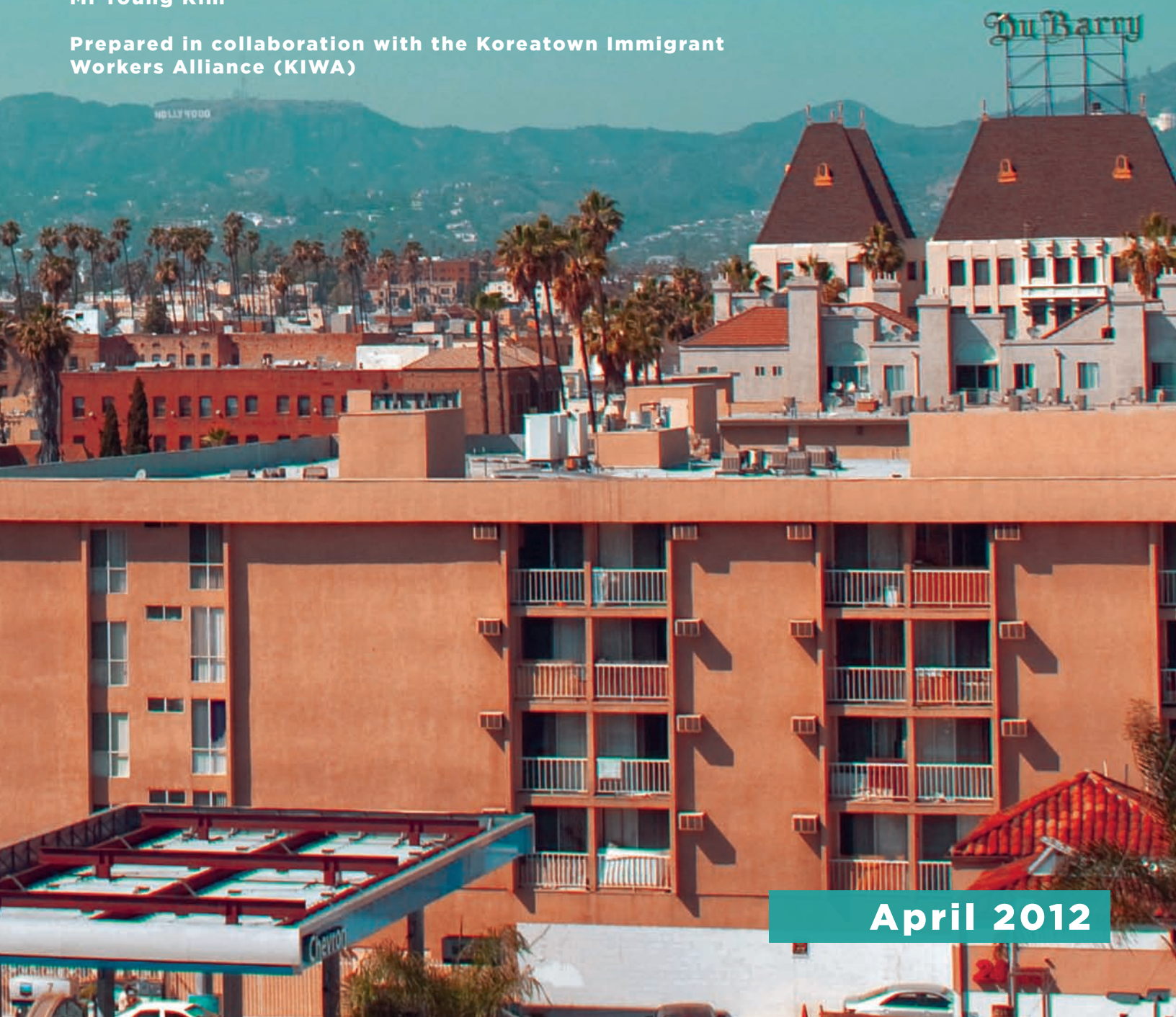


KOREATOWN: A CONTESTED COMMUNITY AT A CROSSROADS

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Prepared in collaboration with the Koreatown Immigrant
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INTRODUCTION

April 29, 2012 marks 20 years since the Los Angeles civil unrest — an event that fundamentally changed how Koreatown was seen by itself, the region, and the nation. That day a jury delivered a “not guilty” verdict in the trial of the four police officers caught on videotape delivering a violent beating to unarmed African-American motorist Rodney King. The verdict was the match that set fire to neighborhoods in central Los Angeles that had been systematically neglected for decades, and so began a civil unrest that propelled Los Angeles into the national spotlight. Over six days of violence on the streets, 53 people died, 2,000 were injured, 1,100 buildings were destroyed, and businesses big and small were looted (Baldassare, 1994). Ordinary workers, business owners, and residents were left devastated by the events that unfolded, not only because what they had worked so hard to build for so many years had been erased in a matter of days but also because their future had become so uncertain. South Los Angeles and Koreatown were among the hardest-hit communities.

At the time, the mainstream media focused on racial tensions, predominantly between African Americans and Korean Americans. Images of armed Korean shop owners guarding their stores from the rooftops circulated and recirculated, as did portrayals of anger in the African-American community over the light sentencing of a Korean-American shop owner who shot black teenager Latasha Harlins. Meanwhile, the plight of the Latino community was under-reported. Less publicized was the frustration and despair felt among all groups over ongoing poverty and lack of opportunities resulting from the — less camera ready — forces of economic restructuring, government deregulation, and labor market discrimination (Light and Bonacich, 1988).

But in the aftermath of the crisis, a number of community-based organizations kept focused on the root causes of the unrest and have spent the last 20 years building one of the most vibrant and dynamic multi-racial movements for social and economic justice in the U.S. The organizations that were either founded in response to or dramatically influenced by the 1992 unrest include: Community Coalition (CoCo), the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA), Strategic Concepts in Organizing and Policy Education (SCOPE, originally founded as AGENDA), the Labor/Community Strategy Center, the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE), and Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance (KIWA).¹ Through building strong grassroots leadership, developing innovative policy solutions, and often working in collaboration with each other, they have



KIWA and supporters revived the tradition of the May Day march in the context of KIWA's campaign against labor abuses at Elephant Snack restaurant, marching from Ardmore Park along Olympic and up Western to 9th on May Day 2000. KIWA, together with CHIRLA and Pilipino Workers Center, formed the Multiethnic Immigrant Worker Organizing Network (MIWON), which then took May Day citywide. MIWON was later joined by the Garment Worker Center and IDEPSCA. May Day has become an enduring Los Angeles tradition.

won important battles to improve the quality of life for everyday residents: establishing a city-wide living-wage ordinance, holding new residential, commercial and transit developments accountable to their neighborhoods, and ensuring schools offer equal education to residents across the region.

This report is itself the result of collaboration between the USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity (PERE) and Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance (KIWA), formerly Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates.² Founded just months before ‘Sa-I-Gu’, the Korean term for the 1992 unrest which translates as April 29, KIWA is celebrating a 20-year history of multiethnic organizing and collaborative campaigns. KIWA’s efforts have sought to improve neighborhood conditions and elevate the voice and influence of low-wage, predominantly Korean and Latino immigrant residents and workers. Its first victory was the inclusion of displaced workers, both Korean and Latino, in a community relief fund set up by Koreatown business owners after the civil unrest. Since its inception, it has focused on the impacts of widening inequality and shifting demographics — making its work especially relevant for rapidly changing neighborhoods across the country. How do organizations advance social justice and equity in the context of rapidly shifting conditions, such as immigration and displacement, cycles of economic growth and recession, income polarization, and transformations of the landscape?

