

World on the Move: A Traveling Exhibition about Migration and Displacement, and Its “Crossroads” Narrative Device

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Abstract:

Most exhibitions about migration and displacement put the visitor at a destination where they consider who was there earlier, who came later, how these later arrivals adjusted to new surroundings, and how the hosts adjusted to the late-comers. In contrast, for *World on the Move: 250,000 Years of Human Migration*, we have employed the “Crossroads” device, where the exhibition visitor has a vantage point from which they regard multiple movement flows without the othering, highlighting how everyone has a migration story somewhere in their family history. The traveling exhibition, a project involving the American Anthropological Association, the Smithsonian, and the American Library Association, is bringing current scholarship to light to help change the public conversation about migration and displacement. While commonly framed as a modern-day crisis, we know that human populations have always been on the move. Gathering, hunting, and pastoral nomadism involved patterns of seasonal and multi-year migratory cycles. Commerce, contact, conflict, and natural disasters have propelled further movement, sometimes voluntarily but often under duress and coercion. Our treatment of this history highlights a range of responses, intentionally framed broadly, reflecting the grand historical scope of the story of human migration. The framing device of the Crossroads fixes the visitor’s gaze on movements across the landscape over time, whether seeking economic opportunity, escaping conflict and harm, coerced by trafficking or enslavement, or displaced by gentrification, natural disasters, and global environmental change.



Photographer: Nell Haynes – Wherever we are, mobile phones are an essential affordance of our daily lives on the move.

Introduction

World on the Move: 250,000 Years of Human Migration brings together the current state of knowledge about migration and displacement to reach a variety of audiences, including school children and their families, educators, and community-based organizations, aiming to reframe the ways in which we think—and talk—about migration. *World on the Move* challenges people to consider the scale, composition, and time-depth of human population movements, the ways in which research on migration and displacement have been used (and misused) to support public policy, and the lived experiences of individuals, families, and communities on the move.

We hear a great deal of talk these days about how we move around much more than we used to. We also hear about what this moving does to our communities—and it often is not good news. Economic hardships, a shortage of affordable housing, religious persecution, the threat of disease, and even the effects of climate change may force people to move. People may also move in search of economic and educational opportunity. At the end of a migrant family's journey, sometimes the reception is a hearty embrace. But the reception is not always

with open arms. In some places, there is concern that “too many” immigrants will take away jobs, or “change the character” of a place beyond recognition.

Drawing on a wealth of case studies from across human history and the breadth of cultures, *World on the Move* aims to help people appreciate migration histories—their own and those of others. The exhibition is designed to travel to public libraries, museums, and community centers around the world for a target audience of primary and secondary school-age visitors. As host institutions may not have educators or docents on hand to actively guide and interact with visitors, the exhibition design accommodates flexible self-navigation, with modular panel displays and accessible interactive components. Host institutions may customize their presentations with displays featuring local stories and public programs.

With this exhibition, the goal is to inspire visitors to:

- Be curious about the long history of human migration
- Appreciate the complexity and diversity of migration stories
- Recognize that migration is a shared human experience
- Feel safe to discuss issues surrounding migration
- Share migration stories with family members, neighbors, and friends
- Feel proud of their family’s migration stories
- Gain greater empathy toward migrants in their communities and elsewhere
- Ask critical questions about migration
- Consider their beliefs and opinions about migration

One may notice that the goals are as affective as they are cognitive. In other words, the exhibition does not directly ask visitors to identify the migration routes through which humans have come to populate the world, or the types of evidence that have enabled researchers to recreate these routes, as a classroom teacher might do. Instead, we mean for visitors to *be curious, appreciate complexity, share stories, and feel proud.*

Prevailing Exhibition Narratives

Our narrative approach differs from the typical exhibition narrative structure. Most public exhibitions focusing on migration and displacement use a geographic reference frame involving places of origin and destination, with a narrative that emphasizes the destination as the receiver and host of successive waves of new arrivals. At France’s National Immigration Museum in Paris, for example, the central problem of the long-term exhibition on display is one of “how to represent two centuries of immigration in France?” The exhibition invites the visitor to follow the main steps of the path that immigrants experience in adapting to a new home in a sometimes welcoming, more frequently hostile France.

At Britain’s Migration Museum in Manchester, the prologue label text sets the tone of the exhibition by quoting Robert Winder’s *Bloody Foreigners: The Story of Immigration to Britain*. Winder observed, “Ever since the first Jute, the first Saxon, the first Roman and the first Dane leaped off their boats and planted their feet on British mud, we have been a migrant nation. Our roots are neither clean nor straight, they are impossibly tangled.”

And in the United States, the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History presents *Many Voices, One Nation*, a long-term exhibition that takes visitors through a

chronology of migrants “settling in” and “unsettling” America. It advances a narrative of diverse populations blending or co-existing in service to the project of nation building.

As a traveling exhibition, *World on the Move* is not tied to a home institution and is not committed to tell the story of any particular region. Instead, it takes a more encompassing view that centers less on one specific place, and more on the patterns and processes of migration and displacement. It is necessary to complicate the orderly sense of place and time packed into this narrative structure. The exhibition resists the framing that begins with a privileged “we,” most typically corresponding to the imagined community of a nation-state, and the challenges presented by the arrival of a foreign “they.” And it calls attention to the way such stories often rely heavily on a rational choice-making model of individual decision-making to account for when, where, and why people move.

The linear narrative structure—people come from there (a place of origin) and move here (a destination)—does not account for cyclical movement over seasonal, annual, lifetime, and inter-generational patterns. It cannot neatly account for agricultural and construction workers who shift locations with short-term employment prospects, for children who shuttle between rural and urban family members along with the yearly school calendar, for retirees and pensioners who divide their time between places, or who relocate for care-giving or cost of living accommodations, or for refugee and asylum seekers who retain a strong inclination to return—or enable their children to return once conflict subsides.

The use of “push-pull” factors to explain migration dismisses altogether the coercive conditions of enslavement and trafficking, while discounting the widely prevalent circumstances in which the social production of vulnerabilities leaves individuals and families with no good options. Our decisions to move are usually influenced by forces beyond our control, such as where and when we were born and what political, economic, and environmental conditions are like in our area. Migrants are often forced to choose between equally bad options. Stay and you may face difficulties and danger. Leave and you may face an uncertain future in a place you know nothing about and where you know no one.

A narrative that involves the origin/destination binary, when coupled with the push-pull rational choice model, reinforces inequities that must be named. It reinforces the structure of hierarchies—people from some places of origin and for selected reasons are more worthy than others of a welcome reception at their intended destination. In a world where nearly everyone has a story of migration or displacement somewhere in their family history, we believe that it is time to change the narrative and the public conversation to better understand our own stories and the stories of others.

The “Crossroads” Narrative Device

For *World on the Move*, “Crossroads” has been chosen as a narrative device to tell the story of migration and displacement from a different, and hopefully thought-provoking, perspective. Crossroads are intersections where people from different places meet. Crossroads also symbolize connections between cultures and moments when crucial decisions are made. Placing exhibition visitors at selected crossroads affords them a vantage point from which to observe the gatherings and movements of people at and through an intersection. It’s also an accessible concept that even people from regions not represented in the exhibition may apply

to their communities and experiences.

