own way in jazz, and in fashion, she’s monumental, she’s a big inspiration to a lot of the kids here, and in East L.A., because of who she is and what she did. And we have a great staff

of people that are coming through here now, and we just brought in JoJo Sanchez and Julie, I can't remember her last name, but they're great, they're very tied in with the juvenile halls and foster homes and some of the battered women shelters. And when we came into path, which was just not too long ago, that was my calling, to start that project, and when I told them about it, they were just floored because this is what they've been looking for, too. How did we meet, how did this become what it is? And like I said, it's all because of something that's been laid out in front of me, and the Vex was the catapult for it. This is not where it's at, it's where it's gonna end at that's what's important. To me, I think I got a good maybe fifteen, twenty years left, and I got a very short time, because time goes by so fast that eventually everything that comes out of this thing is going to be amazing. Everybody is going to realize how fantastic things are going to be out of this place here. Like I said, I'm already looking at other venues in San Diego, and in Orange County, to open up, and I'll have one pretty much, hopefully, in every city in the United States. That's what I want.

Second Interview with Todd Taylor
Los Angeles, CA, 8/15/2013

DAVILA: I can't remember exactly how you were saying it the other day, but we were talking about how you thought Scion Chicano punk exhibit could impact the neighborhood kind of negatively?

TAYLOR: Yeah, definitely. Any time that there's going to be a lot of money promised, of course people are going to try hold out for that money. So if you're working on a project, we're a cultural project, we say "We can't pay you, but we'll include you in this project, like a layout for an interview, we'll give you as many issues as you want of it when it's done, you get credit, if you have a web presence, we'll put your URL on there. But we can't pay you. And you still retain exclusive rights to your photographs, we just want to use them for this." And if someone at a large corporation's promising them hundreds of dollars per photograph, of course they're not going to give them to us to use as kind of like a fair use. And when Scion came through, for a fact, one of the photographers held out, and then they pulled the plug, and then he wanted to be involved in the project. And nothing offensive to him, is that the project was almost finished, and to pull all the photographs of the people that had actually turned in for his photographs is not nice. It's not a good way to go about it, we've already told these other people, "Yes, we're using your photographs." So it's like we can't compete with the financial capital of that, and we won't.

DAVILA: And do you find anything disingenuous about what they're doing by trying to stamp their name on the history of East L.A. punk?

TAYLOR: Absolutely. What have they provided? They're not giving anybody a car outright, and it's a car company, it's a car company that's a subsidiary of Toyota. Toyota is a corporation, it's not a person. It's not going to give back to the individual people that are putting into a musical scene, a cultural scene. They're just using an influx of cash with the hope that we're talking about them now, that they become culturally significant, and that maybe down the road someone buys one of their cars, their brand new cars. And if somebody—I'm assuming how much their cars cost, I'll just say \$15,000 to \$20,000—if I was given \$15,000 to \$20,000, the last thing I'm going to do is buy a new car, and I

think a lot of the people in this neighborhood feel the same way. So it seems very disingenuous to me.

DAVILA: And do you think that that's also true of the Vans documentary that's trying to be made?

TAYLOR: I actually even take offense to it being called a documentary. Because it's a shoe company. It's coming from a place of commerce, that's what it is, it's a shoe company. And as far as I know, they're not showing up with four hundred pairs of shoes to give everybody shoes. Because I have no problem with them as a shoe company, making shoes and people like their shoes. That's fine, that's not at issue. It's Vans doesn't make music. Vans will try to run some metrics and say, "Okay, we can get some sort of cultural capital out of this area," and it's pennies on the dollar to them. They get the images, maybe the music, they get the energy, they tap into something that they believe that they can make a lot of money out of. Otherwise they wouldn't do it. They're a corporation, it's not people, it's stakeholders, and it's boards, it's not actual people trying to figure out or make something that has some real significance in the community. It just happens to be in Boyle Heights. That's it.

DAVILA: So you think that they're looking at this community as a community where they could eventually hope to make money? This is a market to them?

TAYLOR: Oh, this is definitely a market, yes. And it's funny, too, because a lot of people already wear their shoes. I think it's just the deeper branding, or also the familiarity, "Oh, Vans are cool," not just as shoes to put on your feet, but as a company. All those things. I think it's almost making the corporation your cultural provider because they can kind of do a bait-and-switch where it's not even bands from this area, and the next time Vans presents, and they have people that are manufactured play the Vans thing, and it just happens to be in East L.A. There's a lot of options, and none of them are good. I can't name one time where a corporation came in and actually was part of a community prior to harvesting. And it's not a documentary. In the purest sense they are propagating an image of their shoe. It's propaganda for commerce.

DAVILA: Do you think that there's any value in the sense that—in either case, Scion or Vans—that with Scion some of the older East L.A. bands are getting a little more recognition, or with the younger bands, the current bands, with Vans, that they're getting their name out there, and that maybe there might be some more opportunity for them later?

TAYLOR: Well, two things. One, and it's the sad one, is that if DIY and DIT—doing it together—culture was stronger, and could support these bands, and financially support them, and emotionally and creatively support them, people wouldn't even be entertaining this. So a part of it is a failure, and that's something to work towards. The other part is that, I wish they would stop trying to bait people with recognition, and you know what, just pay them. And have it above board, you know? “Your band, we're gonna pay your band \$10,000 to do this.” And it's always really hazy and really shady if you try to get into the nuts and bolts with anybody about this. I think recognition is a losing currency, also. So people like your song for a week or two weeks. Or do you want to be a band for years and years? Or do you want to be a musician, creating things for a generation? And that's what the legacy is because we know about bands like the Brat, and Los Illegals, and Butt Acne. Because they actually put music out, and people still want to listen to it. That's the important part. It's not because they played a battle of the bands, it's not because they were showcased by hair products or bubble gum. Those are the things you're going to remember them by, and to have them kind of like have these other insinuations in there is pretty offensive to me. Yeah, it's great to get paid. It really is. But there's better ways to do it. And there's way that, these methods of control, if you can control the whole thing yourself, or with a group of people, you get so much in return. Besides financially, creatively, those things, you get to learn how to make these things by yourself. Because otherwise, again, they pull the plug. They're gone. So you're leaning on Vans, and Vans disappears. Again, it's not a person. They're ghosts, and now what do you do?

DAVILA: To go back to Scion and their kind of contribution to bringing recognition, making people aware of the history of punk in East L.A., do you think that they play an important role there, or that they could? Or does it feel in some way like they are just kind of piggybacking on the work of other people? Or maybe something in between?

TAYLOR: Oh, I think they're total carpetbaggers. I'll be really honest about that. Scion is smart enough where Christian rock wasn't smart enough. There's no such thing as a band that Scion has made, and brings them out there. They harvest what's already working, and try to expand people's awareness of that. And to me that's offensive. And I understand why certain bands do it. So if a band like the Spits, they can play a show in their hometown, and Scion says, "Here's \$3,000, it's a free show for everybody to show up, there'll be food trucks there, and you get a hotel room," that's a hard thing to say no to. But it's the branding that's involved with it, too, that I find pretty offensive. They aren't creating anything. Except it's where traditional record labels have failed, that beforehand the trade-off was you would get distribution and some tour support. Now you just get a larger Internet presence, or maybe advertising, that kind of thing. I don't know, I don't know how valuable that is.

DAVILA: So it seems like the only thing that's come out of their interest in East L.A. was two or three Youtube videos that basically tell the same Vex story that has been told over and over again by other people. I don't know if you've seen any.

TAYLOR: No.

DAVILA: But that basically seems to be all it's amounted to. So it seems to me like kind of the same thing, that they've take the work that other people have done, and used that to open themselves up to a certain market. But they don't seem to have done any original research because if they had actually looked into it very closely, they would find out that a lot of the things that they're repeating are not actually all that accurate.

TAYLOR: Right. Yeah, they're not part of East L.A.'s past. And there's a huge possibility, if East L.A. is not as profitable as they need it to be, they're gone tomorrow. With people that are here, it's a group of people, although a lot of them are contentious, not everybody sees the same things at the same time, that's how our culture is, it's kind of messy. Yeah, it's disappointing, and kind of depressing, that a car company—a car company, not even under the pretense of being a music company—has much more impact than hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people who have been working hard for decades. I mean, it's just kind of depressing. And I distrust Scion particularly because of—also because of being a non-profit—how they position everything. I just get the

feeling that it's a huge tax write-off, that if something changes in their quarterlies, that it'll just disappear, there will be no trace of it whatsoever. Because there's no legacy, there's no deep roots, it's all surface.

