

## Radicalising Teaching and Tourism: *A People's Guide* as Active and Activist History

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The city of Los Angeles, which has been built on tourism and self-promotion for more than 150 years, certainly has no shortage of tour guides. They range from the conventional, such as *Fodor's* or *Time Out Los Angeles*, to the whimsical, such as *Los Angeles off the Beaten Path* or the *Zagat Los Angeles Dating and Dumping Guide*. However, as co-authors of *A People's Guide to Los Angeles* (forthcoming from University of California Press, 2012), we felt that there was a need for a different kind of tour guide. The aforementioned publications suggest that Los Angeles is solely a place of glamour, wealth, and fame or the home of eccentric, creative individuals. By contrast, *A People's Guide to Los Angeles* privileges the perspectives, histories, and landscapes of those who have been systematically excluded from most mainstream representations of the city's history: the working-class and the poor, indigenous peoples, people of colour, women, immigrants, gays and lesbians, environmental justice activists, political radicals, and other marginalised groups.

Collectively, our sites reveal a myriad of power relations that shape Los Angeles County. These sites are often ordinary places such as beauty salons, church basements, and restaurants where extraordinary events have occurred. They include the Holiday Bowl, a bowling alley in South Los Angeles where diverse clientele, including Black, Japanese American, and white manufacturing workers, convened to bowl, eat, and talk;<sup>1</sup> the home of Dorothy Ray Healey, chair of the Southern California chapter of the Communist Party; the offices of Kashu Realty, founded by a Japanese American real estate agent who was instrumental in desegregating all-white neighbourhoods; the academic buildings on the campus of California State University, Northridge where student protests created the first Chicano Studies program in the state; and West Hollywood City Hall, where thousands of gay and lesbian couples married during the brief period in 2008 when gay marriage was legal in California. Other site entries offer a fresh interpretation of places that are already well known by highlighting struggles over power that have occurred there, often including active resistance to inequality and oppression. For example, our entry on the Mission San Gabriel, a popular attraction for tourists as well as students in fourth-grade California history classes, emphasizes the forced labour, religious conversion, and cultural conquest of the indigenous California population that was a fact of life at all the Spanish missions, and also the 1775 revolt led by Nicholas José, a baptised resident of the mission, and Toyapurina, a non-baptised young woman from a nearby Tongva community. Similarly, our entry on public beaches in Malibu, a wealthy, celebrity-studded beach community that is frequently portrayed in television shows and movies, highlights the intense efforts at privatisation that have occurred there in

recent years, but also draws upon ongoing activist work by the Los Angeles Urban Rangers to clarify for readers their legal rights to occupy and use these beautiful spaces.<sup>2</sup>

*A People's Guide to Los Angeles* is a project of both active and activist history. Since the project's inception more than ten years ago, *A People's Guide* has been deeply rooted in our commitments to both scholarship and activism, and a refusal to separate the two in our daily work. The initial idea for the *Guide* came from a book project that co-author Pulido was working on, *Black, Brown, Yellow and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles*.<sup>3</sup> During Pulido's research, she uncovered numerous sites where pivotal events had occurred that were not recorded in standard popular histories or tour guides of the city, such as the building where the Black Panther Party and the Los Angeles Police Department had their final shoot-out, or the restaurant at which journalist and Chicano activist Ruben Salazar was murdered by a LA County sheriff during the protests against the Vietnam War associated with the Chicano Moratorium. While sharing this information with friends, local teacher Tony Osumi suggested that these sites be collected and called "The People's Guide to LA." His idea immediately resonated and for several years Pulido sought out and saved information on sites. Eventually another friend, Alexis Moreno, suggested producing a poster, which Pulido did, working with several students and alumni. At this point Pulido reached out to a new set of collaborators, including co-authors Barraclough and Cheng. Simultaneously, the research and writing became a popular, collective process involving many people, some of whom worked formally on the project (for example, as paid research assistants or as unpaid volunteers who sought out nearby restaurants, parks, and museums as additional sites of interest), while others contributed to the project more informally (for instance, by sharing a story, helping to pin down an exact address, lending a photo, or connecting us with little-known primary sources).

Our research process and the resulting product have been not just active, but activist, in two primary ways. First, the project has grown out of our relationships with people, organisations, and institutions working within Los Angeles's progressive and radical activist circles. We participated personally in many of the campaigns, rallies, protests, workshops, and alternative tours highlighted in *A People's Guide*, and accumulated an embodied knowledge of the geography of struggle and resistance in the city upon which to draw. This knowledge was particularly helpful in researching sites that were proposed, but never materialised, such as the East Los Angeles Prison defeated by the Mothers of East Los Angeles, or the toxic waste incinerator defeated by the Concerned Citizens of South Central Los Angeles. Through our relationships, we also heard stories about places where important events occurred many years ago, in some cases before our lifetimes. Part of our task when we heard such stories was simply to put on our historical geographer hats and ask: "Where did that happen?" Through this process, we discovered that there is an extensive body of knowledge about Los Angeles' progres-

sive and radical past that was not concretely recorded, existing instead solely in the memories of the city's activists and passed on through stories, myths, rumors, and jokes.