While a fair amount of time, thought and research has gone into selecting crossroads locations, retelling their stories and curating engaging illustrations of them, we recognize that no amount of text on a wall display will fulfill our empathy-building goals. To prompt introspection and conversation, the stories we provide are complemented by a series of interactive components that draw on the principle of *designing for empathy* (Gokcigdem, 2016), which envisions the exhibition visitor, envisioned in our case as school-age youth, developing a compassionate worldview. These activities allow visitors to respond to what they have read, tell their own stories, and record their thoughts and responses for the benefit of subsequent visitors.

The first interactive module features a world map with the continents shaded in different colors and the questions, *Where did you come from? Why did you move?* Visitors are instructed to think of a migration story in their own or their family's experience, take a token colored to match the place of origin, and drop it into an acrylic tube with the label that best fits their circumstances:

- We moved to seek a better life.
- We moved to be with family.
- We moved to escape harm.
- We were forced to move.
- We moved for another reason.
- We have always lived here.
- We have always been on the move.



These elevations produced by Smithsonian Exhibits reflect 65 percent content and design development for the exhibition.

When our pilot testers, high school students in Washington, D.C., came to this activity, their reflections were not limited to traditional immigrant narratives of cross-border relocation and settlement. They also spoke of families who had migrated from the American South; families who had long-time presence in D.C. and were forced to leave their neighborhood; exchange students who had moved temporarily to another country, just for the experience, before returning home; and distant relatives scattered across the globe. They also looked at the tokens that had already been placed and wondered about their friends' and neighbors' stories. The activity reveals that the visitor's hometown or current residence, wherever it may be, is itself a crossroads with its own constellation of migration stories old and new.

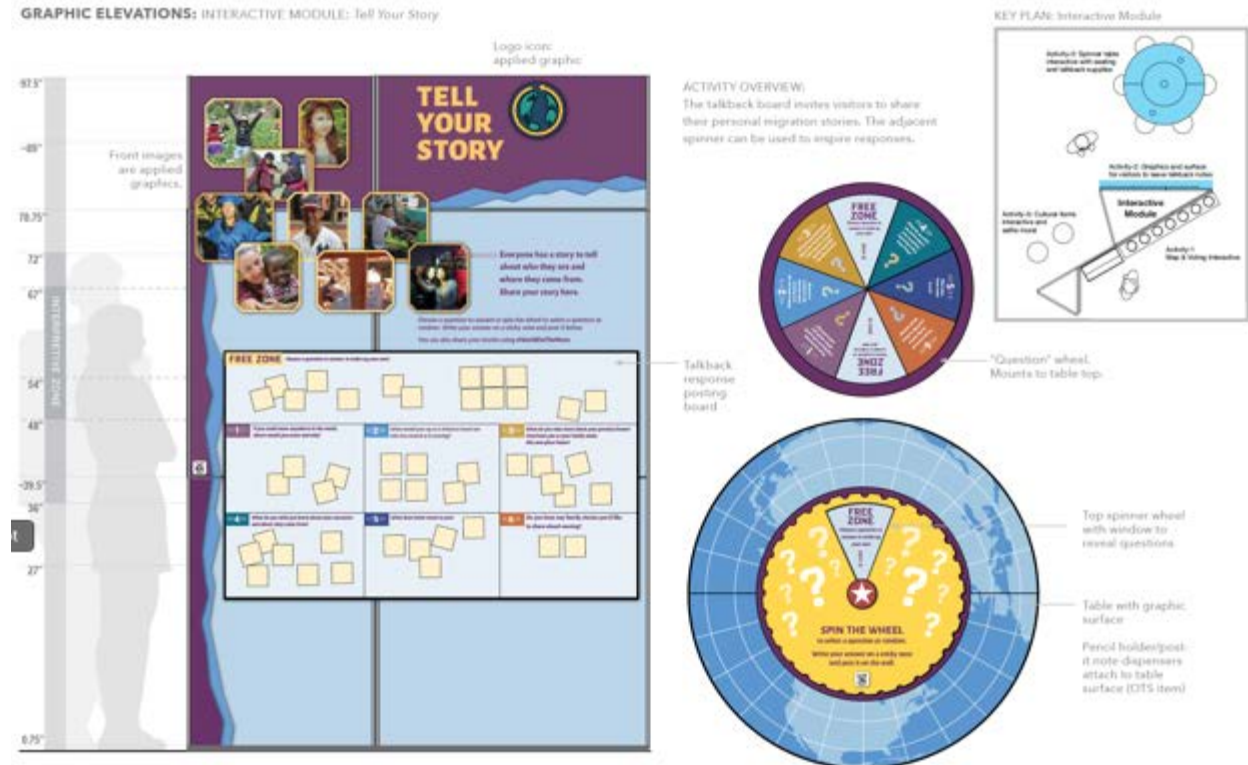
The second activity features a large illustration of a suitcase with the label, *What would you bring?* The panel is magnetic, and illustrated icons are available for visitors to place on it: a cell phone, a family photo album, a camping lantern, a soccer ball, a bottle of hot sauce. To make this decision, pilot testers imagined themselves in the migrant's circumstances and the difficult choices they might face. They asked us, "Why would I need a lantern? Am I planning to move or am I running away in the middle of the night?" They wanted to bring their favorite snacks to remind them of home, but at the same time realized that toothpaste and prescription medications would be more urgent needs, and recognized that this might pose a true dilemma. What happens when our need to survive conflicts with our need to remember where we come from? What will become of us then?

GRAPHIC ELEVATIONS: INTERACTIVE MODULE: What Would You Bring?



The third activity, *Tell your story*, features a spinner with discussion questions: "If you could move anywhere in the world, where would you move, and why?" "What do you wish you knew about your ancestors and where they came from?" "What does *home* mean to you?" Post-it notes are provided, and space is available on the wall for visitors to post their responses. Once enough visitors have come through the exhibition and participated in this activity, we

imagine that the wall of sticky notes will become a living record of community members’ dreams and stories. Where the map activity allows visitors to look holistically and take in the scope of their community’s diversity, the discussion questions encourage them instead to drill down on details; as anthropologists know well, each data point is a snapshot that reflects an entire world.



The exhibition also creates opportunities for local adaptation. Space is provided for relevant books and artifacts from libraries’ own collections or on loan from community members, and host libraries will also be expected to partner with local organizations and other experts to offer public programming on related topics. We are also developing a project website that complements the physical exhibition, not only with in-depth research and pedagogical resources, but also including features that expand the interactivity into virtual space. For example, the *World on the Move Community Scrapbook* offers an online form through which visitors can “share photos, recipes, jokes, song lyrics, or anything else that reflects [their] migration story.” These submissions can then be compiled into a book or slideshow, an enduring document that can travel with the exhibition while also remaining in each host institution as a record of its time hosting *World on the Move*. In this way, host libraries will deepen not only their partnerships with community organizations, but also their institutional knowledge about the communities they serve.