First Interview with Todd Taylor

Telephone, 11/7/2012

DAVILA: I thought we could probably start just with some of the basics, like where you're from and what got you interested in punk music in the first place.

TAYLOR: My father was an international social worker, which is kind of a weird job. We moved around a lot when I was a kid—we lived in Australia for a while. I was really close to my family and I was also displaced a lot, too. One of the things that left a really big impression on me when I was a kid was when we moved to Australia, my father's job was to make himself obsolete, so he was a superintendent of children's homes. So I grew up surrounded by hundreds and hundreds of kids, a lot of aborigines, and that was my socialization as a kid. Fast forward a little bit: I was in a pretty bad accident when I was a kid and I couldn't do a lot of stuff. I had to just draw and not do much physical stuff. I was ejected through a car window and run over by another car. So I kind of gravitated to punk rock that way, just finding angry music, or finding outlets for that stuff that were cathartic and healthy. So that's how I stumbled into punk rock, and it got definition more and more as time went along.

DAVILA: Over the years, have you participated in the scene in a number of different roles? Have you been in bands, mostly just a fan, or like now, with the magazine, kind of a chronicler or critic of the punk scene?

TAYLOR: Yeah, I would say a defining moment was in 1996 through, again, just a series of unforeseen events. I became a helper at *Flipside* fanzine, which had been going continually since 1977. My special skills were I had an unexpired driver's license and I would show up on time. I worked there for five years and became basically the general manager at the end of it. I'm doing the world a favor, believe me, by not playing music in public, ever. I've been trying to play the ukulele, but that's not going very well. First and foremost, I think I'm a writer, but I've done pretty much everything else in support roles, from graphic design to photography to recording—podcast recording, no fancy music recording—and being a, yeah, chronicler is a good way to put it. I had other part time jobs in '96, but since I started *Razorcake* in 2000, beginning of 2001, I haven't had another full-time job. I've just kind of scrounged shit together.

DAVILA: So are you the founder of *Razorcake*, then?

TAYLOR: I'm technically the co-founder. It was myself and Sean Carswell. He's a long-time friend—we went to college together. Running a national fanzine is way too much work for one person and I knew it, so I didn't want to start it unless I had a partner that could shoulder half of the stuff, and he was great.

DAVILA: So maybe you don't have fancy titles like editor-in-chief or anything like that, but are you still kind of the head guy there?

TAYLOR: Yeah. We became a non-profit in 2005, a 501(c)(3), and through that we kind of had to give ourselves titles. We were tired of telling all the governing bodies we're all directors, because they didn't know how to fill that in to their forms. We kept on getting things rejected and kicked back. So I'm officially the executive director, and Daryl Gussin is the managing editor. Those are the two titles we have that everybody seems to be okay with.

DAVILA: I was also wondering a bit about the mission of the magazine. I know there's a mission statement on the webpage, which I've read, but I was wondering if you could maybe talk a bit more about what it was that made you want to start the magazine, and maybe what made you want to make it a non-profit?

TAYLOR: We feel very, very strongly about a couple of things. There's an integrity in DIY punk that we're not willing to give up. At first it manifested itself in the '80s as "major labels suck." SST did a great campaign about that. But even in the last probably five years with the death of the traditional major music label, and the spawning of all these multi-media enterprises that traditionally didn't deal with music (like car companies heavy-duty and just media companies, period) are completely encroaching, and kind of muddying the waters on punk rock. And we're very, very strong about that. Our thing is that all advertisers are independent, not even just independent labels, but independent recording places, independent resource centers, that type of thing. That's very, very important to us, because that's how I came into punk rock, and that's what we're going to cover. I would say there's only a handful of international analogues to us, and that would be *Maximum Rocknroll* in the States, *Trust* and *Ox* in Germany, but there's not very many at all. And that's where I think we kind of distinguish ourselves from multitudes

and multitudes of other magazines, or even websites, dedicated to music and specifically punk rock. It's a small distinction, but I think it's a really, really important one, and one we're not willing to give up on. Because the other spectrum is, you can kind of quietly, or very secretively or dishonestly, get funding from other sources, and those sources are the sources that have traditionally really harmed music. They've enriched a few people, but harmed music as a whole, and we see it happening right now, it's happening all over again. So that's a big part of it.

And being a non-profit, I think it does a couple things. It, one, ensures people are thinking about, "Hey, I can donate to these guys, or I can help them out in other ways," and they know that I'm not just putting that money in my back pocket and buying a really fancy purple metal flake jet ski. I'm actually working as hard, if not harder than most people around me to keep this stuff going. I think it also clarifies our relationship with a lot of people, too. So, it's nice, it's good, it takes a lot of the question marks out of it.

DAVILA: I was wondering maybe a bit about who your readership is. How many copies of each issue do you publish and are most of your readers in the U.S.? Do you publish internationally?

TAYLOR: We print 6,000 copies of each issue. We are very, very proud to be in Northeast Los Angeles. We have a concerted effort of anywhere that we can, either myself or one of our many volunteers can drive to and drop off issues, and we'll do it for free. So there's record stores, there's community centers, there are punk houses, there are just cool coffee houses in our area that we'll drop off there for free. But we are available internationally. We do our best to administer all our own mail and stuff, so it gets shipped to Italy, Greece, France, Belgium, England, Latvia, Malaysia... In small batches, we're not talking tons and tons of 'em. But a couple hundred pounds worth of zines for every issue will go out that way, and that's been consistent. With traditional magazine distribution, if you're going to get into any store that has more than three or four of the same store, like an Amoeba or whatever, you have to go through different channels and we've completely just walked away from that. So it's all either directly to small regional distributors that we like and they like us, or it's directly to stores or to people, and they do the distribution independently. We're pretty honest with how much everything costs with people and how much it costs to ship, and we try to get it as close to that without going

out of business. It's a sustainable model—it changes all the time because prices change. The post office is gonna raise rates again and change how things are processed, so it's a continual thing. But worthwhile.

DAVILA: And I think I remember seeing on the website that you will give a subscription to public libraries for free?

TAYLOR: Oh yeah. Absolutely. It doesn't even have to be a publicly open library. So if somebody has an independent resource center or anything, we just have to double-check that it's valid, that we're not going to their house and putting it on top of their toilet, because you have to pay for that. But otherwise, yeah, absolutely. We have a long-term, long-standing relationship with tons and tons of libraries. L.A.'s weird because it's so big and very fractured. There's the Los Angeles Public Library and the Los Angeles County Library. We've been in the Los Angeles Public Library for a long time, but we just got picked up by 85 branches of the County Library. We donate to them and then they put them on the stacks. One of our biggest compliments is that our magazine gets stolen tons and tons from the library. But hey, kids are reading. It's good. [Laughs.]

DAVILA: Is that just because you think that the things that are being published in the magazine are things that people should have access to?

TAYLOR: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. I also firmly believe in the power of public access and public libraries, and I also know from first-hand experience how difficult it is for things to keep going and have legs for more than a year, six months, two years, something like that. So I want to be in those places because I really appreciate them, and if we have the financial ability to do it for free, which we do, we're going to do it. It goes back to when I was growing up—I loved libraries. I think libraries *are* a cornerstone to civilized fucking society. I want to be a part of that and if it's just a small thing of us donating the magazine to it, then let's do it. Very intentional.

DAVILA: I want to switch gears and talk more about the East L.A. stuff. You've had all of these articles and interviews about that scene, and I was just wondering if you could talk a bit about what interested you in publishing those?

TAYLOR: Oh yeah. One, the music's awesome, and the amount of creative output here

is incredible. Two, no one was doing it. I mean, I live here—I live in Highland Park—and finding actual, real interviews, or substantive things on any music production out of East L.A., almost seem to end at 1982. Jimmy Alvarado and I would hang out and talk about stuff and that's where a lot of our conversations came from. Jimmy's done the lion's share of it, but it's not just Jimmy. Jenny Moncayo has done stuff. Ryan Leach just did an interview with Kid Congo Powers from El Monte. So I really am proud of where I live. We're not fabricating anything—there's this rich musical heritage that for some reason continually gets overlooked. There really is an east-west divide in Los Angeles, and it happens to this day.