Second, the project seeks to widen the purview of radical scholarship. The work of Los Angeles scholars, particularly those who have written from the



*Figure 1: Former site of the Holiday Bowl in the Crenshaw neighbourhood, in South Los Angeles (Photo: Wendy Cheng, 2006)*

revisionist perspective associated with social history in recent years, constitutes another rich descriptive and analytical archive that is infrequently accessed by the general public.<sup>4</sup> Bringing both of these sets of knowledge to a broader audience – especially those who may be scholars or activists-in-the-making – will, we hope, be part of the ongoing work of animating the hyphen between “scholar-activist.”<sup>5</sup>

In this essay, we first situate the project within a paradigm shift occurring within the realm of tourism, citing specific examples from Los Angeles. Then we discuss how a “people’s guide” research process has been applied and expanded in a pedagogical context, an undergraduate class in New York City, thus bringing the methods of active history into the classroom while radicalising the production of knowledge. Taken together, these frames suggest ways that both tourism and pedagogy can be retooled as active sites in the production of political consciousness and alternative knowledges, through the lens of a single project.

### Rethinking Tourism: Advancing a More Complex Understanding of Power and Place

Tourism is now the largest and the fastest growing industry both in the United States and worldwide, but in its conventional format, tourism is fundamentally marked by relationships of power. Dennison Nash argues that tourism is a form of imperialism because it is structured around the needs, resources, and interests of the productive centers of developed nations and their people. Tourism involves agreed-upon understandings about the conditions of the relationship between tourist and host. These conditions include a “condition of strangerhood,” whereby tourists and hosts treat each other as ideal types and objects, and



Figure 2: Street signs in Malibu, California indicate both public and private demarcations (Photo: Wendy Cheng, 2009)

expectations of service, whereby both parties understand that the tourist is at leisure and the host is there to serve. The tourist does not adapt to the host context and is not expected to; rather, the host adapts to the tourist's needs and expectations, which produces, in some cases, psychological and social anxiety.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, tourism at its core involves the consumption of difference; it means leaving home to encounter cultural practices through to be different from the tourist's own, performed by people who are assumed to be different and “exotic.”<sup>7</sup> Such consumption of difference is simultaneously economic, for example through

the purchasing of souvenirs and postcards, and visual, encoded in John Urry's notion of the "tourist gaze," which is informed by intertextual representations of the place or people being encountered and becomes a lens through which the tourist experiences difference.<sup>8</sup> In this context, Jane Desmond argues that the structural conditions surrounding and producing tourism are elided:

the social, political and economic histories which brought performers and spectators together in the same space are either entirely absent, re-presented as nostalgia, or recoded as cultural or natural conservation ... [the] factors of force, domination, and hierarchy necessary to the divide between performers and audience are either naturalized or rendered invisible. The status quo is validated.<sup>9</sup>

In other words, conventional practices and relationships of tourism obscure existing structures and relations of power. This fact is not negated by the active solicitation of tourism by host societies or by the demonstrable benefits that tourism may produce for some segments of the host society's population.

Tourism maps play a particularly important geographic and representational role in reifying relations of power as they actively construct and structure tourism spaces, identities, and the relationships between tourist and host. Conventional tourism maps rely on the dominant cartographic paradigm, in which maps are thought to more or less accurately model the world and to have no impact on the spaces they claim to represent. Critical cartographers, by contrast, emphasize that all maps are both parts and products of social discourses and employments of power.<sup>10</sup> From the critical cartographic perspective, all maps make choices that involve biases, prejudices, and assumptions; as such, maps reference, reinforce, or ignore a whole realm of other texts and knowledges, thereby providing "frameworks of discipline" that shape the experiences of those who use them in relationship to the places being explored.<sup>11</sup>

Existing mainstream tour guides to Los Angeles and their maps exemplify the biases and elisions of conventional tourism, which promotes passive, spectacle-driven consumption of the lifestyles and practices of the wealthy, elite, or simply strange in an individualistic, celebratory vein devoid of any kind of structural analysis. The vast majority of mainstream tour guides direct readers and visitors primarily to Downtown, Hollywood, and the Westside. Occasionally, portions of the San Fernando Valley and Long Beach are also included. Historically, these areas have been — and, to some extent, still are — inhabited predominantly by people who are white, wealthy, famous, and/or powerful. Through their overrepresentation in tour guides and other depictions of Los Angeles, these people and places are persistently privileged and centered. Further, in terms of interpretation, usually one person — almost always a man, and usually the capitalist who invested in a place, or the architect or designer — is credited, thus reifying an individualised, masculinist, and entrepreneurial way of thinking about history, while the people who actually created, built, or used the place remain nameless.<sup>12</sup>