The report begins with a brief overview of Koreatown that highlights its location at the nexus of demographic, economic, and social changes in the region. In the next section, titled “Restructuring,” we point to economic restructuring as a major contributor to the employment and

earnings inequalities experienced by many Koreatown residents. In “Reinvestment,” we discuss how both global and local investment has increased the economic vitality of the neighborhood, but has also left behind many long-term, lower-income residents. And in “Resurgence,” we focus on the efforts of everyday residents and workers to address the often unintended negative impacts (there are also positive impacts) of restructuring and reinvestment so as to improve conditions not only for themselves, but for their broader community.

The story that emerges is one of challenge, change, and possibility. In the face of challenge and change, Koreatown has enduring poverty in the shadows of wealth and the threat of widespread gentrification. Long-time residents face everyday challenges rooted in both broader global economic forces, as well as local policies that fail to meet their needs. Rising housing costs (from reinvestment and redevelopment) along with the growth of low-wage, service sector jobs (from the changing economy) are straining long-time, often immigrant, Korean and Latino residents.

But the neighborhood also has a roadmap for how to forge a better future. Research suggests that equitable and inclusive development is not only a morally conscionable pathway, but also the economically sustainable one (PolicyLink and PERE, 2011). KIWA has been leading in this direction for the past 20 years. It and other regional grassroots organizations have developed partnerships and tools to enable equity-driven growth. As KIWA continues to move forward, its job will be to adapt to today’s conditions as well as to be the voice that calls others in Koreatown and Los Angeles in the direction of equitable and sustainable growth.

² This report builds on three of KIWA’s previous studies of Koreatown that have sought to bring to light the everyday struggles of its least-visible residents and workers: *Koreatown on the Edge: Immigrant Dreams and Realities in One of Los Angeles’ Poorest Communities* (KIWA and Park, 2005); *Towards a Community Agenda: A Survey of Workers and Residents in Koreatown, Los Angeles* (KIWA and DataCenter, 2007); and *Reclaiming Koreatown: A Prescription for the Current and Future Needs of Koreatown Residents* (KIWA and DataCenter, 2009). Based on both public data from the U.S. Census Bureau and data collected through surveys and interviews, each study has echoed the same message: good jobs, quality health care, and affordable housing are three pillars upon which to build an equitable and sustainable Koreatown.

WHOSE KOREATOWN IS IT?

Since the early 1970s, Koreatown has been defined as the neighborhood just west of downtown Los Angeles, although its boundaries have shifted over time. Today, Koreatown is just west of the Pico-Union and Westlake neighborhoods. For the purposes of our analysis, it is bounded by Wilton Place to the west, Beverly Boulevard to the north, Hoover Street to the east, and Pico Boulevard to the south.³ With a population of 116,935, it is one of the densest neighborhoods in Los Angeles — at just under 35,000 people per square mile.⁴

Koreatown is a multiracial, multiclass community in transition. Once considered a new immigrant gateway, Koreatown has become a neighborhood where many families, including immigrants, have lived for decades. Today, it is also a sought-after, globally-connected neighborhood for upwardly mobile professionals as well as Korean empty-nesters — many of whom are now on small fixed incomes, but are returning to the community that they left decades earlier in pursuit of better schools and safer streets.

In this section, we focus on the demographics of Koreatown residents. To provide an understanding of Koreatown within a regional context, we compare the neighborhood demographics to those of Los Angeles County. To get at these neighborhood-level

demographics, we used a variety of government and other publicly-available databases.⁵

To begin, Koreatown is very diverse. Koreans are the single largest national origin group within Koreatown, at 22 percent of the population. However, while Koreatown has by far the largest concentration of Koreans in the region, they are a racial/ethnic minority; Latinos, with origins in Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, other Latin American nations constitute 58 percent of the population. The remaining 20 percent is made up of non-Hispanic whites, African Americans, non-Korean Asian and Pacific Islanders, and others.⁶ A side-by-side comparison (see Figure 1) of the racial and ethnic distribution of both Koreatown and the County underscores Koreatown's relatively high share of Koreans and Latinos. While the share of

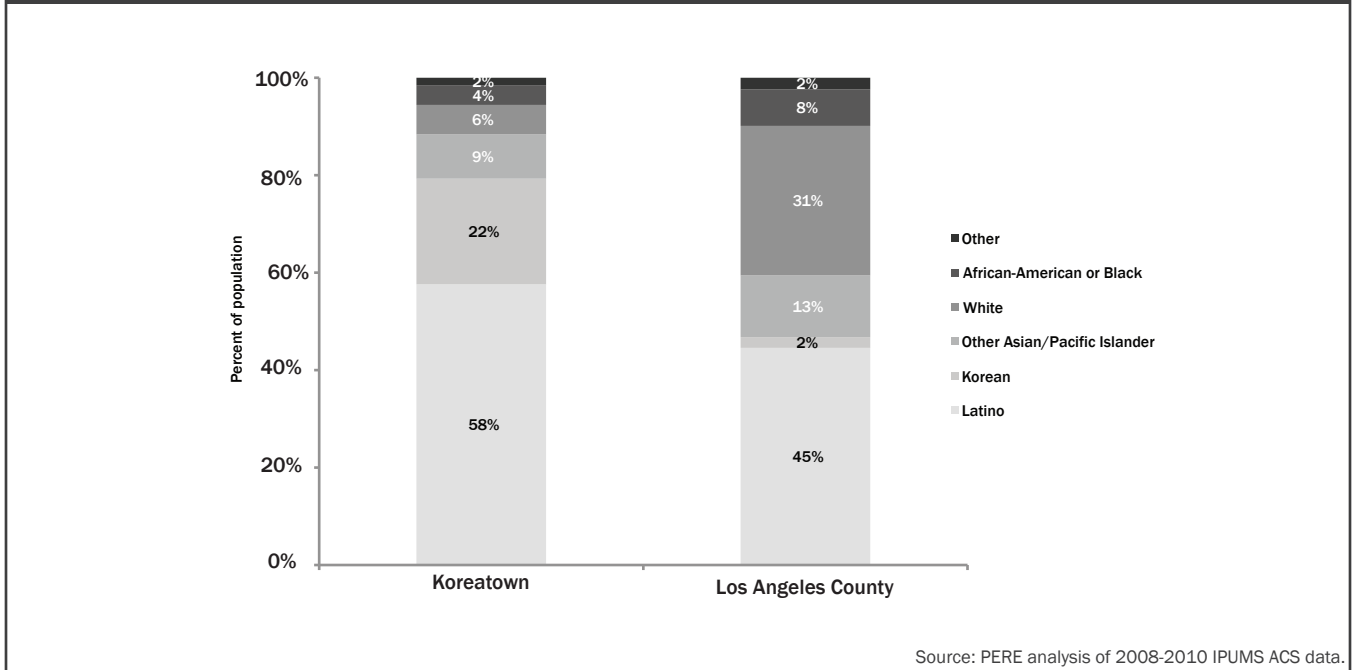
³ The authors recognize that the boundaries of Koreatown have been in flux since its origins and will continue to change. At present, KIWA considers Koreatown, at a minimum, as defined above; however, the western boundary extends as far as Crenshaw Blvd. For the analysis that follows, we chose the census geographies which best aligned with Koreatown's boundaries (for more information on the data used see the footnote five).

⁴ PERE analysis of 2008-2010 IPUMS American Community Survey (ACS) data.

