

Riverside, California: Lieux de Mémoire (Realms of Memory) in a Multiracial City

PATRICIA A. MORTON
University of California, Riverside

Realms of Memory

The city of Riverside, California serves as an instructive case study in the contested history of Southern California urbanism. In the process of its transformation from Mexican-Indian “Jurupa” to American “Riverside,” the successive inhabitants have erected buildings and created new districts that superseded those of previous groups. Thus, the Spanish-Mexican settlers of the early nineteenth century displaced the Native Americans who occupied the land, just as the Mexicans were later supplanted by Anglo-American colonizers.

The French historian Pierre Nora has developed a theory of history based on what he calls *lieux de mémoire* or realms of memory. For Nora, French history is concretized and codified in physical memorials and places where collective memory is represented. These places include actual monuments — such as war memorials and commemorative statues — public spaces, festivals, and museums as well as symbols of French nation and culture like the Tricolor flag and the Larousse dictionary. Realms of memory can be acknowledged sites of communal importance or they can have hidden or latent meaning that serves as a “counter-memory” to dominant history; they do not have to be authenticated with a plaque, Historic Landmark status, or inclusion on walking tours. Memory is more fungible, less easily assimilated than its physical traces, which can be effaced through deliberate demolition or simple neglect. Although some sites, buildings, and objects have disappeared from Riverside, they are recorded in place names, family stories, local legends, and personal remembrances.¹

The official walking tour of downtown Riverside features the monuments of Anglo dominance, such as the Mission Inn, the Old City Hall, the Universalist Church, and the County Courthouse. These are the most visible signs of the city’s history. Riverside has other, neglected *lieux de mémoire*. This paper examines some of these realms of memory in present-day Riverside.

Jurupa

The region around present-day Riverside, then called Jurupa, was occupied by Native Americans, the Gabrielino, Cahuilla, Luiseño, and Serrano Indians. They were hunters and gatherers who migrated between the Santa Ana River banks and the foothills of the surrounding mountains. Very little is recorded of their architecture, but their villages consisted of temporary buildings of wood and adobe. The name Jurupa comes from a Gabrielino term for sagebrush.

The Sherman Indian Museum and Sherman Indian School is

one of the only places where Riverside’s Native American history is recorded. It was built in 1901, the last of the original 34 Mission Revival buildings of the Sherman Institute, a federal government Indian school. The other buildings were demolished after 1967 and replaced by low stucco boxes. This realm of memory is a vestige of the control the United States exercised over Native Americans, including their forced attendance at boarding schools like the Sherman Institute, in the name of assimilation and betterment. The Indian heritage survives also in the place names Jurupa and Pachappa.

In the early nineteenth century, this area was settled by Europeans, mainly Mexican-Spanish settlers who established ranchos for cattle ranching. The Californios immigrated from New Mexico and Arizona to California as part of the Spanish drive to establish missions and pueblos in Southern California. Leandro José Serrano was the first non-Native American to settle in Jurupa, coming from San Diego in 1818. Serrano built a large house and a grist mill, and brought his family in 1824. In 1838, most of Jurupa and its surroundings was granted to Juan Bandini by the Mexican Government. Bandini, born in 1800 in Peru, was the son of a Spanish naval officer; his family moved to San Diego in 1820. One of his land grants, Rancho Jurupa, covered 32,000 acres and the other, Rancho El Rincón, covered 4400 acres.

By the mid-nineteenth century, Jurupa was home to a thriving settlement of Mexicans, Yankees, and Native Americans. Many of the immigrants were of mixed Indian, African, and European heritage. A group of New Mexicans from Abiquiu, led by Lorenzo Trujillo, created two settlements on the Santa Ana River’s east bank in 1844 and 1845: La Placita de los Trujillos and Agua Mansa. The New Mexicans were of Pueblo Indian and Spanish descent. Juan Bandini donated land to them in return for help fighting Paiute Indian raids from the deserts to the north and west. After California came under U S control, the open range on which the communities depended was closed by Anglo settlement. The farms were depopulated when younger people moved away to work in the citrus industry.⁴ The Trujillo Adobe still exists and is owned by Riverside County as a landmark slated for restoration, but this realm of memory is not open to the public.