“Crossroads” in Exhibition Content

Interactive components help visitors see their own community as a place where people have always come, gone, transited, and stayed. To complement this, the exhibition presents

stories from selected crossroads locations that are of particular historical salience and clearly illustrate patterns and processes of migration and displacement. For starters, we have chosen to feature four crossroads locations: the Mediterranean, Beringia, Central Africa, and East Los Angeles. We could have selected others distributed around the globe, of course, and the traveling exhibition is designed to expand to accommodate additional stories that illuminate local lived experiences. At its core is the age-old social sciences debate about the combined explanatory power of “agency” and “structure.” The “Crossroads” concept is a corrective for the current over-emphasis on individual agency in understanding migration. In each of the selected Crossroads places we are able to demonstrate a rich and variegated history of people on the move, for a variety of reasons, with profound changes resulting from encounters between peoples from different places and backgrounds, setting and resetting the local and regional stage for changes yet to come.

The Mediterranean Basin

Throughout history, one could stand on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea and watch much of the world go by. The ancient Phoenician, Greek, and Roman civilizations rose and fell along the Mediterranean’s shores. The region was also home to the Ottoman Empire, which controlled much of North Africa, the Middle East, and southeastern Europe for nearly 600 years. Today, the Mediterranean Basin remains a crossroads for people risking their lives to flee dangerous conditions in North Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East.

Where in the world is the Mediterranean?

The Mediterranean Sea is connected to the Atlantic Ocean at its western end through the narrow Strait of Gibraltar, and to the Black Sea at its northeastern end through the Bosphorus Strait. Several areas of water, such as the Aegean and Adriatic Seas, are part of the overall Mediterranean basin, which is otherwise surrounded by land, with southern Europe forming its northern coastline, northern Africa forming its southern coastline, and Turkey and the Middle Eastern countries of Syria, Lebanon, and Israel forming its eastern coastline. From west to east, the Mediterranean Sea extends about 4,000 km (2,500 miles), and at its widest point, is about 800 km (500 miles) north to south.

The sea, the islands it surrounds, and the coastal basin that it forms have been major thoroughfares for trade, imperial conquest, and transcontinental cultural exchange for nearly 200,000 years. Data from the Misliya Cave in what is now Israel indicate human presence between 170,000–190,000 years ago (Hershkowitz et al., 2018). Archaeological evidence from coastal Greek sites show human settlements between 130,000–160,000 years ago (Harvati, Panagopoulou, and Runnels, 2009). Knowing that Crete has been separated from the mainland throughout the Pleistocene, evidence of human settlements on Crete during the late Middle or early Late Pleistocene (120,000–80,000 years ago) suggests that people were able to cross open water by then (Strasser et al., 2011).

Who lives in the Mediterranean now?

Looking at a map and starting from the west, the countries of the Mediterranean basin, in counter-clockwise order, include Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Israel, Lebanon,

Syria, Turkey, Greece, Albania, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Slovenia, Italy, Monaco, France, and Spain. Cyprus and Malta are island countries surrounded by the Mediterranean Sea.



Source: By Janwillemvanaalst - Own work, CC BY 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=92163949>

Who passed through here? Where were they headed? And what remains that marks their presence here?

Although evidence of human settlement in the Mediterranean basin is found as long as 200,000 years ago, until the emergence of sedentary agriculture in the region about 9,000 years ago, livelihoods were made by hunting, fishing, and gathering plants. This means that *everyone* was on the move in well-established seasonal patterns, shaped by variations in topography and weather (Headland et al., 1989).

With the advent of increasingly intensive forms of agriculture, ever larger permanent settlements such as Alexandria were possible, drawing people to population centers, leading to distinct specialties in livelihood and centralized authorities for supporting, coordinating, and controlling the production, distribution and exchange of goods and services—in short, “civilization.” Several civilizations emerged along the Mediterranean coasts, taking advantage of the sea for fishing as well as trade routes, colonization, and conquest.

These civilizations included the Phoenicians, the Egyptians, the Greeks, and the Romans. As the Roman Empire was in eclipse, the Byzantine Empire formed in the 4th century, and about three centuries later the rapid spread of Islam across the Mediterranean basin gave rise to the Arab Empire, which lasted well into the 13th century. Viking expansion from the north between the 8th and 11th centuries extended its reach to include trade and settlement along the coast of Spain and southern Italy.

By the 14th century, mercantile states like Genoa and Venice controlled much of the trade with central and eastern Asia that came by land over the Silk Road routes and further west around the Mediterranean basin by ship.

By the 15th century, the Ottomans expanded their control of Mediterranean shipping lanes, first by conquest of the Byzantine Empire, and then making their way west to establish naval outposts along the coasts of France, Tunisia, and Algeria in the 16th century. Also along the coast of North Africa, from western Libya to Morocco (called the “Barbary Coast” by the Greeks), bands of Berbers monitored the sea trade, taking cargo and enslaving crew and passengers. The so-called “Barbary pirates” also raided coastal towns in Italy, France, Spain, Ireland, and England, capturing residents and selling them in Ottoman slave markets. As many as one million people may have been enslaved between 1500–1800.

When the Suez Canal opened in 1869, it connected the Mediterranean with the Red Sea with a lockless waterway that cut weeks off the mercantile trip between Europe and East Africa and Asia. From these regions, people and cargo flowed into southern European ports in unprecedented numbers. Throughout the late 19th to mid-20th century, war and conflict in the Mediterranean basin displaced millions, pushing people from southern Europe to northern Europe and North America, and to Australia as well. In 1948, shortly after the end of the Second World War, the United Nations established the State of Israel in territory carved from the British colony of Palestine, displacing thousands of Palestinians, and inviting Jews who had been displaced by the Nazis and Fascists, and who had survived the Holocaust, to move to Israel.

Since the end of the Second World War, agricultural innovations, off-shoring of industrial operations, the fall of the Soviet state, increasing globalization of the production of goods and services, and ongoing conflicts over land and resources throughout the Balkans, the Middle East, and the African continent have combined to propel peoples’ movements, from rural to urban areas, fleeing war and religious persecution, or seeking economic and educational opportunities for themselves and their families that have been either temporarily or permanently foreclosed in their homelands.

In the 21st century, the Mediterranean has been the scene of a dramatic increase in refugees and asylum seekers crossing from North Africa to escape harsh economic conditions in sub-Saharan Africa and war and conflict in the Middle East. More than three million asylum seekers arrived in Europe between 2013–2019, and at its peak in 2015, more than one million migrants crossed the Mediterranean into Europe in a single year (UNHCR, 2015). Their reception in different European countries has ranged from warm and welcoming to outright hostility and strenuous efforts to block these new arrivals (Kyriakopoulos, 2019).

...Lampedusa now bears an enormous burden of pain. We have had to go through the Prefecture to ask other boroughs for help in order to provide the last 11 corpses with a dignified burial as we have no more sites available. I know there will be others that we will bury, but I have one question which I must address to everyone: just how large exactly does the cemetery on my island need to be?

Open letter from the Mayor of Lampedusa to the European Union, 15 Nov 2012

What other places in the world are like the Mediterranean?