A recent example: *L.A. Weekly*, who is like a weekly freebie in L.A., named the top twenty Los Angeles punk records, and they didn't even follow their own prescription. They started naming bands from Orange County, which is not part of Los Angeles, and only one East L.A. band got on that list. So it's very conspicuous and strange. Oh, hold on, I take that back. Zero East L.A. bands were on that list. One from Inglewood and South Central, but everything else was Hollywood, West Hollywood-type stuff. To this day it happens. I can't even tell why it happens. But I think the music is really important, really exciting, and deserves its due. Jimmy is a force of nature dealing with that stuff, and my main goal with Jimmy is to facilitate him. We've had an on-going relationship since 1996, '97, when we first met, and that has been fantastic.

DAVILA: I guess this is maybe just asking you to speculate and if you don't feel comfortable doing that, that's totally fine. People have talked about this divide between East and West, and there's been a lot of debate about whether or not the fact that the Eastside is largely Mexican American plays into the fact that the Westside tends not to pay attention to the Eastside, or that punk historians haven't really paid much attention to that scene. Do you think that that plays into it at all?

TAYLOR: Yeah, I definitely think that's a factor. I think another factor is just different fucking classes, too. If we're gonna look East and West, we can look at how for a band to be known outside of its region, you have to be of either some resource or it's luck and timing. A lot of the East L.A. bands could only do cassettes. Those cassettes degraded and they're no longer available. Very, very few bands actually released vinyl, and very, very few could tour outside of a very restricted area. So I think those factors definitely

come into play, and I do not discount at all that there is a brown-white divide, either. Also, just being a white guy who lives in East L.A., I understand that if a lot of people have been burned over the years, they think projects didn't go well. The Stains would be a perfect example of that. They signed to SST, which was a really rich, resourceful label, not rich monetarily. But if the Stains actually got their record out when they were still currently an active band and toured on that, there's no doubt in my mind that they would be put in the same bracketed category as Black Flag and Circle Jerks. But you're lucky if you hear them outside of East L.A. And Black Flag's own admission is that they were the better band. They were actually better than MDC, who were called the Stains, and they saw the Stains and said, "Well, we're not as good as that, you guys can keep the name," and changed their name to MDC. So yeah, that is definitely one of the main factors, absolutely. I'm gonna say it's racist, sure.

DAVILA: I know there's been a lot of debate and Brendan Mullen had this very public feud with Willie from Los Illegals over it. I don't necessarily think that any one definitive answer can ever be reached, especially by me, someone who's not from the region, but...

TAYLOR: Right. Oh, absolutely. But if you just look at the cultural accumulation, the bracketing of what would be considered important versus not important, just the amount of material that is available today, years later, even digitally, for some reason it's completely favoring the West over the East. And I don't think that it's a quality thing. "Oh, it's just not as good music, we don't need to pay attention to it." That doesn't fly with me at all. So, yeah, it's tough. Because also, when you come from an area, say if you're in Santa Monica or Hollywood, and you're very progressive, that shouldn't be a slight on you. And there's also always case-by-case basis, which is happening all the time, because the other part of this is that a lot of punk rockers are fuck-ups. A lot of punk rockers don't do what they say they're gonna do or a lot of other factors come into it. Dysfunctional families, drug addictions, and all that stuff, so throw that into the pot, too.

DAVILA: On that note, you were talking earlier about your commitment and the magazine's commitment to a DIY ethos. A lot of times, people talk about DIY as being a conscious rejection of the major label system, or of capitalism altogether. But I was

wondering if you think sometimes it might also work the other way. Does DIY maybe become more of a necessity for people who the major labels aren't really paying attention to? For instance, in East L.A., which is perhaps economically or racially marginalized, do you think DIY has a different importance, or does it function in a different way?

TAYLOR: Hmm. That's a good question. All right, I can give you some personal anecdotes.

DAVILA: Sure.

TAYLOR: So through the years, I've been shoulder-to-shoulder with bands that have been given a lot of opportunity that... It pains me because DIY, for a lot of people, if you like it or not, is a stepping-stone. It's the first spot to go into. And some people really, really believe it and will see it through to the end. It's a lot different saying, "Oh, I'm a DIY band," and no one's offering you anything, or no one's giving you any difficult decisions. I can't name the name of the band right now because it's happening, but one of the bands that *Razorcake* has put out, one of the band members is signing to a major (for another band, not a *Razorcake* band). But it's such an important divide for us that I think the band that we put out's gonna break up because of it. I think that we're going to really, really distance ourselves from them on an ideological way. I mean, he's still our friend, but he's stepping into a really shitty world. A shitty world where I don't believe that he understands what contract he's signing. He's justifying it by saying that, "Oh, it's a subsidiary of a major." It's a major, brother.

So our point of view is not only day-to-day necessity, it's a looking-ten-years-down-the-road necessity. The only way that certain things can exist in this world is by not taking that path. I've seen it firsthand, that destruction, happen over and over and over again. And this other thing that people don't talk about it is that people who become "successful" in those organizations, form an amnesia to the people that helped them to that point. So many successful bands that have been covered in *Flipside* and in *Razorcake*, when asked, "Hey, would you be interested in donating, and this money goes to supporting the framework that you were part of ten years ago?", fucking tumbling tumbleweeds. Nothing. I'm not gonna bash anybody in particular, but we have done a good amount of work for outreach for people that we knew personally who have become very popular not only in punk rock, but in graphic design or something like that, and they

want nothing to do with us, when all we've done in the past is give them a fair shot like everybody else, gave them a really good interview, reviewed them very honestly, that kind of thing.

So yeah, I think it's a necessity. I think it's a protective measure. Also, it's a lot more fun if you can grow something organically in your own neighborhood. And if it grows bigger, you already have that infrastructure, you understand how it works, you understand when someone is bullshitting you, you understand the difference between, "Hey, this person's paying me less, but when I show up, they pay me in cash," as opposed to, "They promised to pay me more, but then they dinged me on the contract, and I actually don't get half as much as I thought I would, but I'm indebted to these people forever." So yeah, it's weird. I think it is a huge necessity, but it's a hard one because people are so conditioned for, I wouldn't say instant rewards, but rewards that they can see, instead of a long-term dedication to something. It's a hard sell, I understand that. We're working out of a basement after eleven years, so there's not a lot to bling up, to show people. Materially.

DAVILA: Something that Jimmy has been critical of is the fact that when Eastside bands do come up, there are just four or five names that are always repeated over and over again. People always talk about the Vex, but don't really talk about other things that are going on, like the backyard scene. So I was just wondering if you had any comment on that. Do you see this as a problem, that only a few bands get mentioned? Why do you think it might be the case that only these bands get talked about?

TAYLOR: That's a great question, but my answer is, I took that to heart, because Jimmy's not incorrect at all on that. From a perspective if you're not from this neighborhood and you're coming into it kind of blind, even as a scholar or as a researcher, the available stuff, the digital stuff that's available, there's not a lot of it. And also trying to track down the zines or the actual—not to sound like Antique Roadshow—but the provenance, or the actual artifacts of that time are just increasingly scarce. I don't know if it's rare, but it's scarce, it's hard to find. So of course people are going to latch on, to show some sort of working knowledge of something. You're going to pick things that are the most available. The Vex bands that get mentioned, and those four or five bands Jimmy that mentioned have gotten the most press. If you're one of those bands that

don't get the respect or the recognition that you rightly deserve, you're going to keep it. You're going to keep on promoting and talking to those people. There's that connection between the Vex and Asco, and Asco's been able to get some more traction through the museum system in California, and that's fantastic.