Meanwhile, South and East Los Angeles are regularly and systematically omitted. In many existing guides, the maps literally stop, on their southern edge, at the 10 Freeway — excluding the vast communities to the south, most of them black and Latino — and, on the eastern edge, at the Los Angeles River, which separates the Greater Eastside and its historically Latina/o and Asian American communities from the rest of the city. In South Los Angeles, only the Watts Towers and occasionally the Dunbar Hotel (an Art Deco hotel constructed in the late 1920s) are featured; in the Eastside, just a few restaurants deemed sufficiently “upscale” are considered worthy of tourists’ time and energy. These exclusions and omissions deflect attention away from some of the city’s most impoverished, segregated, and polluted neighbourhoods, and the institutionalised forces of neglect and oppression that have created such conditions. Such partial representations also obscure the efforts, past and present, of the people who live and work in these areas — people who have led vibrant, innovative movements to resist environmental racism, the expansion of the prison-industrial complex, state violence, and residential segregation, among other forces. In these ways, mainstream tour guides and their maps socialize their readers away from thinking about either structures of inequality or the power of collective action and social movements.

However, there are always slippages and fractures in the consumption of tour guides and tourism maps, and thereby of touristed places, that may lead to counter-hegemonic and resistant ways of experiencing place. Wearing, Stevenson, and Young argue that the tourist has too often been understood as a *gazing flaneur*, rather than as an interacting *choraster*. They note that “tourism is first and foremost about a series of direct and mediated relationships with, and in, the context of space/place” wherein a wide range of interactions may occur, including both those that are scripted and staged but also others that are quite unpredictable.<sup>13</sup> As a result, although tourism conventionally rests upon the commodification of a place and people and their reduction to visual spectacle, other possibilities always exist, including those that build what they call the “social value” of a place, “where the interests and needs of local communities frame an interactive experience which extends for the tourist beyond that of her/his temporary stay.” In this context, “tourism comes to be viewed as a process of expanded social interaction whereby self-identity can be enlarged through the intersection of differing places, peoples, cultures, and societies.”<sup>14</sup> Seen from this angle, tourism can be an opportunity to educate about relationships and structures of power, and to build relationships — or even alliances — that are durable, long-lasting, and possibly even connected into a movement.

In adopting this latter approach, the places and people that we feature in *A People’s Guide to LA* create a dramatically different perspective on the Los Angeles region: an oppositional, or counter-hegemonic, one. In raising questions about the operation of hegemony through both structural domination *and* ideological processes, we prompt our readers to question common thinking about

which places are “desirable” and worthy of time, money, and attention. Most of all, we show how power actually works: how everyday people are exploited and disenfranchised by capital and the state; how those same people sometimes mobilise to create alternative forms of power; how racism, sexism, class differences and homophobia lead to struggle and conflict; how dominant ideas are memorialised in landscapes; and how Los Angeles has been a constant site of struggle between nature and people. Through this process we “flip the script” not only in terms of what stories and places are centered in mainstream tour guides and other representations of historical geography, but also how those stories and places are interpreted. In this way, we intervene in dominant values and practices of tourism as a vehicle for the production of both history and place.

Similar motivations and convictions underlie the wide range of alternative tourisms that has emerged in the last two decades.<sup>15</sup> A number of groups in Los Angeles have been experimenting with such forms of resistant, counter-hegemonic tourism as a way to build community, sense of place, and participatory democracy. For example, the Los Angeles Urban Rangers creatively and humorously deploy the figure of the friendly, knowledgeable park ranger to engage LA residents in firsthand explorations of their urban habitats, including Malibu’s effectively privatised public beaches, Hollywood Boulevard, and downtown LA, all of which focus on the intersections of environmental and social justice. Friends Of the Los Angeles River (FOLAR) offers tours of the city’s river, 80 percent of which is a concretized channel, to educate participants on the city’s riparian ecosystems and engage them in clean-ups and advocacy work. In large part through the popular engagement built through its tours, FOLAR has succeeded in preventing further concretization of the river and in securing and creating significant public space, such as bike paths and pocket parks, in the dense urban communities along the river, which are occupied primarily by immigrants and people of color. The Latino Urban Forum, in partnership with several other local organizations, coordinates an annual Nacimiento bike and metro tour of nativity scenes coordinated by Eastside residents. Frequently, counter-hegemonic tourism in Los Angeles is linked to or sponsored by public history institutions or economic justice organizations that integrate tourism as part of their work: Japanese American activists have created walking tours of Little Tokyo; the Studio for Southern California History offers social history-oriented tours of unlikely places, such as the Evergreen Cemetery in Boyle Heights, Union Station, and Chinatown; the Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research has involved high school students from South LA in conducting oral histories with their family members and community elders to find out about important places in their neighbourhoods; and Gilda Haas, founder of Strategic Actions for a Just Economy, led a studio class and community outreach program at University of California, Los Angeles on the subject of community-based tourism which led to the creation of an organisation called the Tourism Industry Development Council (now known as Los Angeles

Alliance for New Economy, one of the region's foremost economic justice collaboratives). *A People's Guide to Los Angeles* coexists with these important efforts. Indeed, we wish to honor this path-breaking — but typically ephemeral — work, both by documenting much of it in a printed, tangible format and by extending its insights and arguments to broader topics and audiences.