⁵ Most of the data analysis draws from the Integrated Public Use Microdata (IPUMS) 2000 Decennial Census and 2008-2010 American Community Survey (ACS) data. We use pooled samples because the neighborhood is relatively small, and we need larger sample sizes to have confidence in the results. There are two main reasons why we use these IPUMS datasets. First, the IPUMS "microdata" allows us to get a more nuanced look at the neighborhood. Microdata are the individual or household responses to the ACS surveys that allow users to create custom tables that are not available through other pre-tabulated ACS products. For example, it permits us to analyze the Korean population within the neighborhood. Second, the 5-percent Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMAs) are the smallest geography at which the microdata can be analyzed. In our analysis, a single PUMA (PUMA 5414) is used to represent the boundaries of Koreatown. This geographic definition has been applied in other research; Kim (2011) was the first researcher we are aware of who approximated Los Angeles' Koreatown with a PUMA-based approach. Public use microdata sample data is most appropriate for studying neighborhoods in dense areas where the PUMA is relatively small: for example, PUMS data has been used to study Manhattan's Chinatown in New York City by Zhou and Logan (1991). The Koreatown boundary definition given by PUMA 5414 is also generally consistent with those identified by community groups. The major limitation to using these recent datasets at PUMA level is that we were only able to go as far back as 2000 in our analysis because of changes in the definition of PUMA geographies between 1990 and 2000. For this shortcoming, we turn to a more general census tract analysis using different data sources. These sources include the 1990 and 2000 Decennial Census summary files and a pooled 5-year 2005-2009 ACS summary file.

⁶ 'Other' refers to non-Latinos who identified as Native American, multiracial, or of an 'other' race.

**Figure 1: Population by Race/Ethnicity
2008-2010**



the Korean population in the County stayed constant during the past decade at about two percent, in Koreatown, the share increased from 19 percent to 22 percent.⁷

Koreatown is largely an immigrant community: two out of every three residents (65 percent) were born abroad (a slight decline from 1990 when 69 percent of residents were foreign-born). Latino immigrants make up 38 percent of the overall population, while Korean immigrants comprise 18 percent.⁸ Korean immigrants have played a role in Los Angeles since at least the early 20th century, but the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act and the International Monetary Fund-mandated liberalization of the South Korean economy during the 1990s, catalyzed immigration as many came to the U.S. looking for greater economic opportunities (KIWA, 2005; Lee and Park, 2007). Today, Koreans represent 28 percent of all immigrants in Koreatown (see Figure 2). Central American immigrants, mostly from El Salvador and Guatemala make up nearly 30 percent of the immigrant population. Immigrants from El Salvador

and Guatemala began arriving in significant numbers in the 1980s as they fled wars in their home countries. More recent Central American immigrants have arrived in search of economic opportunity and to reunite with family members.⁹ Finally, Mexicans, who have a long history in Los Angeles and make up a significant proportion of the population, comprise 27 percent of the immigrant population in Koreatown.

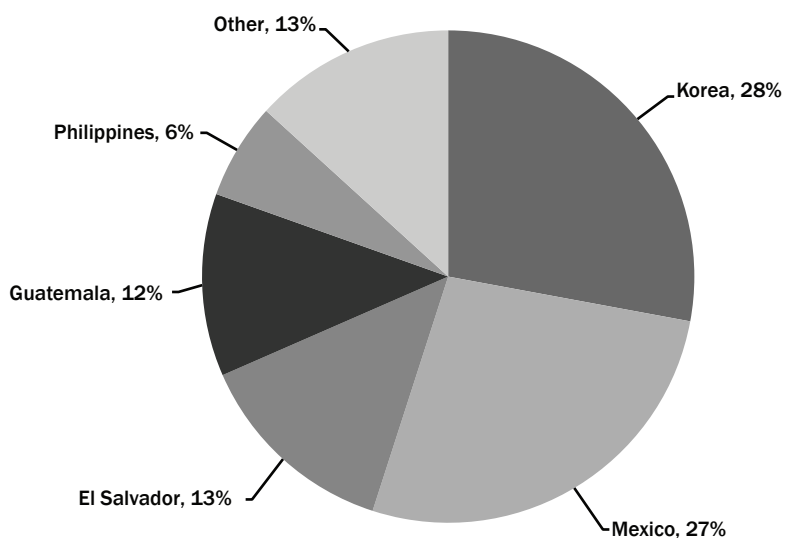
In short, this is a diverse neighborhood with global ties. With the largest concentration of Koreans outside Korea (Navarro, 2004), it is the cultural and economic heart of the region’s Korean community. Park and Kim (2008) call it an “ethnic nexus” — not an ethnic enclave — because Koreans comprise less than a quarter of the population yet figure centrally in the culture and economy. Indeed, Koreatown draws Koreans from across the region to connect socially and culturally as well as economically. Businesses and social networks tie the neighborhood to Korea, and international firms connect to global suppliers and markets.

⁷ PERE analysis of 2000 IPUMS Decennial Census and 2008-2010 IPUMS ACS.

⁸ PERE analysis of 2008-2010 IPUMS ACS data.

⁹ See Hamilton & Chinchilla (2001).

**Figure 2: Immigrants by Country of Origin
Koreatown, 2008-2010**



Source: PERE analysis of 2008-2010 IPUMS ACS data.

Yet Koreatown residents are mostly Latino. Although they are on average poorer than Koreans, Latinos share much in common with the working-class Korean residents.¹⁰ Both groups share immigrant narratives and often are side-by-side in the workplace. Residents' lives intersect on many levels — in explicit and implicit ways.

Importantly, today's Koreatown immigrant community is more established and rooted than it was 20 years ago. In 1990, 74 percent of immigrants in Koreatown had been in the country for less than 10 years, but recently that figure has dropped to 34 percent; two-thirds of Koreatown immigrants have been in the country for 10 or more years. Koreatown, like many neighborhoods across the region that were once immigrant gateways, has transitioned into becoming a stable community with more long-term immigrant residents and a growing second generation population. But, long-term does not necessarily mean better-integrated. For example, despite the decline in recent immigrants, the percent of linguistically isolated households — households in which all members 14 years old and over have at least some difficulty with English

— has risen from 41 percent in 1990 to 49 percent in 2005-2009.¹¹

As we expand upon below, Koreatown has clear opportunities around recent development, a stable niche market around Korean commerce and culture, and a central location — but also real challenges around economic well-being that are markedly different by race and ethnicity. In a place where the largest constituency is low-income Latinos, but business is largely driven by Koreans and others from across the region and across the globe¹² — whose voice carries the greatest weight? And is there a way to make sure that all are heard and benefit? These questions are part of an ongoing and very relevant debate around cities' responses to changing demographics and economic restructuring. We now turn to examine how shifting economic conditions are reshaping Koreatown.

¹⁰ PERE analysis of 2008-2010 IPUMS ACS data.

¹¹ PERE analysis of 1990 Decennial Census and 2005-2009 ACS data.

¹² See Park & Kim (2008).

RESTRUCTURING: Shifting Economic Conditions



Eluvia with her son Michael at a local mobilization advocating for equitable urban development policies.

Eluvia Vail is a domestic worker and resident of Koreatown. Like many other neighborhood residents, she has employment, but earns far below family-supporting wages. Recently she's been offered cleaning jobs at low-pay – below the minimum wage – which she cannot even consider accepting, given the additional childcare and transportation costs she would incur. When asked how the current economic recession is affecting her, she says “A lot, because employers don't want to pay you...they're offering 40 dollars for eight hours of work, five days a week because of the economy. Before, we got paid more. Now employers don't want to pay. They're lowering the cost of labor....we're practically working for free.” Vail is actively involved in KIWA's campaigns for a Koreatown park and affordable housing.

Since the 1970s, the economy has shifted away from manufacturing towards knowledge and service jobs – global trends with significant impacts on Los Angeles. Stable, unionized, durable manufacturing (i.e. auto manufacturing) has been on the decline and has been partially replaced by non-durable manufacturing (i.e. food packaging, clothing production, etc.) and low-paying service sector jobs (i.e. janitorial services, domestic services, etc.). Meanwhile, there has been growth on the high end of the service sector spectrum too, in knowledge-based jobs in engineering, financial services, and technology, creating a high-low split in the labor market (Autor, 2010).¹³ In addition, and not discussed here, Kim (2012) has noted the importance of the informal labor market and its complexity in Koreatown. With this, the middle class has shrunk and social inequality has been on the rise (Scott, 2008). If left unchecked, the new

economy will thrive on and further reinforce this polarization.