Bandini sold or granted large tracts of land to other settlers who ranched and farmed the land. Benjamin D. (Don Benito) Wilson had large tracts on the west bank of the Santa Ana River; in 1847 he sold 6700 acres Louis Robidoux (later known as Rubidoux). Robidoux, of French Canadian descent, came from

St. Louis by way of Santa Fe. Isaac Williams, Paulino Weaver, and Abel Stearns were other early settlers of Riverside. A Danish sea captain, Cornelius Jensen, came to the west side of Jurupa in 1854. He married a local woman, Mercedes Alvarado, and opened a store. His house, constructed of brick in 1870, stands just outside Riverside and has been made into a living museum. The Jensen-Alvarado House celebrates the mixed union of a European settler and a Mexican family who had come to the region three decades earlier. The house as an architectural realm of memory is not a hybrid entity, however; it embodies the European side of the marriage to the exclusion of the Mexican.

The Colony of Riverside

John W. North's colony, Riverside, changed the economic and racial character of Jurupa. North, born in upstate New York in 1815, was an ardent abolitionist. Before he came to Southern California, he founded two cities in Minnesota, became a wealthy businessman and railroad president, served as surveyor general and judge in Nevada, and owned a foundry in Tennessee. His previous efforts to create an integrated town in Knoxville, Tennessee after the Civil War ended in failure due to his white neighbor's opposition and boycott of his foundry. In 1869, he and a friend, Dr. James P. Greves, decided to found a colony in California; in 1870 he and about a hundred prospective colonists, all white, traveled West on a train to look for sites for the new city. They found land on the east bank of the Santa Ana River, on the Rubidoux Rancho, where a group of investors had tried to raise silkworms, but had gone bankrupt. North described his vision of the new city as a planned colony of "educated, enterprising, progressive people."⁵ The colonists named the town Riverside after considering and rejecting Jurupa.

North and his colleagues sold shares in the Southern California Colony Association and subdivided the land. In the center of the tract, they laid out a mile-square grid. The center block was reserved for a plaza in the Spanish tradition. There were 169 blocks of two acres each. Outside the mile square, they staked out 257 small ten-acre farm plots. To make the colony's farms successful, the Association built a canal from the Santa Ana River flowing south to the farmland around Riverside. It was finished in mid-1871.

Government land lay to the south of the town where settlers could "squat" or homestead land with access to the water from the canal. Two homesteaders on Government land, Luther and Eliza Tibbets, were responsible for Riverside's future prosperity: they imported the navel orange. Tibbets came from Washington, DC in December 1870 and his wife followed two years later. Before she left Washington, she contacted William Saunders, a horticulturist at the US Department of Agriculture, to ask if he could suggest exotic varieties of fruit suitable for Riverside. In 1873 he sent her two navel oranges from Bahia, Brazil; these were the "Parent Navel Trees" that started the citrus industry in Riverside. One of these Parent Navel Trees still survives and is memorialized in the California Citrus State His-

toric Park, a lieu de mémoire for the early American settlers of Riverside.

In a classic California real estate story, disagreements over water rights caused the end of Riverside as an ideal community under John North's leadership. In 1875 a consortium of investors, led by Samuel Cary Evans, Sr., a banker from Indiana, and William T. Saywood, a speculator from San Francisco, joined forces with Charles Felton, who owned most of the Colony's shares, and formed the Riverside Land and Irrigating Company, which controlled water rights in Riverside. They removed North from control of the Colony and he moved to San Bernardino.

The transformation of a multiethnic community of ranchers to a society of wealthy white citrus growers was complete by 1890. After the citrus industry became the dominant economic power in the area, Riverside was dominated by educated White Anglo Saxon Protestants. Wealthy citrus grove owners and new immigrants built big houses, played tennis and polo, and enjoyed a leisured, genteel life. Their official realm of memory, the Catherine Bettner House or Heritage House, recreates and displays this history of wealthy Anglo Riverside.

Ethnic Riverside

In 1895 Riverside boasted the highest per capita income in the United States, but racial inequality was fixed in landownership and residence patterns. Large numbers of immigrants from China, Japan, Italy, Mexico, and later the American Dust Bowl came to Riverside to work in the citrus groves. Building styles, street names, and landscape features all reflected cultural and physical segregation; African American, Hispanic, Chinese, and other ethnic enclaves were located in outlying areas or adjacent to the original Mile Square in the Eastside. The citrus workers established neighborhoods, segregated from the fashionable and gracious districts where the grove owners lived. The Casa Blanca colonia, for example, was a settlement of Mexican citrus workers. The colonia was not served by city services such as water, sewer lines, garbage pickup, and street maintenance for the first fifty years of its existence.⁶ The community has one official realm of memory, the Ismael Villegas Park and Community Center, named after a resident who died in World War II and received the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Another significant, if ironic, realm of memory of Spanish-Mexican history is the Mission Inn. The Inn was started by Capt. CC Miller who came from Wisconsin in 1874 to work as a surveyor for the Riverside Canal. For his work, Miller was given the block between 6th and 7th Streets and Main and Orange Streets where he built an adobe house adorned with New England details. As his children moved away, he began to take in guests and turned the house into a hotel called the Glenwood Hotel or Glenwood Cottage. His son, Frank Miller, took over the hotel in 1880. Frank Miller became friends with Charles Lummis who helped save and restore the Spanish Missions and espoused building in the Mission Style. Miller, with members of the California Landmarks Club such as Lummis and Henry