All of these counter-hegemonic tourism initiatives raise the question of just who, exactly, is a tourist. Each of these tours connects local residents as well as visiting tourists into a network of people who are systematically working to create social, economic, and environmental justice and participatory democracy in Los Angeles. Such programs are based partly on recognition of the fact that the city's rampant, enduring segregation creates whole territories where many denizens do not venture, and about which they know nothing apart from the same commodified, exoticized representations of place that structure tourists' relationship with their host locale; thus, given growing urban economic inequality and social separation, the need and desire for programs and initiatives to bring together people, even within the same locale, is great. But the popularity of such programs also testifies to many peoples' rejection of such alienating processes and their desire to cultivate community and equity with their fellow Angelenos. As with developing forms of counter-hegemonic tourism in other contexts, intra-urban programs can deepen sense of community and sense of place, build relationships across inequality, and create possibilities for participants to reflect on their relative positions within structures of power. Within this context, students can be a particularly appropriate and promising constituency in the project of transforming the production and consumption of knowledge about history and place.

### **Pedagogy as Active History**

Transformational learning, according to Jack Mezirow, involves a change in one's frame of reference, which he defines as "the structures of assumptions through which we understand our experiences."<sup>16</sup> Anthropologist Kiran Cunningham emphasizes that deeper levels of transformation occur when students are able to critically reflect on their own assumptions by situating the development of those assumptions in broader theoretical and conceptual contexts as well as political-economic structures.

[When] students are able to connect their deepening structural understanding with their deepening understanding of their self, essentially making it possible for their own positionality to become a conscious element of their experience ... this awareness ... catalyzes the kind of shift in frame of reference and habit of mind characteristic of transformative learning.<sup>17</sup>

Experiential education has been increasingly recognized as a vehicle through which to integrate students' structural and cultural understanding of the



relationship between self and society, thereby achieving transformational learning. Experiential learning includes a range of approaches. The five most prominent are active learning, problem-based or inquiry-based learning, project-based learning, service-learning, and place-based learning. These approaches share a set of principles: promoting hands-on learning, using a problem-solving process, addressing real-world problems, encouraging student interaction with each other and the content, and using multiple subjects or perspectives to enhance interdisciplinarity.<sup>18</sup> A wide body of research indicates that experiential learning improves grades and test scores, increases student motivation, and increases respect and appreciation for teachers and educational institutions.<sup>19</sup> One reason for these positive outcomes may be that experiential learning engages not only the intellectual but also the affective, social, and cultural sides of students — a more holistic approach than that which undergirds more traditional, passive educational approaches such as lecturing.

Place-based learning engages students in direct experience in and examination of the local histories, environments, cultures, political economies, literatures, and arts of a place — typically the place(s) where they live, work, or go to school. Critical pedagogies of place, in particular, integrate the social, economic, and environmental justice values of critical theory in place-based education.<sup>20</sup> They involve students in examination of how their communities both shape and are shaped by structural and cultural processes of inequality that are regional, national, and global in scope. For example, the Counter Cartographies Collective's "DisOrientation Guide to UNC-Chapel Hill" seeks to educate students regarding the place of their university in regional, national, and global social, economic, and political contexts, and empowers them to act within their local communities.<sup>21</sup> Students' motivation for learning is higher when it involves places where they are already invested or where they have some existing knowledge upon which they can draw. Other benefits of place-based learning include not only higher test scores and grades but also improved critical thinking abilities and more responsible behavior.<sup>22</sup> According to Scott Wurdinger and Julie Carlson, "when learners develop connections to their own place and have adequate levels of skills and opportunities to act, they become more actively participative in their communities."<sup>23</sup> All of these outcomes are core foundations of democratic participation and activism.