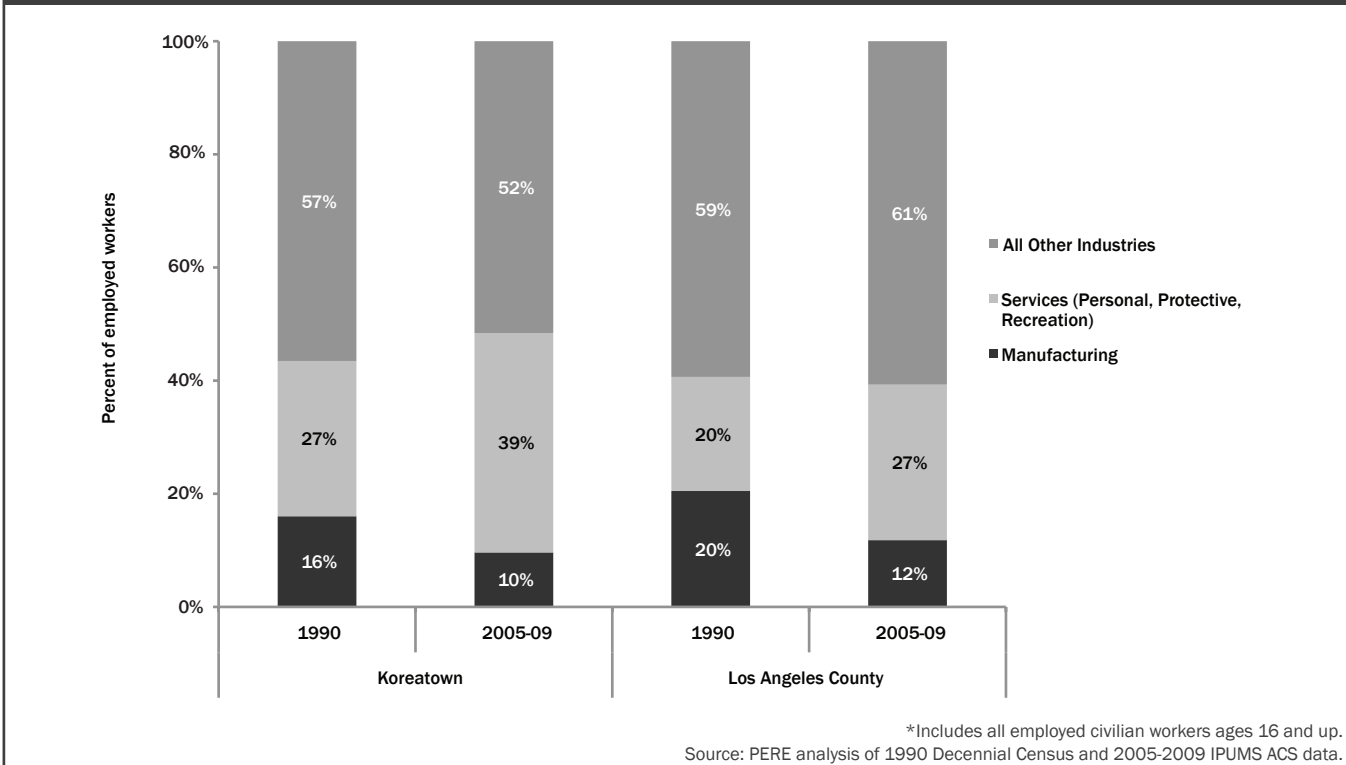
Economic restructuring has reshaped Koreatown. Residents are disproportionately employed in low-wage occupations and industries. Mirroring citywide trends, fewer workers are employed in the manufacturing industry – 16 percent in 1990 versus 10 percent now. Taking the place of these industries are “other services” which includes personal, protective, and recreation service jobs (i.e. beauty and nail salon technicians, domestic workers, and gardeners). Figure 3 shows that a larger share of Koreatown's residents were employed in service sector jobs than the County, in 1990 – 27 percent versus 20 percent, respectively – and also that the service sector has risen more rapidly since 1990.¹⁴

Workers in these service sector jobs typically receive lower wages than those in manufacturing.

¹³ This new economy draws from digital technologies in production and communication such as high-technology manufacturing, business and financial services, health care, consumer services, and fashion-oriented production, and other cultural industries (Storper and Scott, 2009).

¹⁴ PERE analysis of 2008-2010 IPUMS ACS data. Unless otherwise noted, the workforce includes all those in the civilian labor force, ages 16 and older.

**Figure 3: Residents' Employment by Industry*
1990 and 2005-2009**



For example, among employed Koreatown workers, the median wage and salary income of those in personal care and maintenance occupations is \$7,928 annually, as compared to \$14,000 in manufacturing-related production occupations. In contrast, the median incomes in management (\$33,000) and professional services (\$30,000) occupations are considerably higher than both lower-wage service and middle-wage manufacturing occupations.¹⁵

Not surprisingly, there are also differences by race/ethnicity. Latinos in Koreatown most often work in food preparation and serving (17 percent), grounds and building maintenance (15 percent), construction (11 percent) and production (10 percent) occupations. In contrast, Koreans most often work in sales (23 percent), professional (15

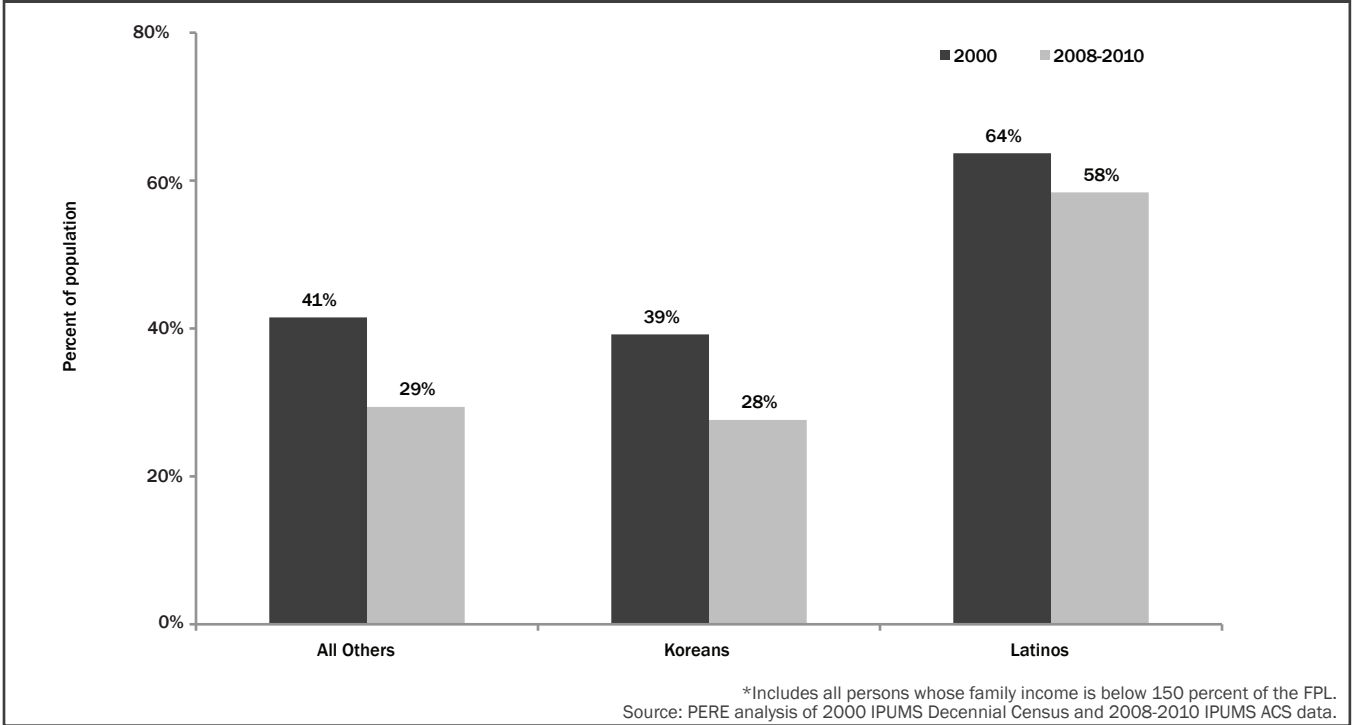
percent) and management (13 percent) occupations. However, like Latinos, many Koreans work in the food service occupations (13 percent).¹⁶ Indeed, many low-wage Korean and Latino workers in this community have campaigned together for better wages and working conditions in the restaurant industry (Narro, 2009).