My hope, especially with *Razorcake* and through example, is showing the depth and breadth of that. I think fanzines are in a really unique position because I don't give a fuck how long those interviews are, I just want them to be done. I want them to be great. Like that Stains one—we dedicated forty pages to it over two issues. We spent a lot of time to find photographs, to get photographs, to talk to people, to make sure that we have the attributes correct, because even trying to say “who is this for sure?” in this photograph, it's amazing how much body types change over years. Going through three or four people, and not knowing, that's a lot of work, and the pay at the end of the day that Jimmy and I get is zero. So what's the incentive? For me the incentive is to know this stuff—it's really culturally important to me. Other people, I don't know. What's in it for them? Because if you spend this time and energy on someone more famous, then you may get recognition from your peers, or from other people, or whatever the end result is. So I don't think there's anything in it for people, to tell you the truth. Unless you're completely engaged in it, there's not a lot of cultural cache. I don't know how it's gonna change or if it's gonna morph over the years. I'll keep my fingers crossed. I'm very critical of *Razorcake* as a whole because I want always to be better, and it's a very active process. But I'm very proud of what we've been able to do so far, the amount of stuff we've been able to accumulate, stories we're sharing, stuff like that. And I'm really looking forward to Jimmy's movie, too. I think that's going to edify some things.

DAVILA: Is there an expectation for when that might come out, or...

TAYLOR: [Laughs.] Never ask that question.

DAVILA: Yeah, fair enough.

TAYLOR: I do the same thing. There's never a pre-release for anything. He'll tell you when it's out. It's jinx, after jinx, after jinx. It's like, “Oh yeah, I've gotta do that thing.” But I know he's been working on it really faithfully. And again, Jimmy has a full-time

job. It's tough. We would love to just be able to work on this stuff full-time, all the time, but it's just not there.

DAVILA: I ask more out of personal interest because as much as I'm interested in studying all of this, my interest in studying it comes from being a fan, so...

TAYLOR: Oh, yeah.

DAVILA: So I just want to see it because I want to see it.

TAYLOR: Right, right. Did he tell you the story that he did a small, shortened video for Claremont, the female punk rock Vexing exhibit? He made a little DVD and it got stolen.

DAVILA: Oh, no.

TAYLOR: And then it got posted on Youtube and they cut his name off the end of it.

DAVILA: Is that the trailer, the one-minute clip?

TAYLOR: Yeah, yeah.

DAVILA: Oh, okay.

TAYLOR: But they cut his name off the end of it.

DAVILA: Oh, no, that's terrible.

TAYLOR: You're like, "You fuckin' cock." Yeah. So that would be an encapsulation, a really quick encapsulation of East L.A. for you. Someone did a lot of hard work and somebody else wants it, but doesn't have the access, doesn't have the capability, doesn't know the context of it. It's kinda like someone being a Columbus ship, just being an explorer. You're stumbling onto something and you call them by the wrong name or whatever, and then you say, "Oh, I found it this way." I do feel that way, that a lot of the stuff that Jimmy has brought forth is being appropriated by other people. And you have been awesome. I'm gonna put that on record.

DAVILA: Oh, thank you.

TAYLOR: Because, as I said in our first email, I'm cagey because we've been harvested before, and I'm just tired of it, because none of this is easy. None of it is just push a golden button and it's done. I mean, that Stains interview was five years in the making. I

help Jimmy with the transcription of some of these things, we do editing backward and forth a lot—it's just not something slapdash and put together. We're pretty uninterested in moving units—we're pretty interested in telling good stories.

DAVILA: Yeah. So that video, I found it on Youtube, and it links back to a Myspace page called Secret Symbol or something. Is that actually Jimmy, or is that the person who...

TAYLOR: Yeah, that would be Jimmy. Okay, so that worked... I knew it may have figured out who did it and got it back to him. Yeah, that's Jimmy. There's a couple other people involved with Secret Symbol, too, I don't know their names right off the bat. So, as I said before, maybe it's a privilege to not think that I'm skin-conscious, and going back to the very beginning, I grew up around kids of seriously tons and tons of different ethnicities. So when I was growing up, race really didn't enter my mind. I was surrounded by all these different cultures and also a bunch of kids that were neglected or their parents couldn't provide for them, so they were in the foster system. Moving to East L.A., I feel an affinity to class, mostly. I get really, really anxious and I'm not a happy camper around a lot of conspicuous consumption or rich people. It's a sliding scale, but I just feel much more comfortable in working-class, diverse neighborhoods. I'm a white minority here, but I don't even consider that because it's secondary. I'm very, very conscientious. Doing stuff with Jimmy is a conscientious chronicling of East L.A. I don't want to be an interloper. I want to be a conscious member of the neighborhood and the community, and be able to build on that, too. So, I'm more than happy and willing and gracious about being support for Jimmy in a lot of times, or being a co-interviewer. Jimmy and I both interviewed Mike Vallejo of Circle One together, Jimmy interviewed the Brat several times and one time I got to sit in on it and talk to them at the same time. Also just being a very involved editor of this. I think that Jimmy and I, and a lot of our contributors, work really well together to not be bitter about certain things. And to skirt a lot of the long-term fractions within East L.A. music. Saying if we publish something, you have to understand that these are people's opinions, and we're not egging them on to say bad things about you, but we're giving you a place to engage in those things. I'm in a unique position and I want to keep on doing these things, because I think they're very, very important. And it's a product of our neighborhood—it's pretty intentional that

we're here. We could, hypothetically, move anywhere in the United States, but I have no intention of leaving this place. So, it's good, I like it. I keep a very low profile as a person—I'm a very private person—but when we sit down and we start these processes, I find that it's easier and easier now, because people talk amongst themselves and they go, "Oh, these guys are gonna treat you fairly. You may have disagreements or whatever in the background, but it's worthwhile." So that's good, we're opening these long-term gates and stuff, so it's cool.

DAVILA: Yeah. So, in a sense then, you might say that, you're not trying to stamp your name onto the Eastside punk history, but you are, through the magazine, trying to open up a space where this history that isn't normally told can be?

TAYLOR: Absolutely, absolutely. One thing that we've been told over and over again is that we're horrible at branding. I understand sometimes they've taken it as a slight to us, but at the same time I'm really happy that we're just creating a space. We don't have a center or anything like that, but a mental, philosophical, historical space that no other fanzine has done over a long period of time in a concerted effort. We didn't push anybody else out of the way. Anybody that comes to us with a good story about East L.A., or East L.A.-contingent... We've got the Kid Congo Powers interview in the next issue and I told Ryan, "Ryan, have him talk about El Monte, growing up there," because it's important that we set the geography down. People are proud of their towns and we just want to make sure that it comes up, because it's a lot more frequent than people think. We don't want to have it as a mark of shame, or a mark of indifference, we want to show a pride in that. And it makes no difference to me if *Razorcake*'s on the banner. I just want to be listed in the credits, you know. That's what it is. Me as myself, as Todd Taylor, unimportant to this whole thing, conceptually. I like putting in the hard work. I don't want to control the large picture of it, because it's a collection of so many people working simultaneously.

DAVILA: When you talk about wanting to expose people to this East L.A. music, is that partly because that's where you're located? For instance, if you were somewhere else, would you still want the magazine to be a space for whatever group, whether it be a class, or a racial group, or women, or queer people – would you still want the magazine to be a

space for those voices that aren't heard other places to be heard?

TAYLOR: Yeah. I mean, first answer, yes, absolutely. Second answer, as long as it didn't suck. I think some things some people try to convince themselves that it's good, and it's just not good. If they believe in the quality of it, that's great. If I went into something and go, "Oh, I'm really happy that you're x, y, or z," if you're marginalized by race, culture, creed, sexual orientation, any of that stuff, that's great. But if what you're making I don't find valuable, or enriching and valuable in a cultural way, I wouldn't do it. I'm really, really energized by the music that has been made here, and is being made here, and I'll be 100% honest with you: my personal blind spots is going to a backyard party as of today, by myself. I think a lot of that is just self-consciousness, too. I'm gonna walk into a place that nobody knows me, and I'm an interloper in that situation. Also, East L.A.'s such a diverse place and there's so many things going on. There is danger and there is potential for a lot of really great things and really bad things to happen. It's an extremely interesting place to be. There's always new stuff to find out, so that's cool. Again, and that's not a slight on any other place, but I've lived in other places that were just much more limited, geographically. You only had a certain amount of people in a town, they'll go to a punk show three times, and then good luck getting them there back for another year, that type of thing. We're definitely not forcing anything and we're 100% not fabricating anything.

DAVILA: Do you think that maybe has something to do with the nature of the place? Like in other cities where lots of things are happening all the time, maybe people are sometimes more indifferent because they know it'll always be there for them if they decide they want to become interested, whereas...