In many respects, the South China Sea has some striking similarities to the Mediterranean crossroads. The southern China coast forms its northern boundary. To the east are Taiwan and the Philippines, and to the south are Borneo and Sumatra, parts of modern-day Indonesia. To the west is the Indochinese Peninsula, including Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam. A visitor standing on any of these shores would see an enormous amount of maritime shipping, highly productive fisheries, extensive mineral and petroleum reserves, and, of course a legacy of diverse cultural heritages stretching back millennia. Archaeological evidence indicates early human migration routes and settlement locations between 60,000–70,000 years ago through what is now Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, and the Philippines on the way to Indonesia and Australia. Coastal navigation in outrigger boats and ocean-going catamarans may have begun about the time of the Phoenicians in the Mediterranean, and early agriculture emerged 4,000 years ago in the area.

Beringia

Bridging the now-submerged Bering land bridge between Asia and North America, Beringia has long served as a passageway between continents. Throughout history, people have crossed Beringia by land and by sea under very different environmental conditions. During the last ice age, more than 14,000 years ago, people crossed Beringia, with some making permanent settlements there while others rapidly populated the entire western hemisphere. Today, climate change threatens to force the region's residents to leave their homes or adapt to new ways of life.

Where in the world is Beringia?

Beringia is a geographic name that remains largely unknown to many people even though it is one of the world's most pivotal crossroads by virtue of its connecting the two continents of Asia and North America. One reason for its relative obscurity is that the name did not exist until 1937 when the Swedish botanist Eric Hultén coined the term in his study of plant species during and after periods of glaciation (1937:34). Another reason is that key sections of Beringia have been submerged below the Bering and Chukchi Seas for at least the past 12,000 years. So far as we know, there is no other place on earth that is comparable to Beringia in terms of both its natural and human history.

The precise geographic boundaries of Beringia are fluid. Expanding Hultén's concept of "the immense unglaciated areas of Alaska and the adjacent regions of northwestern Canada and northeastern Russia," the current consensus is that Beringia encompasses "the entire region between the Lena River in northeast Russia, and the Mackenzie River in northwest Canada" (Ickert-Bond et al., 2009:26). One analysis of Beringian landscapes divides the crossroads area into three distinct ecologies. Western Beringia in northeastern Russia consists of "steep mountain ranges attaining heights of 2,000–3,000 meters" through which traverse the "northward-flowing river basins of the Lena, Indigirka, and Kolyma" (Hoffecker and Elias, 2007:26). Central Beringia is now largely submerged. During the time of Pleistocene glaciations, however, when "global sea level fell 120–130 meters below modern sea level," the Bering Land Bridge had "formed a broad connection between northeastern Siberia and western Alaska"

(Hoffecker and Elias, 2007:28). Eastern Beringia covers portions of present-day Alaska, Yukon Territory, and Northwest Territories.

We do not know who the first people were to move across Beringia, but speculate that they were following herds of game animals, sea mammals, and migratory fish whose foraging ranges and spawning grounds were affected by environmental changes. We do know that “genetic and linguistic data suggest movements in both directions” (Hoffecker, 2017:305), and archaeological evidence suggests these movements were on land as well as coastal water routes. We also know that archaeologists have now updated previous views about the peopling of the Americas (Bratje et al., 2017). Until recently, the prevailing wisdom was that the earliest arrivals to North America involved foot traffic through glacial gaps. A growing body of evidence indicates that “maritime explorers voyaged by boat out of Beringia...about 16,000 years ago and quickly moved down the Pacific coast, reaching Chile by at least 14,500 years ago” (Wade, 2017:542).

Beringia has long been rich in opportunities for food and shelter, with an abundance of fish, migratory birds, sea mammals (including otters, seals, walruses, and whales), and land mammals (including bears, beavers, caribou, moose, and reindeer). One constant throughout human history is that the inhabitants of Beringia depend on fishing and hunting, and move around seasonally for their subsistence. Their livelihoods depend on local knowledge and careful observation of changes in their environment. To this day, in the State of Alaska about one in six resident households live outside of urban areas, and practically all of these households depend on subsistence fishing and hunting (Alaska Department of Fish and Game, 2017).



Traveling with a team of reindeer, 1922, Alaska. Frank and Frances Carpenter Collection, Library of Congress.
<https://www.loc.gov/item/99615141/>

Who lives in Beringia now?

The present-day inhabitants of Western Beringia are extremely varied and often inaccurately identified, due in part to Soviet-era scholars who asked questions that were “specific to their ideological situation” and who placed Indigenous peoples “in a Marxist evolutionary framework” (Vitebsky and Alekseyev, 2015:439). Even today, the “census categories and figures are questionable” especially for identifiable groups of Indigenous

peoples (Vitebsky and Alekseyev, 2015:440). Soviet anthropologists recognized 26 different Indigenous groups, but “with increasing subdivision, more than 40 are recognized currently” (Vitebsky and Alekseyev, 2015:440). These include the Chukchi and Yupik people—numbering in the hundreds—who practice whaling in the Chukchi and Bering seas; the Sakha (also known as Yakut) who practice horse and cattle herding in far western Beringia and who may number close to 500,000; and the Evenki and Even (also known as Lamut) whose culture and economy were formerly “based on reindeer herding and hunting” (Arutiunov, 1988:36), but who have shifted in post-Soviet times “from reindeer husbandry to reindeer hunting” (Takakura, 2012:42).

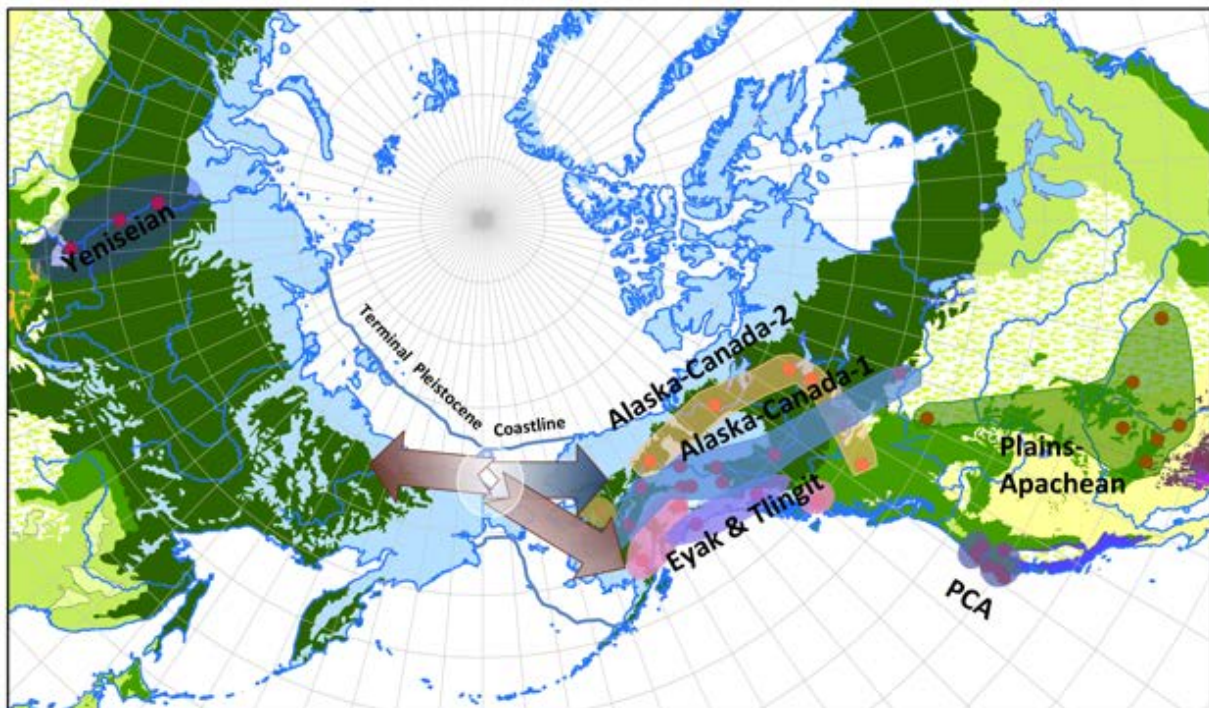
During the Soviet era, non-Indigenous peoples—primarily Russians, Belorussians, and Ukrainians—temporarily migrated to Western Beringia due to “a combination of Soviet planned economic incentives and state-regulated migration” (Crate, 2013:6). However, the collapse of the Soviet Union brought an end to state subsidies and many large industrial projects, which triggered a return of those temporary migrants to their homes in Belarus, Ukraine, and western Russia. For instance, the population of the Chukotka Autonomous Okrug (the most northeasterly region in Russia) decreased 68.9 percent from 1989 to 2013—which was the largest percentage drop of any region in the Russian North (Heleniak, 2017:71).