One major outcome tied to these labor market changes has been a change in the economic make-up of the community. In Koreatown, poverty is widespread and rates are higher than the region. Nearly half the population (46 percent) lives below 150 percent of the Federal Poverty Line — we choose 150 percent of the poverty line because of the relatively higher cost of living in Los Angeles, and we find that it more accurately accounts for those struggling economically. However, as Figure 4 shows, poverty is being felt less sharply now than in 2000, although Latinos did not experience this relief as much as other racial/ethnic groups. Another measure, median household income, also reflects this pattern. Income amongst Koreatown's

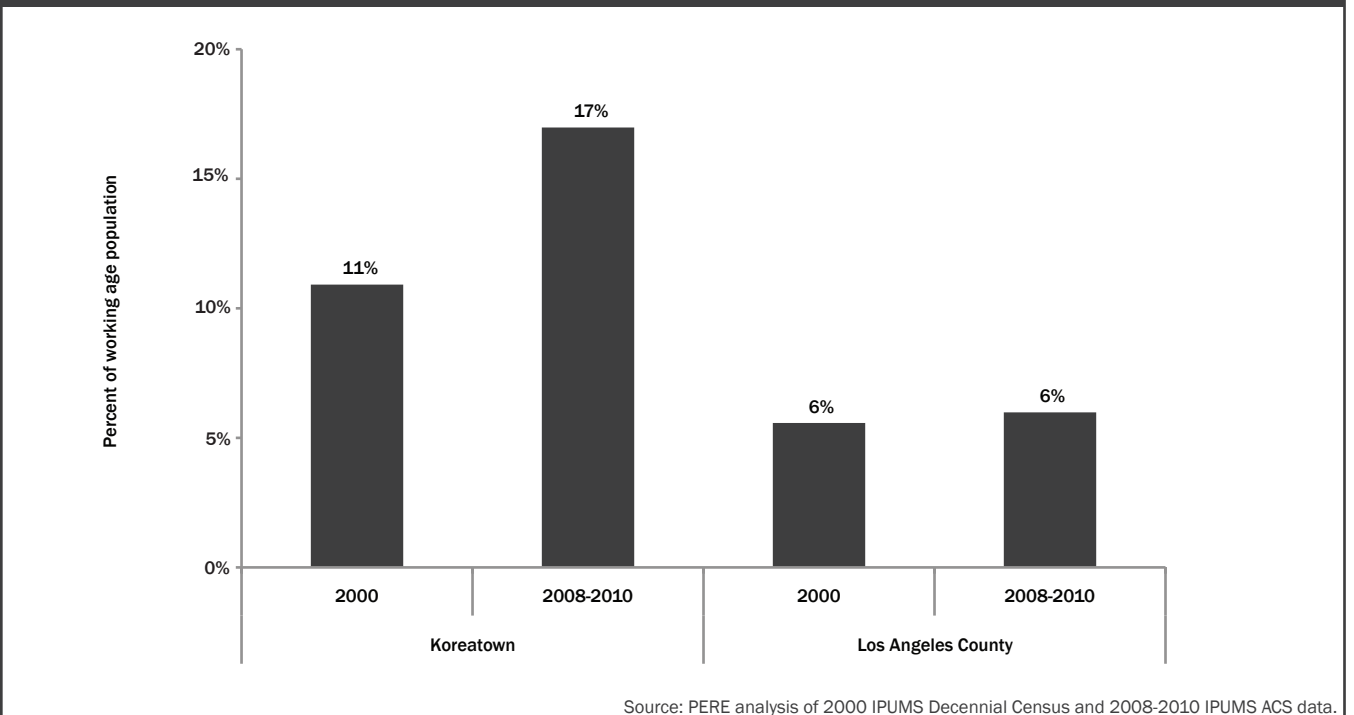
¹⁵ PERE analysis of 2008-2010 IPUMS ACS data. Wage and salary income includes each individual's total pre-tax wages and salary income (that is, money received as an employee) for the previous year. Sources of income include wage and salary, commission, cash bonus, tip, and other money income received from an employer, but exclude other personal sources of income, such as those earned from investments, personal business activities, and public benefits or aid. Note: All income data has been adjusted for inflation.

¹⁶ PERE analysis of 2008-2010 IPUMS ACS data.

**Figure 4: Percent of Population Below 150 Percent Federal Poverty Line (FPL)*
Koreatown, 2000 and 2008-2010**



**Figure 5: Working Poverty Rate
2000 and 2008-2010**



Latino households remained low and stagnant during the past decade, rising from \$26,177 to only \$28,459 between 2000 and 2008-2010. Koreans and other non-Latinos saw greater income gains during the past decade, yet their median household income hovers just above \$36,000, and suggests that many of these families are above, yet very close to, the federal poverty line (depending on household size).¹⁷ The decrease in poverty can be attributed to multiple factors, including 1) an influx of wealthier residents and out migration of the very poor (as we will describe below), 2) a growing number of well-settled and perhaps more economically stable immigrants, and 3) an increase in jobs stemming from growth of the service sector.

Although poverty may be on the decline, many are still struggling to get by. As Figure 5 shows, the percent of working poor is on the rise.¹⁸ Between 2000 and 2008-2010, the percent of working poor increased from 11 to 17 percent in Koreatown — the latter rate is nearly triple that of Los Angeles County. Koreatown is one of the sites where some of the central fractures in our regional economy are felt most deeply. Over a quarter of working-age Latinos are experiencing working poverty, as compared to only 5 percent of Koreans.¹⁹ The high rates of working poverty are likely tied to the concentration of low-wage jobs in Koreatown. Given this, the neighborhood's economy is heavily reliant on the working poor. Another indicator of the lack of good jobs is the lack of access to adequate health care. Nearly 40 percent of employed workers between the ages of 25 and 64 in Koreatown are without health insurance, as compared to 25 percent in the County, leaving many low-income residents with limited access to health services.²⁰

¹⁷ PERE analysis of 2008-2010 IPUMS ACS data.

¹⁸ The 'working poor' are defined as those who are of working age (25-64 years), worked full-time, and whose family income was less than 150 percent of the federal poverty level. Note: A change in the "weeks worked" question in the 2008 ACS as compared to prior years of the ACS and the long form of the Decennial Census caused a dramatic rise in the share of respondents indicating they worked at least 50 weeks during the year prior to the survey. To avoid overstating the increase in the share of full-time workers over time, we define full-time work differently in 2008 and later than in earlier years. In 2008 and later, full-time workers include those who report working 35 hours per week and at least 50 weeks during the year prior to the survey, while in 2007 and earlier they include those who report working 35 hours per week and at least 45 weeks. For more information, see http://www.census.gov/acs/www/Downloads/methodology/content_test/P6b_Weeks_Worked_Final_Report.pdf.

¹⁹ PERE analysis of 2008-2010 IPUMS ACS data.

²⁰ PERE analysis of 2008-2010 IPUMS ACS data.