TAYLOR: Yeah.

DAVILA: You know, maybe in a place like that there isn't as... there's more of an effort made to make sure that things are going on?

TAYLOR: Yeah, I would say so. I also say that there are definite advantages to being in smaller places. I mean, one of the hugest Achilles heels for Los Angeles and East L.A. is that having a really viable all-ages, well-run, venue or space is incredibly, incredibly difficult. They get shut down all the time. The ones that do exist, one of their first modes,

one of their first things to do is cut out punk rock, just because there's always that element of some dingdong's gonna come along and spray paint something, or kick in a toilet, or piss off a neighbor, or break some glasses, or whatever.

DAVILA: Right.

TAYLOR: But, in smaller towns, and this is from experience, if you are organized and do a good job, you can have a really great scene that's not containment, but everybody knows everybody else. There's a lot higher level of respect or acknowledgement. Like, "Oh, great, this will be a fun show." Good friends of ours who are in Pomona, which is thirty miles east of us, have a great warehouse. And they've had to move once, but they throw shows all the time, have a really great community surrounding them, have a lot of support, that type of thing. That's one thing that I think is very difficult in a town, and it might be specific to Los Angeles, because rent's so high, complaints are so high, cops can come in at any time. I know that there's a group of kids right now, maybe early twenties or so, trying to open up a space, but they don't have their permits. I encourage that, but at the same time, that's not gonna last. It's so stacked against them. And I've seen it happen in Long Beach, too—when the cops come in, they sue every single person who runs it, not just the place. It's got its pluses and minuses for sure. But I think that people in smaller areas really look at your benefits and excel on the things you can do. Portland, Oregon has a great zine community. Olympia, Washington has a fantastic DIY punk community, a very active one that travels across the world. So it's definitely doable, possible, and an achievable goal, definitely.

Interview with Angeles “Angee” Zavala

Los Angeles, CA, 8/13/13

DAVILA: The first question is where are you from originally?

ZAVALA: I was born in South Central, Los Angeles.

DAVILA: Have you lived there basically your whole life, then?

ZAVALA: No, I lived there ‘til I was three, and then we moved into Huntington Park.

DAVILA: Oh, so that’s not actually in South Central, it’s just sort of near there?

ZAVALA: Yeah. So Huntington Park is in Southeast L.A., South Central would be south.

DAVILA: Right, okay. And how did you first get interested in punk?

ZAVALA: It was because my brother was dating his girlfriend—I didn’t have any sisters, so it’s just me and my two older brothers, and I kind of didn’t have another female to look up to. And you’re kind of at that age where you’re growing out of your whole pop stage, or whatever the hell. And so then I was growing up, I was feeling different things, and I was noticing that she was into punk, and I really liked it. And she showed me different bands. I remember the first thing that she showed me to was there were these Punk-O-Rama compilations. So she had those, and she had all these different CDs, and so then my brother was a little bit against it because he’s like, “I don’t know if I want you to end up being a punk rocker, I don’t know if I want that for you.” But then I just kind of listened to that, and there was no social networks then, so it was basically like, “Oh, cool, I want to go and find a file,” and then that file kind of has other files in it, so then I started listening to other music. And then what kind of blew my mind was the first thing I listened to was, my brother, he would play video games. So I remember they had the Misfits on there. I think it was the Tony Hawk one or something?

DAVILA: Yeah, probably.

ZAVALA: Yeah. And then just kind of looking through I found Bikini Kill, and that to me was like, “What the fuck?” There’s this girl, and she’s in her underwear, and she just doesn’t give a fuck. And I just kind of really connected to, I guess, feeling that way. So yeah, that’s kind of when I first... And I think I was probably around twelve, thirteen,

when I started really listening and wanting to just know more about it. And then once I found Bikini Kill, I remember I would look up websites, like, “Oh, girls in punk bands,” and then I came across all these other fucking badass women.

DAVILA: Yeah. So what do you think attracted you specifically to women in punk from that early age?

ZAVALA: I just feel like, I don’t know, I think that the fact that you could be very open and not be like... Okay, I feel like with pop music, women are a lot, I guess the openness is very different, it’s very romantic, it’s very like, “I need a man,” and love, and I don’t enjoy that music now. But it wasn’t something that I identified with, so listening to Bikini Kill, and L7, and then the Brat, and just these different female punk bands, I felt like I could identify to what they were feeling because I wasn’t that type of girl, if that makes sense. It was very, very liberating for me to just be able to say “fuck you,” and still feel like I’m still a woman.

DAVILA: Did you feel like growing up there were constrictive gender roles and expectations in your school or neighborhood?

ZAVALA: I think definitely. Being a Chicana there is that whole at-home thing where... My mom was actually, her thing was, “Angeles is not going to be cooking for you, she’s not going to be serving you,” but there still was that slight thing of “you should look at me clean because it’ll come in handy.” Or there was definitely, because I have two brothers, with me it was a little bit odd for them that I was a bit more aggressive than they were. So that was just a general that I, even now, that my mom still kind of like—because she understands what I do and she loves it--but she still kind of has a little bit of, “That’s not so ladylike.” I think in school, society, you see a lot of what women are kind of told to be, like you shouldn’t be that mad, or you shouldn’t say so much. And that’s another reason why I love punk rock so much, because you’re able to say so many things, and you could be as loud as you want.

DAVILA: So what would you say that it means to you, like how would you define punk?

ZAVALA: Punk? For me, punk, for one it’s the music, the sound. I love punk, it makes me move, it’s just something that I own it. I feel that it’s my scene, I feel comfortable in

it, it's just, I don't know. To me it's just being able to be open. And being able to dance, and being able to let go of whatever, like whatever is expected of me. That's what punk rock is to me. I wouldn't know how to say what punk rock means, or a definition, but I just know what it means to me, and that's what it means. It's something that I can always come back to, even if I do do other things, that's just home to me. That's what I identify with, that's what I grew up with, and that's a lot of me growing up, and just healing in a way.

DAVILA: Yeah, I think that's what useful about it for a lot of people is that it, I mean, you can sit around all day and try to define it very narrowly, but it means something different to everybody. So, I don't know, everybody can kind of take what they need from it in a certain way, which is cool. So, when did you first start to want to be in a band?

ZAVALA: I wanted to be in a band when I was like ten. I've always wanted to perform. I would always read books because I just had brothers, and they didn't want to play with me, and I just started reading a lot, and I just loved reading. And I started writing little poems here and there, so then I thought, "Oh, I want to be able to use this." And I remember, I forgot what it was that I saw, I don't even know, I think it was like a picture of, I don't know, I think my mom was talking about something, like Josie and the Pussycats, something like that, and I just thought, "Oh, that's cute." So then my mom, when I was twelve, she bought me a microphone for Christmas, and my dad bought me a guitar. I still have the guitar, it's a Gibson Epiphone. So he got me that guitar, and then I was like, "I want to be in a band," and the opportunity just never came up until I got older. But that's when I wanted to be in a band.

DAVILA: Did you take lessons for the guitar or for singing?

ZAVALA: Well, for singing, I've always been into writing, I love writing, I enjoy writing for Destruye, I love writing. It just comes really easy to me, making a melody, making lyrics. With guitar, I don't think I'm a good guitar player. I was in another band, too, the Sexes, and we only played like three or four shows. One of them was with Destruye y Huye. But yeah, it's really shitty, but we were playing really fast music, so I remember it sounded like I knew what I was doing, but not really.

DAVILA: Fair enough. So you don't play in Destruye y Huye, you just sing, right?

ZAVALA: Mhmm.

DAVILA: So when did Destruye y Huye first form, and how did you come together?