When active pedagogical projects build upon students' social locations as members of marginalized or disempowered communities, they can create alternative ways of knowing that have the potential to develop and deepen already existing or nascent modes of resistance. This was the case for the "Doc Your Block" program developed at the Lawndale/Little Village School for Social Justice in Chicago, which was built in response to community mobilisation, albeit after many years of stalling and delay by state agencies. Students and teachers in the "Doc Your Block" program constructed a documentary video and accompanying criti-

cal essay about their neighbourhood that was framed in explicit opposition to dominant media coverage. In contrast to the twenty-second sensationalistic sound bites typical of mainstream television news coverage, the voices of the neighbourhood's residents were centered, and their perspectives situated numerous recent killings in the neighbourhood within a structural context of gentrification, racism, and poverty. Thus, the "Doc Your Block" project grew out of a history of community mobilisation and resistance, but also buoyed and extended that history in response to contemporary issues.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, in New Orleans's Ninth Ward, Students at the Center (SAC), a writing and digital media program in three public high schools, became the centerpiece of a community coalition that created Plessy Park on the site where, in 1892, Homer Plessy boarded a whites-only streetcar as part of an organised civil rights campaign to challenge Louisiana's Separate Car Act of 1890. High school students led story circles with residents of their neighbourhoods, younger students, staff and faculty at their school, and neighbourhood organisations; they also interviewed their own family members. Reflecting on this work and the eventual creation of Plessy Park, Catherine Michna notes: "public spaces that seek to celebrate counter-hegemonic histories are only as powerful as the contemporary identifications and actions that they make possible." In other words, the process that students used to engage community members in Plessy Park's creation was just as important as the establishment of the park and green space itself: "As SAC students collected stories about New Orleans, they connected narratives about practices that were separate and unequal in the past with their critical evaluations of how institutional racism shaped their own contemporary neighbourhoods and public schools."<sup>25</sup>

Like these projects, *A People's Guide* does not simply offer an alternative reading of the past, but rather integrates history and place as a pedagogical lens through which to engage diverse people in critical analysis of their present reality and future dreams. The "people's guide" methodology lends itself beautifully to numerous pedagogical possibilities that not only empower students to be producers of knowledge themselves — and, in doing so, to transform the corporatist, banking model of education that increasingly dominates universities — but also has the potential to infiltrate the wider world of social movements and social change work through students' own movement into and out of different areas of their lives. Not only are students "our first public, for they carry geography into all walks of life,"<sup>26</sup> but the students we work with — who are often drawn to our classes because of their racial, class, sexual, or political marginalisation elsewhere in the university — can play an essential role in the production of radical historic and geographic knowledge. Over the years, graduate students and faculty at a wide range of educational institutions in Los Angeles and beyond have incorporated *A People's Guide* into their teaching. In history, geography, and methods classes as well as independent studies, students have been assigned to research and write site histories. Students have frequently drawn upon their situated and embodied knowl-

edge to fill in crucial gaps about which we had little information, such as sites of transgender activism or digital youth culture. Several of their site entries will be featured in the book.

Co-author Cheng has recently experimented with the implementation of the “people’s guide” methodology in a new pedagogical and geographical context: an undergraduate class in New York City. In the fall of 2009, in a course that Cheng developed for the Department of Social and Cultural Analysis at New York University (located in lower Manhattan) entitled “Race, Space, and the Production of Inequality,” students collaborated to produce “A People’s Guide to New York City.” The course was designed to serve as an introduction to critical scholarship on race and space in the United States. Themes included the racial differentiation of types of spaces within metropolitan areas, the role of the state in structuring space through exclusion and containment, notions of property and privilege, and place-based activism for social change. Working in pairs over the course of several weeks, students visited, researched, and wrote about three sites in New York City that illustrated the workings of race, power, and inequality in the landscape. In a class of 28 students, fourteen pairs generated 42 sites ranging from Ellis Island to midtown Manhattan to Rockaway Beach, Queens. For each entry, students provided an address, directions via public transportation, at least one contemporary photograph, and, when appropriate, archival images. They addressed the following questions: “Why did you pick this site? What happened here? What is there now, and is there a connection between what is there now and what used to be there? What is each site’s significance with regard to ideas and themes of the course (e.g. white privilege, environmental racism, differential racialisation, activism)?” Each site entry was limited to 350-500 words in length, and included a list of references, ranging from scholarly sources to newspaper articles, policy briefs, and documents from community organisations. At the end of the semester, students presented their site entries to the rest of the class. In addition, all entries were posted by the instructor in a publicly accessible blog (<http://peoplesguidetonyc.blogspot.com>), and treated as course material in the final exam.

From its inception, the assignment served as a collaborative exercise among faculty and students, in which students were able to participate as active producers, rather than simply consumers, of knowledge. In order to generate a working list of possible sites for students, department faculty (as well as other New York-area acquaintances of Cheng including artists, community organisers, etc.) were asked to contribute suggestions for sites and sources. The resultant compilation of sites covered a broad set of topics and interests, ranging from nineteenth-century Seneca Village, a multiethnic African American, Irish, and German settlement in what is now Central Park; to community-university struggles in Morningside Park, Harlem in the late 1960s; to Pier 40, a contemporary site of political organising among queer youth-of-color. Students were also free to pitch their own sites, which allowed them to bring their own interests, experiences,

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and expertise into the project at an early stage; of the final sites, one-third were proposed independently by students. In their proposals, each team listed five to six sites in order of preference and Cheng then chose three out of these to limit overlap and ensure broad geographical and thematic coverage.