Huntington, “undertook a conscious, deliberate, and strategic effort to create a Protestant version of the California mission period that could serve as Riverside’s explanatory myth and the basis for its identifying symbols.”¹¹ The Mission Style linked California with Mediterranean traditions of building and garden design, provided a good style for a specifically Californian architecture, and gave an aura of historicity to the Mission Revival buildings modeled on them. It was the Southwest equivalent of the New England Colonial Revival on the East Coast.

Miller stripped the Glenwood Cottage of its New England trimmings and turned it into the Old Adobe, the nucleus of a Spanish Revival fantasy that grew until Miller’s death in 1932. Designed and built as a shrine to California’s Spanish past, the Mission Inn was to become what author Kevin Starr has called a “Spanish Revival Oz.”¹² The Inn was the hub of Riverside’s wealthy, as well as a symbol for the city. It made Riverside the center for the emerging Mission Revival Style in southern California and proved to be a real estate promoter’s dream. The Mexican Americans who worked in the citrus groves and lived in Riverside’s barrios were not, however, a part of this romantic vision of California’s Spanish heritage. Their ancestors, the mestizo immigrants who settled Southern California, were metamorphosed into pale-skinned “Spanish” heroes. Although the Mission Inn refers to the Spanish-Mexican era in California, it does not constitute a realm of memory for the Latinos who settled in Jurupa and, later, in Riverside.

The original Chinatown in Riverside was located on the downtown block created by Main, Eighth, Orange, and Ninth streets. Chinese men were brought to Riverside in the 1870s as house servants, later to work in the citrus groves and as laborers, laundrymen, and vegetable vendors. In 1886, the Chinese residents of Riverside were forced to move because prominent citizens disliked having them in the Mile Square. They established a new Chinatown in the Brockton Arroyo between Tequesquite Avenue and Fourteenth St. In 1893, after a fire, it was reconstructed in long brick buildings, partitioned into both shops and living quarters. By 1938, only one resident remained, George Wong, who died in 1974. The brick buildings were declared unsafe and torn down in 1978 and replaced by a medical complex. In 1987, a Chinese Memorial Pavilion by Yeun-Chen Yu was erected downtown in front of the Riverside Public Library as a memorial to the thousands of Chinese citrus workers who labored in the citrus groves. Although distant from the second Chinatown, the Memorial forms a realm of memory for the Chinese settlers of Riverside.⁷

Another lieu de mémoire for Riverside’s Asian residents is less visible. The Harada House was built in 1884 and expanded to two stories in 1916. It was purchased in 1915 by local restaurant proprietor Jukichi Harada in the names of his three American born minor children. The question of legal ownership of this house resulted in the first successful challenge of the 1913 California Alien Land Law that prohibited aliens from legally owning property in the state.⁸

The legacy of the African American communities in River-

side has little public visibility. The first African American pioneer was Robert Stokes, who came to Riverside in the 1870s from Georgia, traveling with a white family and taking their name. Stokes prospered in Riverside, where John North’s enlightened attitudes prevailed, and family and friends from Georgia came west during the 1880s, escaping the rise of white supremacy in the South. They worked as farm laborers and road builders, then workers in the citrus industry. Some, such as David Stokes, Frank Johnson, and Oscar Harris, were entrepreneurs in hauling, hardware, carriage sales, and grocery stores. By 1920, there were about 500 African American residents in Riverside. During the 1920s, racism and discrimination became the norm in Riverside, as in most of the United States, and African Americans were segregated in two neighborhoods: the Eastside and the Casa Blanca area. Schools and employment were segregated and blacks were threatened by the Ku Klux Klan, which, in 1924, held an open induction of 200 new members in Riverside.⁹

The contemporary reality of African Americans in Riverside is documented in a literary realm of memory: Susan Straight’s novels, including Milkweed National Prize winning *Aquaboogie*. Straight, a white writer who has lives in the Eastside, records the segregation of blacks from whites in Riverside, their customary distrust and occasional understanding.¹⁰ Riverside has a community building and a park on the Eastside, a former junior high school, named after baseball star Bobby Bonds, a former resident of the African American neighborhood. Another trace of this long-established African American community is Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., formerly Pennsylvania Avenue, a common marker for black neighborhoods in American cities.