ZAVALA: So, okay, Destruye y Huye, we formed, I want to say 2010. And how did it form? We all kind of knew each other. In our communities you kind of already know the punks, that just fuckin' happens. So, the guitarist, Scarlet, I had seen her, we kind of would see each other a lot, she was a lot younger at the time, but we would all just kick it. We knew of each other. When we got older we kind of talked more. So she's the guitar player. Martha, through Youth for Environmental Justice, which is where I work for now, I had a lot of homies in that youth group, and they did a lot of dope shit. They threw on shows, too. And I met Martha through there, so that's how I met Martha. And then Kat, I knew her because, you know, school. So we would go to shows, and we would see each other, and we would kind of mention like, "Damn, we want an all-girl band." There was all-girl bands at the time, but specifically with our group around that time there wasn't really something like that. So we definitely knew we were on the same page. So we would see each other, we would talk, like, "Oh, let's do it, let's do it." And then eventually we all came together, and we just started practicing. And we had nothing, we had a little *cina* that was tiny, I had my mic, we had no equipment, all we had was my mic and that little *cina*. And we would try and practice at least to make lyrics or something, so we would still get together, but Kat would make a beat with pens and paper. We really wanted to have a band. So that's how it started. And we would try to find a place to practice, even though we were just going to be in a room, but then... So yeah, that's how it started.

DAVILA: So it was always the idea to form a band that was all women?

ZAVALA: Mhmm.

DAVILA: So your previous band, you said it was the Sexes?

ZAVALA: Mhmm.

DAVILA: Was that also?

ZAVALA: No, it was... I played guitar, my friend Lori did vocals, my friend Manuel

was on drums, and the bass player, it went through a lot of different changes, so... Oh, our friend Daniel was guitar. The bass player went through different changes, at first it was our friend Stephanie, then our friend... I kind of don't remember. But yeah. There was women in the band.

DAVILA: Okay. So along those lines, do you ever feel that you run into problems, or that you get any kind of crap from people for being all women in the band?

ZAVALA: I think that crap that we do get... I have a lot of women, *mujeres*, that are my girls that are in bands, and they've spoken about having really shitty experiences. I think for me, what would be a crappy experience is just kind of being the front person, and it's kind of tokenized, like, "Oh, there's this all-girl band." I've never really been approached and been told, like, "Oh, you guys are good for girls," or anything. I think the shitty part about it is that you have to realize that at some point people are looking at you, they're not really trying to listen to what you say. I think that would be, for me, the downside.

It's just kind of like, "Ooo, you cute," and that type of thing is what I would say is shitty. But I think that it kind of encourages me more to kind of challenge those things.

What else? What crap do we get? I think one thing, too, is people always want to pin all-girl bands with each other, that really fuckin' bothers me. I think people are always constantly trying to compare, or been like, "Oh, this up-and-coming band," or this one, people try to compare them. Or even that whole subject of women with each other. I've been pretty fortunate that we've played with awesome women, but there has been some moments, I don't know if it's animosity or whatever, but I do feel that those can go along with I think the issues that I've noticed.

One incident that I can think of is that we let a band borrow our equipment—well, I let one person borrow my mic. And it was chill. It was a show in South Central, and we let them borrow the mic, they got something stolen, I don't even know what the story was. But they tried leaving with my stuff, and I think that there's that idea of we are women in the space, and we have our homies, and a lot of them do feel, I feel like, they have to have our back, which is cool, but I don't think it should ever get too violent, too crazy. And in this situation, I understand, whatever, people are mad, but I had already sorted it out, gotten my stuff back, and then it just turned into this violent situation. So I'm not too sure if it was like, "Oh, you're trying to step up to Angee," type of thing, or what the

fuck. So I think that that is totally unnecessary kind of thing, like people have to step in for us when I don't think they do if you've handled the situation, you know?

DAVILA: Yeah, so men who are your friends feel like they need to protect you somehow, is that what you're kind of saying?

ZAVALA: I mean, I feel like in that situation it was that way. That's cool, but I think for that particular situation, I think it was totally unnecessary. That did not have to happen. Crap like that.

DAVILA: Would you say that the scene is pretty supportive of you specifically, or supportive of there being women musicians?

ZAVALA: Oh, yeah. I think they're super for it, I think it was really, really exciting. It was really exciting to have an all-girl band. Even though there's many all-girl bands, but I think for our particular group of folks, it was exciting. We're all friends, and that's always really exciting when you get to see your homies play or release things. But, yeah, for the most part everyone's pretty supportive of it.

DAVILA: Would you say that it's a fairly inclusive scene in terms of, not just women being active as musicians, but in terms of different sexualities and gender identities and stuff?

ZAVALA: Yes. I do think so. Because a lot of us are in bands, and we are girls, and we show up to the shows, it's always very, very... It's almost like a family, we all know each other. I feel that we haven't really been exposed to different opportunities to be inclusive, you get me, like having trans folks, like trans punks. A few folks are queer in the scene, and nobody's ever like, "What the...", you know? I feel like when shows are happening, it's usually pretty safe, I think now than it was years back. I feel like it also has to do with the fact that time passes and there are certain things that you're just not into any more. And I would say, yeah, with certain groups of people, I think it's pretty inclusive. But I think we've only been limited to having women, women of color, queer folks, but when it comes to maybe trans people, I don't feel like we've been as exposed to things like that.

DAVILA: I'm asking because within the Chicano and Latino community, sometimes there's a kind of conservatism, that I think sometimes is partly because of Catholicism,

but also for different reasons. And that's something I've talked about with some of the older people I've interviewed who were back in the Vex scene or whatever, is they felt that sometimes there was this kind of conservatism and machismo and stuff going on in the scene, and I guess I was just wondering if you think it's changed over the years.

ZAVALA: I think it really, really depends on the space. There's some spaces where everyone's gonna be chill, nothing's gonna crack, nothing, no violence, nothing like that's gonna happen. But then there's specific other scenes where... I think it has a lot to do with the fact that I've kind of gone to certain shows now. One, my capacity, and two, I'd rather feel safe, and whenever I do go to other backyard shows, or something where it's different, I do see that there is a sexism, there is the bullshit, like homophobia, there's the whole "I want to get drunk, and I'm gonna be fucked up," and I feel like it's just things that people go through. I would go to those shows at sixteen, and thought, "Oh my god, this is so fucking fun," but I think now kind of reflecting on what happens there, it's definitely still there, totally. I think that there's still the sexism, you still have your fucking pervs, or these aggro punks, and that's still there. Totally.

DAVILA: Okay. To go back, one question I meant to ask is, if you know—and maybe you don't, so if you don't, that's okay. Do you know how long the other members of the band have been playing their instruments?

ZAVALA: I don't know. I do that know Martha, who was the bass player, she had been practicing bass before. I know Kat got her drum set while we were already in the band. But I'm not too sure if they had experiences with instruments before, that I wouldn't be able to answer.

DAVILA: Yeah, okay. I'm asking because punk is often, people talk about DIY and stuff, and how you don't necessarily have to be an expert to play, so this is a question I'm asking everyone, how long they've been playing, if they've taken lessons or if they learned on their own.

ZAVALA: Oh, we learned on our own. I'm telling you, Kat would just be fucking making a beat with her pens and her pad. And we did learn together, we learned a lot together.

DAVILA: And have you, do you think you've gotten a lot of support from your families and stuff with this?

ZAVALA: I think yes, now, because I'm older. I think that was one challenge with my mom growing up, was when she kind of started seeing that I started dressing differently, that what I was listening to, and for her it was like, "What the fuck is this? This is not ladylike." And it's been, what, ten years, so I think at this point she appreciates it. She feels very happy about it. We played—through my job we also have a women's collective—so we had an ending of the month women's month show at my house. So my mom cried, and she was just so happy because, to her she just feels really happy that I'm part of something that means something to other folks, and it's productive to her. I think when she started seeing that I connected punk and organizing, and punk and community, and punk and family, and punk and culture, I think that that's when she really got it, like, "Okay, this is not just a phase." And when she started seeing that punk was becoming something more of a productive thing for me, I think that's what really made it more legit for her. And my brothers are, they're excited. One of my brothers is really into music as well. So, yeah, it's really dope. And I gave my dad a Destruye shirt and he wears it, and it's just really to cool to have that support now.

DAVILA: Would you mind expanding a bit on some of the ways that you've connected the music to organizing, and to culture, and stuff like that?

ZAVALA: The first way was 'cause when I was in high school, I wasn't really a good student, but I really loved the stuff that I was listening to. It seemed really revolutionary to me, like really political. And it kind of gave me a boost of, I could do something, but I just didn't really know how, like how I could play it into whatever it is that would be productive. And I had an internship with Communities for a Better Environment, which is where I work now, but I think I was like eighteen or seventeen. No seventeen. I got an internship and I was able to incorporate a lot of my skills into it, so it was really cool. I was able to have a fundraiser show, and have the homeboys play. Kind of connect it all. Especially since at the time a lot of the members, they were into punk, and we had a festival, Resistance Fest, so bands played. Being able to talk about being a *punkera*, but then also trying to be productive about it.