As the economy has restructured and workers find themselves patching together income from multiple low-wage jobs,²¹ they are also facing a neighborhood that is increasingly expensive. This trend is not unique to Koreatown. The loss of stable manufacturing employment and growth in low-wage service employment has disproportionately affected communities of color in Los Angeles, further exacerbating inequality. In the years leading up to the 1992 civil unrest, systematic disinvestment on the part of the federal government in the nation's urban cores, the global restructuring of manufacturing and the attendant loss of unionized jobs led to decreasing opportunities for many central Los Angeles residents who, for the vast majority, are people of color.²² Since the early 1990s, economic restructuring has picked up speed and continues to reshape the local economy of global cities, increasing economic and social inequality (Scott, 2008). In this context, reinvestment in Koreatown has boosted the local economy, sometimes at the expense of local residents and low-wage workers. This reinvestment has increased imbalances in Koreatown prompting us to ask: What is the purpose and who are the intended beneficiaries of the reinvestment?

During the past 40 years, global capital flows and investment have shaped real estate and service economy development in Koreatown. Korean American immigrants began to step in as major property owners in Koreatown during the 1970s — and did so largely without financing from American banks or non-Korean entrepreneurs (Park and Kim, 2008). The Koreatown Developers Association bought inexpensive real estate around the Mid-Wilshire district and began a public relations campaign, promoting Koreatown abroad in Seoul. As large American corporations, like Union Bank, Texaco, IBM and Getty Oil vacated the area, Korean American businesses further established their presence along Wilshire Boulevard and Sixth Street (Park and Kim, 2008). This process was accompanied by investment from South Korea, a related but distinct economic force in the neighborhood.

²¹ KIWA, 2005.

²² For more on this, see *Reading Rodney King: Reading Urban Uprising* (Gooding-Williams, 1993).

REINVESTMENT: Conflicting Investment Priorities



A worker removes the belongings of an elderly tenant being evicted from a rent-controlled apartment building slated to be demolished.

Affordable housing has been lost through condominium conversions, the rehabilitation of slum housing to luxury apartments, and the demolition of low-income homes for non-residential uses. In 2008, several Koreatown tenants living in apartments owned by Oriental Mission Church approached KIWA for tenants' rights assistance. The residents were frustrated by the church's plans to demolish their apartments, not wishing to leave their homes and knowing that relocation monies would not last long. The church had purchased four buildings, totaling over forty units of rent-controlled apartments, which they planned to demolish to pave the way for parking lots. Most residents did not wish to move; some had lived in their homes for more than 30 years. Long-term tenants had been paying rents significantly below market rate, and had been able to remain in the neighborhood as a wave of gentrification rolled in; moving to another location within Koreatown could mean a doubling of their rent. In the end, despite local opposition, nearly all of the tenants relocated, many to outside the neighborhood,

and the demolition proceeded. Later, for unrelated reasons, an internal split in the church led large numbers of the congregation to move to another church many blocks south. No longer in need of additional parking, the lots now stand empty. But the loss of these affordable units resulting from the teardown is permanent. In Los Angeles, rent control only applies to apartments built before 1978. The demolition of older buildings, like the ones in this case, does not require the development of an equal number of affordable units, and represents a permanent net loss of rent-controlled homes in the neighborhood and Los Angeles.

During the 1990s, investment continued as the Korean economy changed. The 1992 civil unrest created an opportunity for investors as many small businesses in Koreatown had been looted and burned and property prices dropped. More wealthy Korean and Korean American developers bought up many of the properties (Park, 2008). Following the International Monetary Fund-mandated liberalization of the South Korean economy in the late 1990s, an increasing number of newly-wealthy South Koreans, concerned about economic instability and populism in their native country, invested in California businesses and real estate (Park and Kim, 2008).

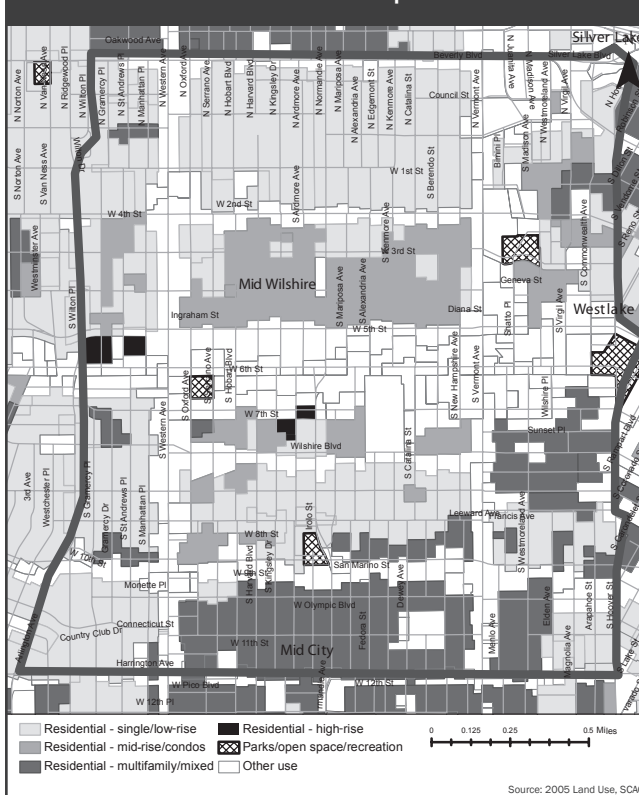
The resulting picture is one of multiple land-uses. Figures 6 and 7 show a vivid image of this diversity.

From single to multifamily residential, low to high-rise office, and both older and newer retail uses, Koreatown's mix of homes, shops, and commercial spaces changes block-by-block. However, notably absent are parks and green space. With a goal of further encouraging mixed-use development, the Community Redevelopment Agency of Los Angeles (CRA/LA) and the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transit Agency (Metro) invested in two notable transit-oriented development (TOD) projects on Wilshire at Western and at Vermont (CRA/LA, 2012). TOD are the intentional planning of residential units next to public transportation routes so that residents are less reliant on automobile use. Given that major public transportation routes run through Koreatown, the allure of local TODs has risen among city officials and potential residents.

**Figure 6: Land Use in Koreatown
Industrial, Commercial and Retail**



**Figure 7: Land Use in Koreatown
Residential and Green Space**



New housing developments appear to have led to an increase in affluent households, and a decline in low-income households. While the TOD at Vermont and Wilshire led to some new affordable housing units, redevelopment has largely attracted more affluent new residents (SCAG, 2008). As Figure 8 shows, the proportion of high income households earning over \$90,000 has increased in the last couple of years, while the proportion of new low-income residents has decreased.²³ These figures suggest that some low-income residents are being pushed out of the neighborhood.

The proportion of new immigrant households moving to Koreatown has declined recently, indicating that the community is becoming less of an immigrant gateway than it has been in the past. Figure 9 shows the percent of immigrant and non-immigrant households who recently moved into Koreatown.²⁴ In 2008-2010, 42 percent of non-

immigrant households had moved in during the past two years, as compared to only 27 percent of all immigrant households. Similarly, the overall number of non-immigrant households who recently moved in grew substantially during the past decade, from 2,473 to 4,011, and constitute a growing share (30 percent) of all who moved in recently.²⁵

Due in part to the migration and investments of newly-immigrated Koreans since the late 1990s (Lee and Park, 2007), many apartments have been demolished or converted to condominiums. As Figure 10 shows, between 1997 and 2007 there have been a total of 268 apartment demolitions in Central Los Angeles, an area that includes Koreatown. Meanwhile, as shown in Figure 11, there has also been an increase in the number of permits issued to convert apartments into condominiums. Yet, these demolitions and condo conversions have increased displacement or priced-out many existing Koreatown residents (KIWA, 2005).