The present-day inhabitants of Eastern Beringia are much better documented, but also represent an extremely diverse group of peoples. Based on U.S. census returns from 2020, Alaska counted some 114,000 Native residents (or 15.6 percent of the state population). The primary cultural and linguistic groups were “Inupiat, Yupik, Athabaskan, Aleut, Tlingit, and Haida, organized into some 226 tribes,” with many living in “more than 200 rural villages, most of which are remote settlements with fewer than 200 people each” (Hudson, 2011:378). Note that these statistics also include settlements in more densely populated southeastern Alaska, meaning that if restricted to Beringia the percentage of those living in remote settlements would presumably be even higher. For “northern Canada,” one recent study estimated 20,100 Athabaskans and 44,700 Inuit, but also concluded, “Despite the importance of indigenous people in the Arctic, there is no accurate estimate of their size and distribution” (Young and Bjerregaard, 2019:1, 12).

In contrast to Western Beringia, the overall population of Eastern Beringia has increased during the past thirty years. One factor was the Cold War and Alaska’s strategic far-north location across the Bering Strait from the Soviet Union. The result was a “militarized landscape” with soldiers and civilians “engaged in military construction and operations” (Hummel, 2005:50). When oil was discovered on Alaska’s North Slope in 1968, the existing military infrastructure literally paved the way for energy companies to exploit the natural resources. The defense industry had been Alaska’s “biggest employer and biggest spender from 1940 to 1970,” but was “overtaken by the oil industry when the North Slope fields started producing in 1977” (Hummel, 2005:58). Although northern Alaska is not experiencing a massive population boom as it did in the 1970s, its population—encompassing the North Slope Borough, Northwest Arctic Borough, and Nome Census Area—has been averaging a 4 percent annual increase from 2010 to 2019—the same rate as the Southwest Region, and topped only by the 5-percent rate for the region around Anchorage, where more than half the state’s population resides (Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, 2020: 53).

Who passed through here? Where were they headed? And what remains that marks their presence here?

Physical, tangible records of Beringia, and especially Central Beringia's land bridge, remain elusive. Genetic and botanical evidence suggest that Central Beringia "may have been a glacial refugium and postglacial center of dispersal for the people who first settled the Americas" (Hoffecker, Elias, and O'Rourke, 2014: 979). However, folklorists and anthropologists who have studied the intangible record, such as myths and legends, see direct connections between the Native peoples who crossed Beringia and those who settled in interior North America. For instance, one study of oral traditions suggests that "Verbal literature arguably preserves glimpses and echoes of the long-vanished Pleistocene world of our ancestors" (Echo-Hawk, 2000:273). More specifically, an origin story that refers to underground worlds from which "humans emerge to populate the earth" may be "a distorted remembrance of Beringia and the Arctic Circle" (Echo-Hawk, 2000:276). Other scholars recognize a wide range of "cultural ties" across the Bering Strait—from "plate and rod armor, the sinew-backed bow, wrist-guards, and sinew-twisters" to "Raven mythology" and "beliefs about similarly named evil spirits (*kele, kala, kalag*) and similar deities of the sky and sea world" (Fitzhugh 1994:33).



This polar projection map of Asia and North America shows the approximate terminal Pleistocene shoreline. The center of geographic distribution of Yeniseian and Na-Dene language is in Beringia. From this center burgundy arrows extend toward the North American coast and into Siberia. A blue arrow indicates Interior dispersals of Na-Dene.

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The melting of glaciers and rising sea levels from the start of the Holocene some 12,000

years ago have echoes today, as further climate change is raising both temperatures and sea levels. For instance, Point Hope, Alaska, in Eastern Beringia “is the northwesternmost settlement in North America and one of the longest continuously inhabited places in the Western Hemisphere” (Sakakibara, 2008:457). As the Chukchi Sea rises, already forcing the village’s Iñupiat inhabitants to move from “Old Town” to “New Town,” the stories that they tell not only reflect the environmental threats, but also serve “as a way of maintaining connectivity to a disappearing place” (Sakakibara, 2008:473). We must hope that Point Hope will not physically disappear like Central Beringia. But should that happen, the inhabitants’ oral traditions and verbal literature will still indelibly mark their passages and crossroads.



An aerial view of Point Hope in early Spring, Photographer: Dennis Davis

What other places in the world are like this one?

Although no other place on earth is quite like Beringia, there are many other places where climate change is causing the rise of sea levels and consequently the loss of land and communities. One example is a community of Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw Indians in Isle de Jean Charles, Terrebonne Parish, Louisiana, where “if nothing is done, the Isle will be gone before 2050” (Maldonado et al., 2014: 606). Not surprisingly, a multidisciplinary team of anthropologists, sociologists, and climate experts compared the situation in Louisiana with that of Beringia--specifically the communities of Kivalina and Newtok, Alaska--noting that these tribal communities “share a common fight to save their culture, ancestral land, and communities in the face of both the causes and effects of climate change” (Maldonado et al., 2014: 603). Other comparisons might be made to the Ganges–Brahmaputra–Meghna delta in Bangladesh, or island nations such as Tuvalu, Kiribati, the Maldives, and others.

Central Africa

At the heart of the world's longest-inhabited continent, Central Africa has always been a hub for movement. Merchants from across Africa traveled to and through the region to trade many things, including ivory, salt, copper, and oil. In the 17th and 18th centuries, millions of people were taken from their homes in Central Africa and sold into slavery. Central Africa remains a busy crossroads today, as people move to, from, and through the region, fleeing conflict and seeking educational and economic opportunity.

Where in the world is Central Africa?



Source: United Nations. Africa / Department of Field Support, Geospatial Information Section [Digital]. Scale approximately 1:3,000,000. Revision 8. New York: United Nations. June 2018. Original image is cropped and edited to outline Central African countries.