And even now, the way that I do it is there's connections with different bands. And even

now I'm organizing also Ladyfest, that's productive. All these people that I've met, and all these awesome things that I run into, I can incorporate it. For example, my friend Vincent Medina—Beanz, he has Beanzattack—he just recently did a workshop with my youth members about DIY documentation, and how that's important, and how he documents shows, and all these amazing movements happening in terms of punk music. And it's relatable because my youth members don't necessarily listen to punk, but they understand that documentation is important, that it's important to kind of like bring those things together, to make zines, to have the DIY culture. So those are just some ways that it's been incorporated.

DAVILA: Yeah, and I think that documentation is really important for communities that are kind of overlooked a little bit, which is my interest in doing the project. Because I think that sometimes Chicanos are not really, they're kind of a second thought when it comes to punk or whatever. So, the fact that the early East L.A. scene, like the Vex scene, is only getting talked about within the past ten years is weird, because the Brat is so good, "Attitudes" is one of the best songs ever. But anyway. So, you sing all of the songs in Spanish, and I'm just wondering if that was a sort of conscious decision in a political sense, or if it was a way to connect to community, or just influences...

ZAVALA: It was all of that, definitely all of that. In the political way, it's kind of like, like how you said, there's a lot of these awesome punk bands, and their lyrics are in English, and I think it's just a way to bring back culture as well. So, yeah, it was a conscious decision that we made, like, "Okay, all of our songs are going to be in Spanish." And at the time, that's kind of what was going on as well, you had all this different bands that were already singing in Spanish. And it's a way to connect, too, like my mom knows exactly what I'm singing now, our families know exactly what we're talking about, and it's cool to bring that kind of growing up thing, 'cause a lot of the times people don't even speak Spanish amongst our friends. So it's just really cool to be able to bring that into the music that we made.

DAVILA: And what you were saying about your mom being able to connect to it on that level is interesting. I had a friend in high school who was really into Los Crudos, and he printed off all the lyrics, and his mom came home and she was Colombian, so she read

through them all, and she was like, “Yeah, this awesome, these are great.” And then she heard the music and hated it, of course. But it enabled that kind of connection, which is cool. So you were talking about how there were a number of bands who were doing that at the same time. Do you think for a lot of people it was the same sort of conscious decision to try to...

ZAVALA: I don't want to speak for them, but I could see how it could be. Because we're living in Southeast L.A., and South Central, East Los, we're from these different communities, and I could see how that would be one of the reasons why folks started singing in Spanish. And then also too there are so many badass bands that are outside of the U.S., like you have all this dope Chilean punk, and you have España punk, and you have these dope-ass awesome bands that are doing other shit. So I think that that also has to do, at least for us, a big influence, and even the sound sometimes.

DAVILA: Who would you say are some of your biggest influences?

ZAVALA: I think for us, we definitely enjoy Último Resorte, the Brat, I want to say Cólera is definitely a band that... I feel like when it comes to sound, we definitely are aiming for something dance-y, but then also something that can be heavy. But yeah, I think for me personally, I just really enjoy watching *este*... Alaska, I fucking love her, her presence is awesome, she's just a performer, and I think that that's really fucking dope, so for me, that was really an influence. And I think bands like Los Crudos that were able to talk about issues, for me that was the one thing is that I want to write songs that are relevant to us. Not that writing a song about having fun or getting drunk isn't relevant, that's what we fuckin' do, too. But I really wanted to make sure that there was a message, and that it was positive. Number one, that it's a positive thing. Even though “Oscura Sociedad” is a song that I guess is a little bit more, I want to say it's a negative song, but it's a bit, I don't know what the word is. Not depressing. But it's not like the other songs. So it talks about being in society, and how we're all going to end up, like everything's going to come to an end, and we have sicknesses, and we have all these different things happening. But it's still something that's very real, so that for me was really important.

DAVILA: So you're saying that most of your lyrics are political or kind of touch on...

ZAVALA: Yeah, yeah. Most of them are, yeah.

DAVILA: What are some other examples or some of the themes that you talk about?

ZAVALA: We have “Ni Una Mas,” which is about the women in Juarez. Even though I can’t speak about being a *mujer* in Juarez, it’s just a situation that’s just fucking brutal, the femicide. And it happens throughout the world, the mass-murder of women, and that’s what “Ni Una Mas” is about. And I think it’s really important also to remember, the more I’ve thought about the song, it’s like *ni una mas* in every fucking aspect. No violence against women at all, no fucking bullshit between women, just animosities, or just petty things, no more, let’s come together the best way that we can. And then we have “Fuck Ted Bundy.” The girls were watching the Ted Bundy movie or whatever, and they were talking about how brutal it was, and for me, the lyrics, I wrote them and it’s just about feeling unsafe as a woman. Like being looked over, and just kind of like the risk of you being abused. And I think for me, I was abused when I was younger, so for me it was just really... We’re talking about, “corro, y corro/aiguien auxilio,” how you can kind of feel, even when you’re not physically abused, you walk down the street and there’s somebody trying to holler at you, or you could just feel that. And that’s that fear that sometimes I hold, like, “Oh, I don’t want to walk down the street,” or “I don’t want to do this,” or “I don’t want to do that.” Which I do anyway, but there is that whole idea of that instinct of I’m being followed, or what do I do, or I need to book it.

What are other examples? I feel like the recurring theme is just about being people of color, and low-income, just talking about our situations of, you know, we’re being pinned to wars, nothing’s getting resolved, we’re poor, and we’re working fucking hard, and when people can barely make ends meet. And also, just about making sure that we keep positive, that we’re holding each other up as communities, as people. And just also, to the bullshit that you see on TV. Which is on our shirt, the TV with the forty being thrown through it. Yeah, like how shit’s just always being constantly fed to you, like do this, do that, look like this, sound like that, blah blah blah, and just wanting to kind of like break away from all of that shit. Feeling comfortable, and not having to be part of that whole bullshit, that we could be our own people because we’re constantly being fucked with. Even with our health, like “eat this,” “coffee’s bad for you,” “no, it’s good for you,” just stupid shit like that. But, yeah, a lot of our themes are that, and just being women, and just kind of like being in that situation of feeling like you’re in danger.

DAVILA: Going back to what we were talking about earlier in terms of all these sort of bands coming together who were singing in Spanish and so on. Do you think that there was a conscious effort made to kind of form a scene around the fact of being Chicano and Latino, or do you think that that kind of consciousness played into the sort of networking that was happening?

ZAVALA: I think it's both. Definitely it is badass to be playing music in Spanish, to be finding other bands that are doing the same thing. But then also, the way that we all grew up I think has a lot to do with it. And yeah, we network. I've met a lot of people through playing shows that had the same ideals of, even if the lyrics aren't in Spanish, the name is in Spanish, and we're playing shows that the other bands are doing the same things. Yeah. I think a lot of it was a conscious decision, but it's also like why not? Why the fuck not?

DAVILA: And I wondered if some of it is just proximity, too. Like you're growing up in areas where a lot of people are speaking Spanish or are Chicano or whatever. So do you do think that that also plays into this sort of group of bands coming together, just being from the same neighborhoods and stuff?

ZAVALA: Yeah, I think so.

DAVILA: Okay. So maybe to shift the focus a little bit to talking about DIY a bit more. So would you describe your approach to music making and stuff, would you describe it as DIY?

ZAVALA: I think definitely, hell yeah. 'Cause, one, getting instruments, that took us a while. And for me I had my mic, but I didn't have my speaker, so that I think that even that, working to get that speaker. There's other people that have access to all these different things, and we didn't, I think that's working with that. And then also, working with what we have. We had at some point a broomstick as a mic stand. Playing your instruments and having to find some shitty way to repair it because you don't have money to do anything to it. *Este*, finding different spots to practice in, I think for us that was really hard, and, practicing in our guitar player's room, and now we practice in her house, but it was like a mission to just find a place. That's very DIY, making connections, like, "Fuck, all right, you're letting us play here, and you're letting me

practice here.” That and just even the shows, the shows are so DIY, it’s grassroots. These are people coming together to throw these shows, everyone works with each other, if you need to borrow something, yeah, you could. Even the production of our tapes, we printed our own things, we cut stuff, we folded them, we got our own tapes. Finding different resources, or things that we have access to and being able to use that, so I think that that’s really DIY. Especially when we recorded, we recorded at our homie’s house in Compton, we were just in the living room, and we just had a mic and their laptop, and there’s no fancy studio, that’s just DIY. And it kind of adds to the sound.