In keeping with the goals of *A People's Guide to Los Angeles*, the selected sites (including those proposed by both the instructor and students) showed how power operates, both in terms of oppressive state structures *and* in the potential for new social formations to intervene in and reshape such structures. For instance, the final project included not only the stoop in the Bronx where Amadou Diallo, a 22-year-old West African immigrant, was killed by police (who allegedly mistook Diallo's gesture of reaching for his wallet for reaching for a gun) in a hail of bullets in 1999, but also the Red Hook Community Justice Center in Red Hook, Brooklyn, in which community services and education and a multijurisdictional court system have been integrated under one roof in order to open new avenues of interaction between poor urban communities and state agents. One student team wrote of the intersection in Brooklyn where the Crown Heights riots of 1991 were triggered, detailing pre-existing tensions between African Americans and Lubavitcher Jews but also describing community groups that formed in the wake of the unrest to improve inter-group relations (such as Mothers to Mothers, which provides a venue for African American and Lubavitcher Jewish mothers to share their experiences with one another). Similarly, in another entry, students highlighted labour struggles at a supermarket in Bushwick, Brooklyn in which predominantly immigrant Latina/o workers, aided by the organisation Make the Road New York, fought successfully for restitution with regard to egregious wage violations. From these nuanced treatments of how power operates — in the sense that crises also present opportunities for reconfiguration of existing power relations — students were encouraged to develop complex analyses of the meanings attached to specific sites and events in the city in which they lived.

Working within the terms of the assignment, students also recast familiar, heavily toured sites such as the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island. The Statue of Liberty was revealed to be not only an emblem of American national ideals, but also a site of protest for the betrayal of these ideals, particular in the 1970s, by groups including the Vietnam Veterans Against the War and pro-independence Puerto Rican activists. Research into the operations of Ellis Island revealed that it was not a site through which the United States received all immigrants with open arms, but a place in which prospective immigrants were screened and excluded from the nation via health criteria that discriminated on the basis of race, ethnicity, and class. Even iconic sites of social movements were revised and retold. For example, in one of two entries written on the Stonewall Inn, the Stonewall Riots were depicted not only as a watershed for “mainstream” gay activism, but a crucial site for transgender rights via the figure of Sylvia Rivera, a transgendered Latina who was an instrumental figure in the riots and later became a major LGBT

activist.

The visual component of the assignment was essential in guiding students to be active producers of knowledge. Students were required to visit the sites and take contemporary photos. This activity enabled them to develop an individual, experiential relationship to their sites as well as to confront how everyday landscapes are implicated in larger questions of power, economics, politics, and social relations. By visiting the sites firsthand, students also examined their neighbourhood contexts, which often yielded surprising discoveries. For example, when students Mike Ren and Katie Gordon went to the 1500 block of Wheeler Avenue in the Bronx where Amadou Diallo was killed, they found a large mural which memorialised Diallo and called into question the American dream by depicting a skeletal Statue of Liberty (Figure 3). Furthermore, since many sites focused on social struggles that were “lost,” and because in large cities such as New York the built landscape is subject to continual transformation, the potential absence of the “original” site (as in the case of thousands of units of public housing razed in the 1950s to build what would become the world-renowned Lincoln Center cultural complex; see Figure 4) offered an opportunity for us to raise questions about memory, history, and processes of development: How are sites preserved in memory if not in the physical landscape? Whose histories are preserved in the landscape, and whose are erased? What traces of the past remain in the contemporary landscape, and if they do not, how and why has this happened? Photography thus served as a means to engage visual and spatial analysis as a particular way of knowing and learning.

In an era in which free and user-friendly Internet applications are readily available, a “website” in the form of a blog was easy to create in a matter of hours. “A People’s Guide to New York City” was online and live within days of students submitting their final text and images. The online format enabled the project to be instantly shareable with colleagues and the general public, and allowed students to see the collective fruits of their work. In addition to in-class presentations in which students shared the results of their research and explorations with their classmates, site entries were incorporated into the final exam, a take-home essay which included an option for students to write about one or more of the sites included in the project in relation to the overall themes of the course. According to senior Grayson Maldonado, a double major in Biology and Social and Cultural Analysis, “this project was the perfect way to blend all the unique and diverse backgrounds that our class came from. We all had different interests, abilities, majors, and hometowns and this project played to all of our strengths.” Maldonado also enjoyed the “liberty to be creative,” stating that the project was “more than academic scholarship. We as students got to see personally how spaces changed. It was a hands-on approach similar to laboratory research... you learn more through actual experimentation than reading about it in a textbook.” Her analysis of the learning experience confirms the positive effects noted by scholarship on experi-

ential learning, particularly critical pedagogies of place, and suggests the value of teaching methodologies such as “a people’s guide” to guide students in exploration of the complex formation of memory, power, and community.