The Central Africa we know of today consists of eight countries: Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, São Tomé and Príncipe, Congo Republic-Brazzaville, and Gabon on the Atlantic coast to the west; and Chad, Central African Republic, and Democratic Republic of Congo in the interior. The map below shows the region and contemporary national borders.

Who lives in Central Africa now?

Today, various ethnic groups largely descended from Bantu speakers inhabit the seven mainland Central African countries. While their official languages reflect their colonial past

(e.g., French, English, and Spanish) common native languages are derived from Bantu (Herbert, 2002:53). Prior to the arrival of Portuguese explorers in 1470, the islands of São Tomé and Príncipe were uninhabited. Current inhabitants include descendants of Angolan slaves, people of Portuguese and African ancestry, Portuguese, and contract laborers from nearby countries. Unlike the other countries in Central Africa, the common languages spoken on the islands are not of Bantu origins.

Who passed through here? Where were they headed? And what remains that marks their presence here?

Africa has a rich migration history that is characterized by continuous waves of populations moving throughout the continent in pursuit of food, better shelter, and greater security (Akin, 1995:87). One of the more influential groups of migrants are the Bantu-speaking people who reshaped the ecological landscape of Central and Southern Africa. Their patterns of movement followed a new expanse of savannah lands that stretched from present-day Cameroon and Nigeria to the western and southern regions of Africa (Grollemund et al., 2015:1). Their legacy includes the hundreds of languages in the Bantu family that are now spoken throughout Central and Southern Africa, from Swahili, which is mainly spoken in Tanzania and Kenya, to the Bulu language of Cameroon and the Xhosa language of South Africa.

The genetic makeup and languages of the present-day inhabitants demonstrates that a wave of Bantu-speakers combined with existing communities of hunter-gatherers in the rainforest and savannas of Central Africa about 2,000 years ago (Michigan State University, n.d.). The cultivation of plants and the domestication of animals accompanied the Bantu-speakers' arrival, along with metallurgy, leading to the formation of more permanent sedentary settlements. Eventually, as early as the eighth century, the region's population became increasingly concentrated into larger communities that formed the basis of centralized governing systems ruling separate regions (Hiribarren, 2016:1). These kingdoms were positioned at strategic points along the salt, textile, and dried fish routes that spanned from the west and east coasts of Africa.

By the 15th century, long-distance trade routes linked China, northern India, Egypt and Europe, with the farthest southern tail of the route reaching northern and western Africa (Newitt, 2005:2). However, unlike other parts of the continent, Central Africa had very little contact with Muslim, Berber, and Arab traders (Michigan State University, n.d.). Insulation from the trade routes ended in 1483 when the Portuguese landed on the western shores of the Kongo kingdom (Michigan State University, n.d.). Driven by the potential of discovering new commercial routes from Africa to India, the source of the spice trade, Portuguese explorers began a quest to search for a sea passage in the interior of Africa (Newitt, 2005:6). There they encountered the Kongo Kingdom, established in the thirteenth century, which spanned from present-day Gabon to Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo. A trade relationship developed between the Portuguese and the Kingdom of Kongo as they exchanged material goods and enslaved people.

Central African goods were widely traded and highly prized abroad due to the fine quality of workmanship in manufactured items (Olguia, 2017:14). Due to the advances in native

forge technology and textile production, Central African-produced metals and cloths were of higher quality than that of their European counterparts (Olguia, 2017:14).

However, though trading of cloth, ivory, and copper was active, Portuguese merchants exchanged the value of practically all trade goods in Kongo to traffic in enslaved persons (Heywood, 2009:10). Slavery, as an institution, existed from the time that the Kongo Kingdom emerged as a dominant power in West Central Africa in the 14th century (Heywood, 2009:3). Based on oral traditions, it is believed that enslaved persons were captured during conflict with neighboring kingdoms. When the Portuguese and Kongo kingdom began their trade relationship, foreign-born citizens of other African kingdoms were used as a commodity because they had high monetary value in Portugal (Heywood, 2009:5). However, by the late 16th century, the political power of Kongo fragmented as rival contenders fought for the throne (Heywood, 2009:3). Without the protection of kings, Kongo citizens were exported to colonial territories (Heywood, 2009:3) as part of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in which 12.5 million Africans were enslaved and forced to migrate to the New World (Mintz, n.d.).

After the invasion and wresting of political control by Belgian, German, and French colonial powers beginning in the late 16th century, with British colonists arriving later, internal migration in Central Africa was limited to economic movements that supported colonial governments (Akin, 1995:89-90). From 1884-1885, European colonists convened at the Berlin Conference, also known as the "Scramble for Africa," to partition Central Africa into "spheres of influence, protectorates, and colonies" (Michalopoulos, 2016:1802). Because European colonists had limited knowledge of local culture, environment, and geography they imposed political borders that fractured kingdoms, clans, villages, language, and ethnic groups, setting the stage for civil and national wars as ethnic groups sought to regain control of ancestral lands (Michalopoulos, 2016:1810). The imposition of these arbitrary colonial boundaries also precipitated economic decline and poverty. Existing trade routes were restricted or blocked by new political borders (Michigan State University, n.d.). New trade routes concentrated the movement of inland goods to coastal areas for shipment (Michigan State University, n.d.). Many Central Africans were forced to migrate from landlocked countries to coastal ones to provide the labor that cleared the land and waterways for the harvesting and shipping of goods. This type of short-term, male-dominated, and seasonal migration following agricultural output of the coastal lands (Akin, 1995:90) replaced the free-moving migration patterns that characterized the land prior to colonial intervention.

Today, the legacy of European colonial control is reflected in the political borders of African countries and the lasting damage to and erasure of Indigenous languages and ethnicities. Although Africans began reclaiming their independence from European powers in the 1950s, the national borders drawn by colonists in the late 1800s have remained (Michalopoulos, 2016:1808-09).

The majority of the migration and displacement that persist throughout Central Africa today is intra-continental, the result of uneven economic, social, political, and ecological conditions (Adepoju, 2002:4). Much of this movement is undocumented, resulting from a long history of policed borders lacking physical landmarks and blurred distinctions between countries and regions where the same language and customs are shared (Akin, 1995:93). Some countries, such as Equatorial Guinea and São Tomé and Príncipe, have out-migration rates that

far exceed global averages due to the many students, skilled workers, and temporary workers departing for international destinations (Shimeles, 2010:7-8). The movement of skilled workers out of the region is sometimes referred to as a “brain drain” because it involves the relocation of highly-educated citizens to former colonial powers for employment opportunities. In Equatorial Guinea, skilled workers who in the past might have emigrated to Spain for employment shifted instead to Gabon due to an economic boom (Adepoju, 2002:6; and Shimeles, 2010:12). This pattern is described as “brain circulation” and may characterize the future of Central African migration (Adepoju, 2002:6).

A second type of migration is caused by desertification and declining agricultural production. For example, workers in the northern region of Chad are being forced by environmental changes to pursue temporary and seasonal work in Cameroon, Congo, Gabon, and the Central African Republic (Adepoju, 2002:7).