DAVILA: So was it all four of you just playing at once with one mic?

ZAVALA: No, we did one-by-one.

DAVILA: Okay. So the way you’re talking about DIY is a very practical sort of thing, but I think another way people talk about it a lot is kind of on a more ideological level. So people talk about DIY often as kind of like this sort of refusal of the mainstream, or like a rejection of capitalism or something. Do you think that also describes your thinking about music making?

ZAVALA: Yeah, of course, because we’re working with our friends, we’re working with people in our community, and we’re supporting them. It’s a two-way thing, we work together to not feel like... I don’t imagine, picture myself being played on a big huge radio station, nothing like that. When it’s done it’s more of, we want to make this as accessible as we can and work with people we know have the skills, instead of having to go through, like, “Oh, let’s find some huge record place, or let’s rent out this.” Which I think if you have the resources, that’s fuckin’ badass if you can do that, but realistically we can’t. And even through connections, even if we have people that we know that do work in studios or whatever, we opt to work with them because there’s that whole understanding of we don’t have all this money, and yeah, we don’t need to have a crazy-ass, clean-ass production to make fuckin’ music that someone’s gonna enjoy. You don’t need a big-ass venue to have a badass show, you can do this in your backyard, it’s that simple.

DAVILA: So do you think that DIY has a different significance for communities that are in some ways disadvantaged or marginalized, like along economic or racial lines?

ZAVALA: Oh, yeah, for sure. Kind of like with that whole practicality thing, we've grown up seeing our parents trying to make things out of whatever it is that they have. I know for us it's like little things, like fixing the faucet, like, "fuck, we don't have money, so let's leave the pliers on the faucet, and this is how we're gonna work through this, we're gonna shower." Little things like that are very, very real to our communities. They're organizing stuff, too, like they organize *quinceañeras*. You gotta be organized to feed three hundred plus people, you have to have those sort of skills that are just very, I feel like they're almost natural to our people, you have to work with what you have.

DAVILA: So, I guess to talk more about, you mentioned the kinds of venues and the shows that people are putting together. So what kinds of venues would you normally play?

ZAVALA: For us, a lot of what we've played at was the backyards, which is always fun, it's always fun and I love it, I love playing backyards and all that stuff. I love playing period, but... We've done backyard shows. We played in a bar in T.J. And just most of the places where we've played in terms of venues have been, they already had some sort of rep, I guess you could say, for hosting punk shows there.

DAVILA: Would you say that you play more all-ages type shows than bar shows and stuff like that?

ZAVALA: In T.J. we played a bar show. We have stepped out of playing twenty-one and over shows, since, uh, hello, our bandmates at the time weren't even twenty-one, why are we gonna play a venue where they're like, "Okay, you can play, but then you have to leave afterwards." Like, okay. I think definitely, too, it just depends. Of course we want to be able to play as many places as we can, but then again, we also have to go back to, is this a band that talks about misogynistic bullshit or whatever? Those are things that we do look at. We want to make sure that we're comfortable playing, too.

DAVILA: I'm interested a lot in the kinds of spaces that people find to have shows. So far I've been to one that was in an info shop in Riverside, and one in a backyard in South

Central, and then one downtown.

ZAVALA: In the warehouse.

DAVILA: In the warehouse. I don't know how to ask about the warehouse without, because, you know, I don't want to talk too much about it in terms of details because I know it's trying to stay sort of under the radar a little bit. But, yeah, do you know anything about how that came together?

ZAVALA: The warehouse is just an awesome, awesome space. It's just a really awesome space where bands get to play, and touring bands have played there. I think that we're very fortunate to have the space, and to have the people that run it be okay with bringing that into our space, it makes very accessible. It makes things obviously a lot easier, you get me? I feel like if something were to go down you could just close the door, whereas a backyard show it's like things can get more hectic. So those are my feelings about the warehouse. I think that it's a really, really amazing space.

DAVILA: I talked a bit to one of the people who's involved in organizing, and he mentioned wanting to kind of keep it under the radar, which I think is interesting about these sort of DIY spaces, this idea that they're kind of tenuous, and that you kind of have to be very protective of them, so that something doesn't go wrong that brings attention to it in a way that will get it shut down. Do you think that's kind of a constant risk for a lot of the shows, is that something will get found out and then the venue just won't exist any more?

ZAVALA: Yeah, that is very real. Well, we had the Allen in Southgate, and then all of a sudden shows just stopped happening there. And we had badass bands there. But I do think, though, that there's always that risk, 'cause even though the Allen was this big old venue, there was the constant cops passing by, or there was the people from the space having to deal with the cops. And I think that that is a really big thing, we just don't want something so great—it's an amazing space—to be taken away over bullshit. I think that's kind of where everybody's effort is important, like, "Okay, don't be scandalous, respect the space, be cool." 'Cause we're here to protect this space, but also to protect each other. I think there is that constant thing of, "Fuck, this place might get raided," or it's gonna be looked at because of whatever, and you have all these punks.

DAVILA: So with backyard shows is it even more tenuous in the sense that shows... Do shows often get shut down in the middle?

ZAVALA: It depends on the area. I think there's certain cities where you already know not to have a late show there because you just kind of know it's not gonna run past this specific time. I think it just really depends on the area where you're playing your show. And, yeah, I think that's where you could really see like, okay, this show won't get raided because of that, or this show definitely will. So, yeah, and it's cool, it's nice that those areas aren't even too far away from a lot of us.

DAVILA: Is it okay to talk about the Silenzio Statico sort of stuff a little bit?

ZAVALA: Well, I could talk about it from my perspective, being part of that.

DAVILA: So, yeah, I guess what ways have you been involved in that? Is it a formal collective, or is it just kind of a group of people who do stuff together informally?

ZAVALA: I really wouldn't know what to say because it's not like I'm a core person in the group, so I really don't want to say anything. But the ways that I've participated is, I remember I did a set for the radio show that they had, I wrote an article on the *punkera* section on the zine, there were zines. And then being part of Destruye. It's awesome people, and it's DIY, so that's really cool.

DAVILA: It's a really cool thing to look at it and see all the different stuff that people were involved in, like I haven't actually seen any of the zines because I kind of missed the boat on those, but it sounds amazing, and there was the video thing for a little while, which was really cool. And I thought one thing that was really interesting about that was that a lot of it was kind of instructional sometimes, like there were segments that were meant to kind of like teach other people how to do things for themselves, which I thought was pretty good to have in there. Were you involved in any of that at all?

ZAVALA: No, I wasn't part of the group, I just participated in different things.

DAVILA: Do people still operate under that banner, or is everyone kind of doing their own thing a little bit more now?

ZAVALA: I think they are gonna release a tape. I do know that that name is still out there, there are some of us in bands that are on the label. So, yeah, I think it's still there.

DAVILA: Do you have any new projects now, like are you in any new bands?

ZAVALA: I definitely do want to, I want to get back on guitar. Yeah, I want to get back on guitar, and see if maybe I can do vocals and guitar at the same time, I don't know, that's just something, like a skill that I want to develop. But I definitely have that, and one thing, too, I just enjoy singing in general. I have friends that make beats, and just kind of like dope trip-hop things, and so that's something that I've always wanted to do, too. 'Cause it's different than the punk thing. Of course for me my heart is in punk, and that's just, it's more fun to me. But I definitely do want to see, as an artist or whatever, what I can do and things that I want to be.

DAVILA: Yeah. So do you have a lot of musical interests outside of punk as well, even if punk is kind of the one?

ZAVALA: Oh, yeah, I do enjoy other music as well, but like I said, I grew up with punk. Punk rock is what I identify with and even though I might not look like how I used to look, with like you wear your belts and your patches and all these different things, that doesn't even fuckin' matter, it's still in me, and it's still something that I love, and that it's healing to me. I think that there's just something so alive about it.

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