In the post-World War II era, Riverside continued to expand beyond its original Mile Square, forming a pattern of irregularly shaped grids and major avenues. The two main streets of Main St. and 7th Street formed the major crossing in early Riverside. Magnolia Avenue and Victoria Avenue extended the growth to the south, parallel to the river, with the Santa Fe railroad in between. The grids that marked citrus groves have been filled in with houses along Victoria Avenue and up into the hills. The Riverside Freeway, Interstate 91, has taken over the path of the railway, bypassing the center of the city and creating a barrier between the exclusive neighborhoods of Victoria and the depressed areas around Magnolia Avenue. It also cuts through the historic district around Mulberry and Lime Streets, which is filled with Victorian houses from the late nineteenth century. The 215 Freeway also bypasses the city, crossing above the Mile Square. The result of this bifurcation has been the further erasure of Riverside’s history and the disjunction of its lieux de mémoire from the commuters who rush by the city on the elevated freeways. From a city with its own identity and distinct, if fictional, architectural character, Riverside has become another technoburb on the freeway network that links the Greater Los Angeles megalopolis of subdivisions, malls, and industrial parks.

Pierre Nora’s theory of lieux de mémoire raises issues of the control of territory, assimilation of immigrant groups into Ameri-

can culture, and the representation of history in the city. Riverside serves as a case study for identifying spaces in which “lost” or repressed histories and peoples have left their mark on the built environment. By extending Nora’s theory to encompass non-monumental, invisible realms of memory, I propose a model for a more inclusive urban history. Rather than the scenographic Chinese Memorial Pavilion, for example, which refers to an architectural heritage never present in the historic Chinatown, this model focuses on the lived spaces and locations of conflict and change. Even the complete effacement of Chinatown serves as an instructive example of the power of architecture to preserve the history of marginal groups and to remind us of the corresponding efforts to suppress those traces. The African American community on the Eastside has created its sites of memory even in the face of segregation and economic devastation.

The assimilation and appropriation of Mexican-Spanish architecture in an idealized, “Mediterranean” Mission style can be interpreted as clever marketing and the exploitation of Mexican culture to further Anglo-American dominance. But it is also a sign of the hybrid, mixed culture produced by the successive waves of immigration to this area. Realms of memory persist as reminders that the dominant culture cannot control all aspects of the built environment and cannot eradicate all traces of other groups. As architects and teachers we have a responsibility to seek out these less obvious, invisible realms of memory, to acknowledge the complex, layered history of cities like Riverside.

NOTES

- ¹ Pierre Nora, ed. *Les Lieux de Mémoire. La République*, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), vii. (All translations, unless otherwise noted, are the author’s.)
- ² Tom Patterson, ed. *Guide to the Historic Landmarks of Riverside County, California* (Riverside, Calif.: Riverside County Historical Commission Press, 1993), 1.
- ³ Tom Patterson, *A Colony for California: Riverside’s First Hundred Years*. (2nd ed. Riverside, Calif.: The Museum Press of the Riverside Museum, 1996), 117-122.
- ⁴ See J.C. Vickery, *Defending Eden: New Mexican Pioneers in the San Bernardino Valley* (Riverside, Calif.: The Museum Press of the Riverside Museum, 1988).
- ⁵ Patterson, *Colony*, 28.
- ⁶ *Shades of Riverside, Neighborhoods Online Exhibit*, Riverside Municipal Museum (<http://www.ci.riverside.ca.us/museum/exhibit/shdnei.html>).
- ⁷ See *Life in Little Gom-benn: Chinese Immigrant Society in Riverside, 1885-1930* (Riverside, Calif.: The Museum Press of the Riverside Museum, 1991).
- ⁸ Patterson, *Guide*, 17.
- ⁹ *Our Families, Our Stories From the African American Community, Riverside, California 1870-1960* (Riverside, Calif.: The Museum Press of the Riverside Museum, 1997). See Barnett John Wesley Grier, *Trek to Equality: An Autobiography* (Riverside, Calif.: The Museum Press of the Riverside Museum, 1996).
- ¹⁰ Susan Straight, *Aquaboogie* (Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions, 1990).
- ¹¹ *Shades of Riverside, Neighborhoods Online Exhibit*.
- ¹² Kevin Starr, *Inventing the Dream: California Through the Progressive Era* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 86.