What other places in the world are like this one?

Another crossroads region that has some similarities to Central Africa is Central America. The rise and spread of Mayan culture throughout Central America, accompanied by increasing agricultural intensification, disrupted by the arrival of settler colonists and the establishment of arbitrary colonial borders all contribute to a familiar pattern. The colonial establishment of infrastructure that served the appropriation and export of mineral wealth and agricultural products left a legacy in the post-colonial era that has perpetuated economic inequities and the economic migration of many to large urban centers in the region or away from the region to flee conflict and violence and seek economic and educational opportunities elsewhere.

East Los Angeles

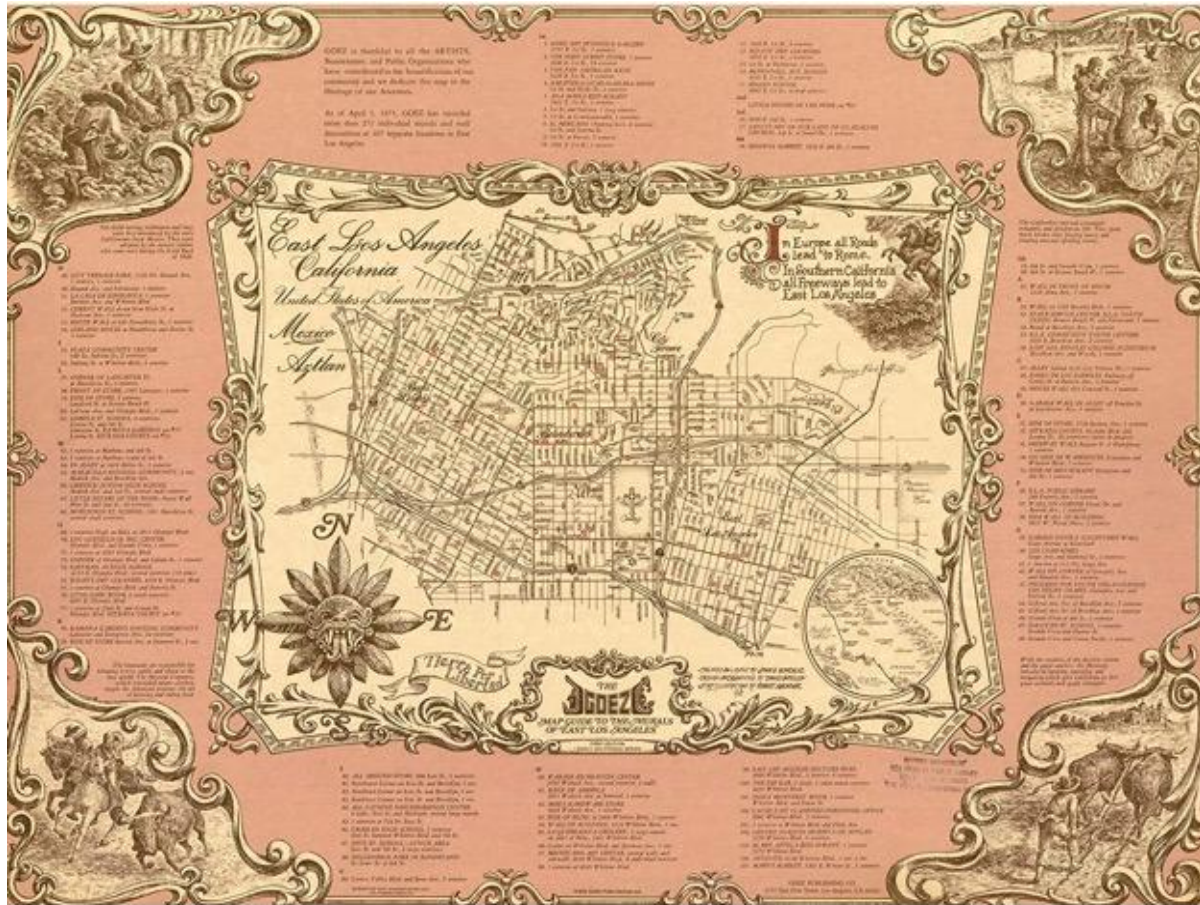
East Los Angeles is a cultural hub and a powerful symbol of place-based identity. It has witnessed ancient trade relations between Indigenous peoples, Spanish colonialism, Mexican independence, U.S. statehood, and more recent waves of immigration. Today, East L.A. is home to one of the largest Mexican American populations in the U.S., as well as people from other parts of the world.

Where in the world is East L.A.?

East L.A. encompasses about 50 square kilometers (20 square miles) in Southern California. Located 225 km (140 miles) north of the Mexico border on the Pacific coast, East L.A. is a crossroads within a crossroads.

The settlement that became Los Angeles was established as a northern outpost of colonial New Spain on the western bank of el Río de la Porciúncula, the only year-round waterway in a drought-prone region. Today it is known as the Los Angeles River, and the communities that developed along the river’s eastern bank are often described collectively as “East L.A.” Sometimes reductively imagined as an immigrant barrio plagued by social problems, East L.A. is also celebrated as an influential site of Chicano political activism and cultural

production.



Goez Map Guide to the Murals of East Los Angeles is a lithograph print produced in 1975 by Goez Publishing Co. in East L.A. Illustration, design, and research by Johnny Gonzalez, David Botello, Robert Arenivar, and Lupe Botello.

Six freeways plus the sprawling East L.A. Interchange form a major transportation crossroads. About 1.7 million vehicles daily travel these roadways, situating East L.A. at the intersection of south-north and west-east axes reaching from Mexico to Canada, from the Pacific to the Atlantic.

Who lives in East LA now?

Today, East L.A. is a working-class immigrant area crossed by commercial corridors and edged by industrial zones. More than 90 percent of area residents are Latino including recently-arrived immigrants escaping precarious conditions in Central America and Mexico, American-born generations, and long-term residents. In recent years, some East L.A. neighborhoods, especially Boyle Heights, have become destinations for upwardly mobile homebuyers and businesses, resulting in conflicts with longer-term residents over gentrification.

Who passed through here? Where were they headed? And what remains that marks their

presence here?

The villagers of Apachiagna are the earliest residents of what is now East L.A (Weltz, 1962, Torres et al., n.d., and Metzli Projects, n.d.). The Tongva, or Gabrielino, as they refer to themselves today, moved into the area as far back as 7,000 years ago from the Great Basin regions of Utah and Nevada (800–1,200 km to the northeast), eventually displacing the people who had preceded them. Originally hunter-gatherers, The Gabrielino-Tongva adapted effectively to the local environment and prospered, developing an extensive network across which food and trade goods were exchanged, along with stories, songs, and ceremonies over land and along the sea coast.

In the 18th century, the Spanish expanded their colonial settlements into the region from the south. They relied on Native knowledge and labor to establish a northern outpost of Spain's empire. The Gabrielino-Tongva were either absorbed into, displaced by, or excluded from the growing Spanish settlement, which developed on the western edge of the L.A. River. Lands on the river's east side were primarily used for cattle grazing and agriculture during the subsequent period of Mexican independence (beginning in 1822).