### Conclusion: Active history in everyday landscapes

At one moment during Cheng’s class, a student – a Social and Cultural Analysis major who was involved in housing rights activism with community organisations in Harlem – asked whether it was really appropriate to call the project a “people’s” guide, when the work was being done by college students enrolled in an elite private university. Indeed, the same question can be asked of much scholarly work, even in the progressive traditions of social history and cultural geography, which is produced by and rarely circulates beyond limited academic and intellectual circles. Those who find themselves in relatively privileged positions may not traditionally be thought of as “the people,” in the sense that Marxist, radical social and political movements valorise working-class, people of color, and otherwise marginalised identities. Yet we also cannot say that they — and we, scholars participating in formal venues for academic discourse such as this peer-reviewed journal — are *not* “the people.” For one thing, many of the undergraduate and graduate



*Figure 3: Mural on 1500 block of Wheeler Avenue in the Bronx, where Amadou Diallo was shot and killed by police in 1999. (Photo: Mike Ren, "A People's Guide to New York City" class project, 2009)*

students who have worked on both *A People's Guide to Los Angeles* and “A People’s Guide to New York City” are first-generation college students from low-income, immigrant, and/or racial minority backgrounds. Participation in such projects

allows students to start from where they are — wherever that may be — and to claim their education as rooted in their personal and community histories. Moreover, these kinds of projects press all students — including those from more traditionally privileged backgrounds — to confront how privilege and inequality are two sides of the same coin, and challenge them to see themselves as implicated as active participants in their everyday landscapes and biographical, socioeco



*Figure 4: The Metropolitan Opera House, designed by Wallace Harrison, stands at the center of Josie Robertson Plaza and what is called the Lincoln Center "campus." During the Lincoln Center Renewal Project in the 1950s, one of hundreds of projects spearheaded by the legendary and notorious "master builder" Robert Moses, numerous residential highrise buildings were seized via eminent domain and razed to make room for this complex of elite cultural institutions, ultimately displacing 7 000 families, most of whom were poor, Puerto Rican immigrants. Of the 4 400 units of housing which were constructed as part of "renewal," the vast majority were luxury units. (Photo and information courtesy of Adela Park and Eric Zhang, "A People's Guide to New York City" class project)*

nomic, and institutional contexts — key foundations for transformational learning. In the sense that "A People's Guide" class projects function as exercises in alternative knowledge production, they potentially train students to be different kinds of scholars and community members — without presuming to which communities they belong or what their roles and contributions to those communities should be.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, *A People's Guide to Los Angeles*, and classroom projects such as "A People's Guide to New York City," reappropriate the tourist guide genre as a vehicle for scholars, activists, students, and the general public to engage with everyday landscapes as sites of active, and activist, history. As both guidebooks and pedagogical tools, these projects provide a productive framework for strategic interven-

tions in teaching, public history, tourism, and activism. The critical focus on everyday landscapes recasts students and the general public as active participants who have important knowledge to contribute to the making of history and places, and moves toward a more resilient and socially engaged understanding of the ways people and places have been, and continue to be, shaped by power, resistance, and the capacity to dream.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Holiday Bowl History Project, [www.holidaybowlcrenshaw.com](http://www.holidaybowlcrenshaw.com) (last accessed 3 December 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Los Angeles Urban Rangers, [www.laurbanrangers.org](http://www.laurbanrangers.org) (last accessed 6 December 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Laura Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> This literature is by now quite extensive, but for a few illustrative examples, see William Deverell, *Whitenashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of its Mexican Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Matt Garcia, *A World of Its Own: Race, Labor, and Citrus in the Making of Greater Los Angeles, 1900-1970* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Scott Kurashige, *The Shifting Grounds of Race: Black and Japanese Americans in the Making of Multiethnic Los Angeles* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Peter LaChapelle, *Proud to be an Okie: Cultural Politics, Country Music, and Migration to Southern California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Becky Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Mark Wild, *Street Meeting: Multiethnic Neighborhoods in Early Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> Ruth Wilson Gilmore, "Scholar-Activists in the Mix," *Progress in Human Geography* 29, no. 2 (2005): 177-82.

<sup>6</sup> Dennison Nash, "Tourism as a Form of Imperialism," in *Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism*, ed. Valene Smith (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), 37-52.

<sup>7</sup> Jane Desmond, *Staging Tourism: Bodies on Display from Waikiki to Sea World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), xv.

<sup>8</sup> John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies* (London: Sage, 1990).

<sup>9</sup> Desmond, xvi.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Lize Mogel and Alexis Bhagat, eds., *An Atlas of Radical Cartography* (Los Angeles: Journal of Aesthetics and Protest Press, 2008).