²³ The 'year moved in' variable measures all relocation activity, both inter- and intra-neighborhood, accounting for households who moved into Koreatown from another neighborhood, as well as those who moved within Koreatown.

²⁴ Household nativity status is determined by the nativity of the head of house.

²⁵ PERE analysis of 2008-2010 IPUMS ACS data.

**Figure 10: Permits Issued to Demolish Existing Apartment Buildings
by Area Planning Commission (APC) Region**

Permit Issue Year	North Valley	South Valley	West LA	Central LA*	East LA	South LA	Harbor	City of LA
1997	2	3	6	16	26	15	1	69
1998	1	0	16	8	23	2	1	51
1999	2	3	15	15	34	10	0	79
2000	0	18	42	13	1	14	2	90
2001	0	11	28	15	2	9	0	65
2002	0	9	24	16	12	6	1	68
2003	0	19	44	13	1	4	69	150
2004	0	35	47	22	3	6	0	113
2005	3	20	50	51	3	1	0	128
2006	2	65	75	52	15	9	20	238
2007	0	56	76	47	8	5	1	193
All Years	10	239	423	268	128	81	95	1,244
%	1%	19%	34%	22%	10%	7%	8%	100%

*Includes Koreatown, as defined for this study.

LA Department of Building and Safety, 1997-2007. Building Permit Data from the Plan Check and Inspection System (PCIS). Based upon 1,244 permits to demolish properties previously used as apartment buildings.

Source: Flaming, Burns, et al, 2009.

**Figure 11: Permits Issued to Convert Existing Apartment Buildings to Condominium
by Area Planning Commission (APC) Region**

Permit Issue Year	North Valley	South Valley	West LA	Central LA*	East LA	South LA	Harbor	City of LA
1997	0	0	5	1	0	0	0	6
1998	7	2	9	0	0	2	4	24
1999	0	2	13	2	0	0	0	17
2000	0	7	7	0	1	0	0	15
2001	0	1	15	0	0	0	0	16
2002	0	14	22	4	0	5	0	45
2003	2	5	8	4	1	1	0	21
2004	3	15	16	17	0	0	0	51
2005	4	30	25	15	1	0	39	114
2006	17	37	33	31	3	3	5	129
2007	13	63	68	48	4	7	3	206
All Years	46	176	221	122	10	18	51	644
	7%	27%	34%	19%	2%	3%	8%	100%

*Includes Koreatown, as defined for this study.

LA Department of Building and Safety, 1997-2007. Building Permit Data from the Plan Check and Inspection System (PCIS).

Source: Flaming, Burns, et al., 2009.

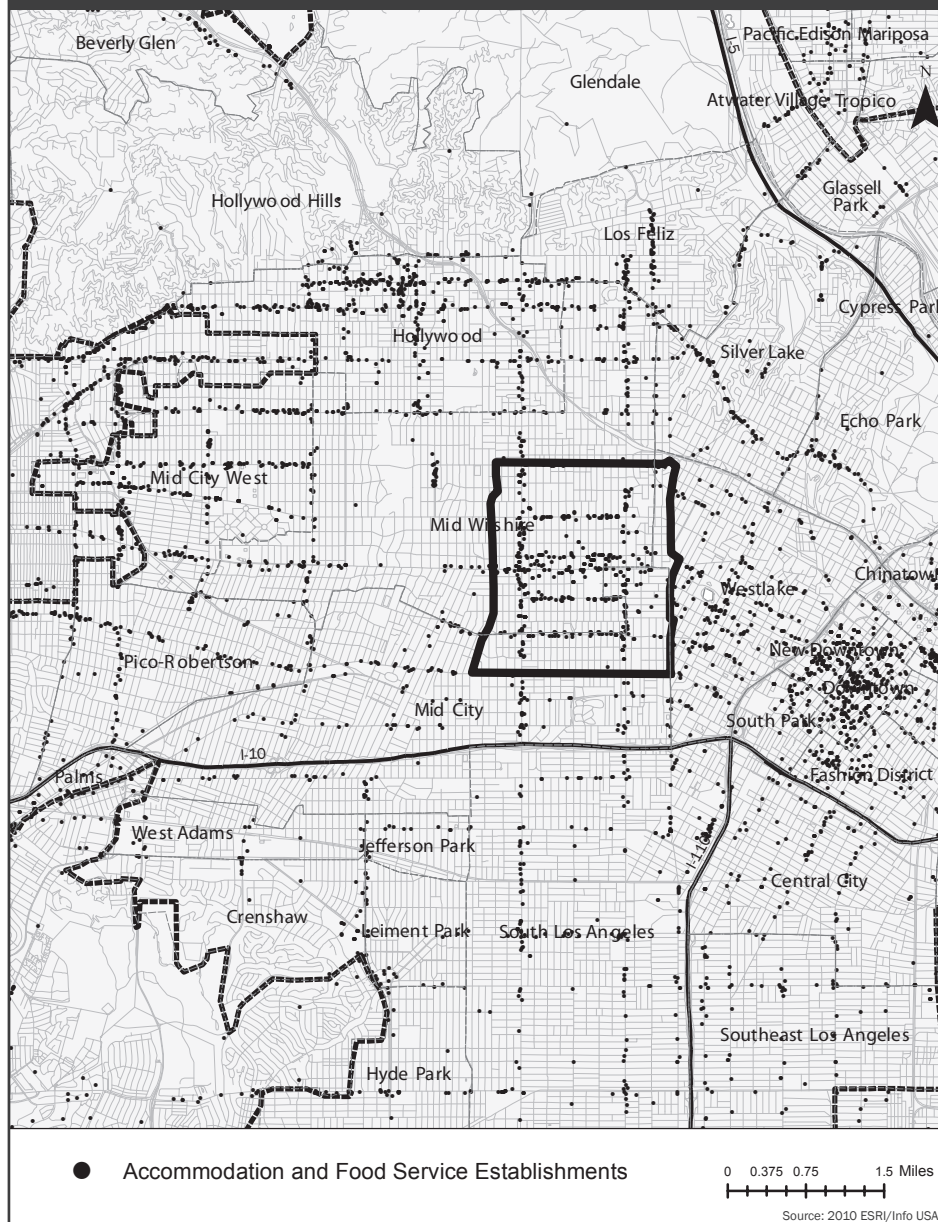
The current housing stock is now generally segmented into “(1) the Latino-occupied, inexpensive, old apartment buildings, (2) the Korean-occupied refurbished apartment buildings, (3) gentrified middle-class houses” (Lee and Park, 2007). Also, increasingly found are larger, high-end housing developments.

New housing development investment has been accompanied by a surge in investment in related amenities, from bars and restaurants to day spas and shopping. Combined, these investments further attract a new professional class seeking high-density, high-amenity development. As Figure

12 depicts, Koreatown is an epicenter for leisure and nightlife. Like other destination neighborhoods, such as Hollywood, West Hollywood, and even the Crenshaw district, it is densely filled with restaurants and bars. Yet, the area is not immune to the economic downturn; many luxury condominium developments, like Solair at the Wilshire/Vermont TOD, sit unlit and half-empty, providing an image of the instability of deregulated markets and the speculative development that accompanies them (Ryan, 2011).

Employment data reflects this shift, as well. In 2009, about 12 percent of all employment in

Figure 12: Koreatown and Surrounding Neighborhoods, Amenities



immigrants, but also suburbanites (Lee and Park, 2008). This culture shift is also easily viewed in the evening, when streets are filled with the foot traffic of upper middle class club-goers (Zhou and Cho, 2010).