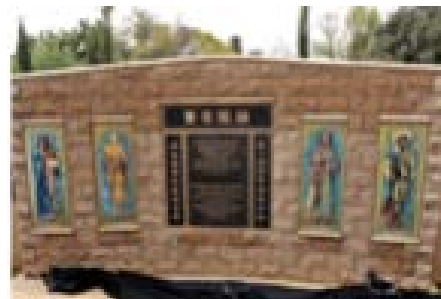
Two important things happened in 1848. The US-Mexico War established American rule in California, and gold was discovered near present-day Sacramento, about 400 miles (640 km) north of Los Angeles, and "the world rushed in" (Holliday, 1981). Los Angeles cattle ranchers prospered and the city grew as a regional trading center, provisioning fortune-seekers from across the globe. Among these were the speculators who invested in the first residential subdivisions of land that would become East L.A.

With the arrival of the railroad in the 1870s, Los Angeles expanded into a metropolitan center. An affluent suburb in the early days of this growth, the communities east of the Los Angeles River would become more diverse and working class as wealthy residents moved to newer, more homogeneously "Anglo" areas. New arrivals were driven by wars and poverty, attracted to jobs in nearby downtown industries, and excluded from other parts of the city by restrictive housing covenants. These newcomers built places of worship, dance halls, language schools, mutual aid societies, hospitals, and cemeteries, some of which remain today. Among the distinctive and particularly visible populations during this period were Mexicans uprooted by the Revolution of 1910–1917; the largest concentration of Jews west of the Mississippi River; Russian Molokans, Christian pacifists escaping mandatory conscription and religious persecution in Russia; Japanese Americans, as well as African Americans, Armenians, Syrians, Chinese, and Italians.

At the time, some observers were intrigued by the possibility of diverse community building at the crossroads . Others considered this diversity a liability—especially with respect to a working class, heavily immigrant population. Thus the area was vulnerable to policy interventions that destabilized and disenfranchised residents, often forcing them from the area (Sanchez, 2010). In the 1930s, thousands of local Mexicans were deported in a racial scapegoating move stemming from the economic strain of the Great Depression. Discriminatory policies designated East L.A. communities as high risks, which devalued property, curtailed local

home ownership, and paved the way for destructive urban renewal projects. During World War II, the city's entire Japanese American population was removed and incarcerated in inland camps. Starting in the 1940s, suburban expansion came disproportionately at the expense of East L.A. residents. The freeways routed through the area degraded the quality of life, separated families and entire communities, and displaced at least 10,000 residents.

The presence and pathways of earlier generations are recorded in the land. Archaeological findings confirm the wide-reaching trade networks of the Gabrielino-Tongva. Some municipal boundaries and thoroughfares correspond with ancient routes and former rancho boundaries (Nelson et al., 1964). In the built landscape, bygone people and events are remembered in monuments, buildings, place names, and public art. East L.A.'s many religiously and ethnically-specific cemeteries amark the passage of earlier generations of Catholic, Jewish, Chinese, Russian Molokan, and Serbian residents. Evergreen Cemetery, the city's oldest nondenominational burial ground, is an East L.A. landscape that embodies both the urge to remember and the ease of forgetting those who came before. The site is the final resting place of city leaders, veterans of conflicts dating back to the U.S.–Mexico War of 1848, indigent people, and regular folks who are memorialized on headstones in Armenian, English, Japanese, and Spanish.



In 2005, while preparing for a street-widening project alongside the cemetery, archaeologists working for the city's transportation authority discovered the graves of 174 people whose burial in a former "potter's" field had been covered over under 14-feet of dirt. DNA analysis of the human remains, and examination of the headstones and materials recovered from the graves, revealed that most were Chinese, likely railroad workers who had settled in the city in the late 1800s (Gust 2007, Goldstein and Sekhon 2012 Credit for excavated Chinese materials: Photo by and courtesy of Cogstone Resource Management, Inc.) Trilingual memorial wall in English, Spanish, and Chinese for the excavated "potters" field. Photo by Laura Dominguez, courtesy of the Los Angeles Conservancy.]

The influence and legacies of ancestors animate enduring social and cultural practices in East L.A.—from musical styles engendering hybridity to foodways. Current residents also evoke

with pride the history of local grassroots efforts to resist and organize for social justice. Today's activists build on this lineage and memorialize it creatively in song, place names, formal historic designations, and community events.



Today a powerful reminder of East L.A.'s ongoing struggles over space and newer gentrification threats is expressed in a mural on a public housing complex, Ramona Gardens, sponsored by the local councilman's office. Completed in 2008 by Raul González, Ricardo Estrada, and Joséph "Nuke" Montalvo, the mural "Conoce Tus Raíces" depicts Toyipurina, a local 24-year-old Indigenous woman who led a nearby rebellion against L.A.'s Spanish colonizers in 1784. Photo by Alan Nakagawa

What other places in the world are like this one?

With its history of ethnic succession and reputation as an immigrant enclave, East L.A. resembles other places where the interactions of diverse populations have shaped distinct heritages and surfaced structural inequalities. It resembles international cities, centers of trade, and urban districts from São Paulo to New Orleans, Singapore's Kampong Glam neighborhood to New York's Lower East Side. Like these, it is a transnational space where the movement of people extends the scope of communities beyond neat political borders.

East L.A. is similar to many old urban centers that were historical ports of entry or way stations—places en route to somewhere else, possibly somewhere better. Like ethnic enclaves around the world, East L.A. is a place formed from policies designed to exclude and segregate

populations, but which has also served as a site of refuge and deliberate long-term settlement. Even after former residents have moved away, such places often continue to be an anchor for identity and belonging.

Today as investors and people move back into city centers, East L.A. also resembles places worldwide where gentrification has become a pressing concern. These communities, which once suffered from neglect or direct assault, are now reimagined for material investment and consumption. As in the past, East L.A. residents are organizing for environmental justice, housing rights, educational equality, and the right to stay. These advocacy efforts join international and national conversations spotlighting increasing tensions between ongoing migration, displacement, and globalization.

Why the “Crossroads” device works

People have always been on the move, and we can expect this will not change. The people, places, and patterns may change, but the underlying experiences remain the same.

In both senses—intersections where people meet, and crucial moments for decisions—we believe that today, humanity is at a crossroads. Today, roughly one in seven people on earth, or more than one billion people, are estimated to have migrated at least once in their lives. 763 million people are internal migrants who have moved within the country where they were born. 272 million people are international migrants, who have moved from one country to another. Many of the forces driving migration today are the same as what have mobilized our ancestors, including poverty, conflict and violence, persecution, political instability, labor shortages, competition for resources, natural disasters and more gradual environmental changes. By 2050, there may be as many as 405 million international migrants around the world, and as many as one billion climate migrants.

As we write this in Spring 2022, the spread of COVID-19 over the past two years shows us how interconnected places are to one another, regardless of how distant and disconnected they might have seemed. The inevitability of people on the move in such an interconnected world means greater numbers of people coming in contact with more people of diverse backgrounds, heightening the need to make the world safe for cultural differences. The decisions we make about migration and displacement now will affect the future of millions of people. Will we adapt to the changes migration brings and find ways to live together? Or will we resist change and allow our differences to divide us?

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