<sup>11</sup> Stephen Hanna and Vincent del Casino, *Mapping Tourism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), xi. See also J B Harley, "Deconstructing the Map," *Cartographica* 26, no. 2 (1989): 1-20.

<sup>12</sup> The Bradbury Building in downtown Los Angeles is an excellent example. Most mainstream tour guides credit the creative contributions of the architect, George Wyman. While we agree that the Bradbury Building is historically significant, we also believe that it constitutes yet another example of white, European-influenced architecture, and that most accounts of it are incomplete. Who were the workers that actually constructed the edifice? How did Bradbury, who commissioned the building, make his fortune? How has the building been used? How has it fit into a larger pattern of urban development in downtown Los Angeles?

<sup>13</sup> Stephen Wearing, Deborah Stevenson, and Tamara Young, *Tourist Cultures: Identity, Place and the Traveller* (London: Sage, 2010), 10.

<sup>14</sup> Wearing et al., 11-12.

<sup>15</sup> These include ecotourism, which seeks to reduce tourism's negative environmental impacts in order to preserve the sustainability and health of local host communities; and volunteer-oriented tourism, such as alternative spring break programs, which use the labor and capital of tourists/students to address the needs of host communities; see, for example, Ralf Buckley, *Ecotourism: Principles and Practices* (Cambridge University Press, 2009); and Lisa Mastny, *Traveling Light: New Paths for International Tourism* (Washington DC: World Watch Institute, 2001). Given the wide range of such programs that exist, their effectiveness is, of course, mixed. At their best, such initiatives develop



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long-term commitments to environmental and/or social justice among the touring participants and deepen relationships between host and tourist locales, while meeting the needs of host communities as defined by them. Yet, without deliberate, purposeful reflection on the structures of inequality, power, and privilege that pervade the very relationships that bring tourist and host together (for a good example of this kind of structured reflection, see the Grassroots Community Development alternative spring break course at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst: [www.umass.edu/uact/syllabus\\_web.pdf](http://www.umass.edu/uact/syllabus_web.pdf)), such programs risk becoming another kind of liberal, “feel-good,” charity without improving the capacity of host communities to determine and realize their own goals. Furthermore, some alternative tour programs are organized by individuals and companies driven by the profit motive and foremost attentive to the interests of a privileged consumer; thus, they remain structured into local and global political-economic relationships of power, even though they accomplish ends that might be considered more socially or environmentally desirable.

<sup>16</sup> Jack Mezirow, “Transformative Learning: Theory to Practice,” *New Directions for Adults and Continuing Education* 74 (1997): 5-12.

<sup>17</sup> Kiran Cunningham, “Putting the Anthropological Toolkit to Use in International and Intercultural Learning,” *Practicing Anthropology* 32, no. 3 (2010): 25.

<sup>18</sup> Scott Wurdinger and Julie Carlson, *Teaching for Experiential Learning: Five Approaches that Work* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010), 8.

<sup>19</sup> For a helpful review of this research, see Wurdinger and Carlson, 47-49.

<sup>20</sup> Mark Graham, “Art, ecology, and art education: Locating art education in a critical place-based pedagogy,” *Studies in Art Education* 46, no. 4 (2007): 375-390; David Gruenewald, “Foundations of Place: A multidisciplinary framework for place-conscious education,” *American Educational Research Journal* 40, no. 3 (2003): 619-654; Claudia Ruitenberg, “Deconstructing the experience of the local: Toward a radical pedagogy of place,” in *Philosophy of Education Yearbook* (New York: H W Wilson, 2005), 12-20.

<sup>21</sup> Available at [http://www.countercartographies.org/component/docman/cat\\_view/22-maps](http://www.countercartographies.org/component/docman/cat_view/22-maps).

<sup>22</sup> Louise Chawla and Myriam Escalante, *Student Gains from Place-Based Education* (Denver: Children, Youth, and Environments Center for Research and Design, 2007).

<sup>23</sup> Wurdinger and Carlson, 84.

<sup>24</sup> David Stovall, Ariel Calderon, Luis Carrera, and Sedrick King, “Youth, Media, and Justice: Lessons from the Chicago Doc Your Bloc Project,” *The Radical Teacher* 86 (2009): 50-58.

<sup>25</sup> Catherine Michna, “Stories at the Center: Story Circles, Educational Organizing, and Fate of Neighborhood Public Schools in New Orleans,” *American Quarterly* 61, no. 3 (2009): 532, 546.

<sup>26</sup> Kevin Ward, “Geography and public policy: towards public geographies,” *Progress in Human Geography* 30, no. 4 (2006): 500.

<sup>27</sup> In this regard the project differs from “community-based” or “service” learning, in which the institution as well as faculty and students have specific moral and ethical responsibilities to community entities. For an overview of these issues, see Sean Creighton, “The Scholarship of Community Partner Voice,” *Higher Education Exchange* (2007): 12-22.