Like long-term residents, new residents and visitors are attracted to Koreatown’s varied streetscape, central location, and rich cultural offerings. However, the influx of these new groups has reshaped Koreatown’s local economy, in part, around a new set of consumption activities, which are tied to gentrification. As growth ensues, city leaders may pursue these amenities-driven development strategies as an unquestionable public policy, and prioritize the voices of new, more affluent residents. However, many in the neighborhood have realized that a consumption-driven path is neither equitable nor sustainable. As we have seen, working poverty is on the rise, suggesting that a consumption-based economy is not adequately sustaining all

Koreatown was in the food and accommodations sector, and employment growth in this sector accounted for 20 percent of all growth between 2002 and 2009.²⁶ Although the majority of establishments are small, several large-scale developments have also altered the character of the neighborhood. The construction of large-scale commercial and entertainment complexes such as the Aroma Wilshire, an ‘urban oasis’ of shopping, dining, and fitness draws not only wealthy

those caught working in it. As a result, some of the working poor have organized to develop a strong progressive voice to address the systemic problems around them.

²⁶ Conversely, the IT sector, while small (6 percent of employment in Koreatown) accounted for 22 percent of all growth, reflecting higher-end service sector growth. PERE analysis of 2000 and 2009 Local Employment Dynamics data.

RESURGENCE: Rising Social Movements

C. Kim has worked in restaurants since 1992, beginning in Korean restaurants in New York City. She currently works in a Koreatown restaurant. Though 20 years have gone by and she has moved across the country, some things have not changed: in both cities, employers failed to pay her overtime and stole her tips. In addition to wage theft, she also feels the sting of sexism and ageism at work. As a woman no longer in her youth, it is extremely hard to find work, she says; “For someone over 35, they’ll tell you straight out, ‘you’re too old, I can’t use you,’ or ‘you’re ugly’ – things that can really wound a person.” Sadly, C. Kim has an all too common story. However, KIWA assisted her with filing a Department of Labor Standards Enforcement Claim, and she recovered thousands of dollars in unpaid wages. Today C. Kim is a member of KIWA, where she helps to guide and sharpen KIWA’s work around gender and labor rights violations. When people like C. Kim are transformed through seeking help for their individual problems, their newfound community leadership supports the growth of social movements.

Koreatown is at a crossroads. The multiethnic immigrant community that has grown longer and stronger roots in the neighborhood is at risk of being uprooted by a wealthier set of residents who also want their own slice of the new American dream: homeownership in a diverse and reinvested *urban* environment. Fortunately, there is a roadmap to a better future that has been forged by organizations that now have a 20-year track record of building alliances among diverse groups.

The 1992 civil unrest exposed the need for new and sustained approaches to urban problems that could reach both the depth and scale needed to address the root causes of poverty, low-wage work, and crowded housing conditions. Organizations representing immigrant and working-class communities of color in Los Angeles responded through grassroots organizing, alliance building, and bottom-up advocacy.

One such organization is KIWA. Recognizing that its accomplishments would not have been possible without the collaboration and collective game-changing efforts of many social change organizations, this report focuses on KIWA for two reasons. First, another PERE report focuses on the movement building story, *L.A. Rising* (2012). Second, we want to mark KIWA’s 20th anniversary with a celebration of its achievements since it was

founded as a worker center just months before the unrest.

While it has always remained steadfastly committed to organizing low-wage immigrant workers, both Korean and Latino, KIWA’s campaigns and issues have changed over time and, not coincidentally, mirror the changes and challenges described in the previous sections of this report. Its campaign work can be categorized into three main issue areas: workplace justice and workers’ rights; affordable housing and tenants’ rights; and parks and open space.

Workplace Justice and Workers Rights

Post-Civil Unrest Worker Compensation

One of KIWA’s early successes is directly tied to the unrest. KIWA advocated on behalf of workers who lost their jobs when buildings burned, winning \$109,000 in compensation funds that went to 45 Latino and Korean workers. At a time when media chose to frame the unrest in terms of racial conflict, KIWA was one of the organizations whose actions were based on multiracial unity.

Worker Empowerment Clinic

Since then, workers seeking to recover stolen wages have been coming to KIWA’s Worker Empowerment Clinic. With services in Korean,

Spanish, and English, the clinic provides consultations to thousands of immigrant workers each year. Hundreds of workers end up filing claims totaling millions of dollars annually to recover wages from unscrupulous employers. Since the 2008 economic crisis, the levels of wage theft are increasing: the lowest-wage workers are the most vulnerable and face even greater economic exploitation in times of crisis. For two decades, the Clinic has been a consistent, reliable, and enduring resource that provides information and assistance for low-wage immigrant workers.

Restaurant Workers' Justice Campaign

KIWA's Restaurant Workers Justice Campaign has been a multiracial effort to bring thousands of service workers into common cause against exploitative practices. KIWA initiated the Campaign in 1996. Immigrant restaurant workers in Koreatown labored up to 72 hours per week for as little as \$2.20 per hour and faced unfair firings as well as verbal and physical abuse. A random sweep by the Department of Labor found that a staggering 97 percent of Koreatown restaurants violated labor

laws. KIWA initiated a campaign to stop these illegal practices — using legal and political pressure in coordination with an organized Korean and Latino restaurant workers base to demand industry-wide reform. The campaign brought compliance in the industry to increase by at least 50 percent. Millions of dollars that had been illegally withheld each year began to be paid to workers. This campaign demonstrates both great success in instituting sweeping change and also points to work still to be done. KIWA also conducts ongoing outreach and education work in occupational safety and health to low-wage workers.

Market Workers' Living Wage Campaign

Expanding upon its campaign at the Assi Market, which began in 2002, KIWA launched a campaign for living wages in Koreatown supermarkets, resulting in over 600 workers in five different markets benefiting from living wage agreements. In one of Koreatown's most lucrative industries, supermarket workers now earn an additional \$2.5 million every year.



Assi Market picket line organized in support of workers' rights.

In 2007, KIWA reached an historic living wage agreement with California Market, extending living wages to 150 workers. Through a creative agreement tying wages to land use on the redevelopment of California Market at Western and 5th Streets, workers will earn one dollar above minimum wage.

During the same year, KIWA also successfully settled a multi-million dollar lawsuit against Assi Market for illegal employment practices, which included failure to pay wages and racial discrimination. The settlement awarded Assi workers \$1.475 million. The settlement also required Assi to create a complaint system for workers and conduct trainings for its managers on California's wage and hour laws and how to stop employment discrimination. All this was hard won: among other things, the campaign began back in 2002, and at the end involved workers picketing for every day for over one year.

Affordable Housing and Tenants' Rights

Community-led Development

As economic restructuring has resulted in housing development increasingly geared toward the wealthy, KIWA has been a strong advocate for developing affordable housing in Koreatown for an immigrant working class that is facing mounting financial stresses. As developers have sought to increase the number of high-priced units in the neighborhood, KIWA has advocated that affordable housing be built in conjunction with the luxury high-rises that now dot the landscape, on the principle that equity should be an integrated



Rent-controlled apartments just before demolition.

element of growth and development in the neighborhood. In 2011, KIWA successfully advocated for a Community Benefits Agreement between the CRA and the J.H. Snyder Corp., that included 96 units of affordable housing development in the area surrounding a new mixed-use, market rate, transit-oriented development on the south side of Wilshire and Vermont. It joined with others to advocate for local hiring, living and prevailing wages. It also sought input on the open space design and support for a community center. KIWA's current work includes a campaign to hold the developer accountable to these commitments.

Increasing Affordable Housing

KIWA not only advocates and organizes for more affordable housing, it is now also partnering with Little Tokyo Service Center to develop 52 units of affordable housing for low-income individuals and families, including some specifically for those facing homelessness. The project is scheduled to break ground in the coming year. Proposing a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED)-certified green building with community input in the design, KIWA seeks to demonstrate through this development that housing in

Koreatown can be community-oriented, affordable, and beautiful. KIWA plans to move into the ground floor of the building and offer all its existing programs to residents.

Tenant Organizing

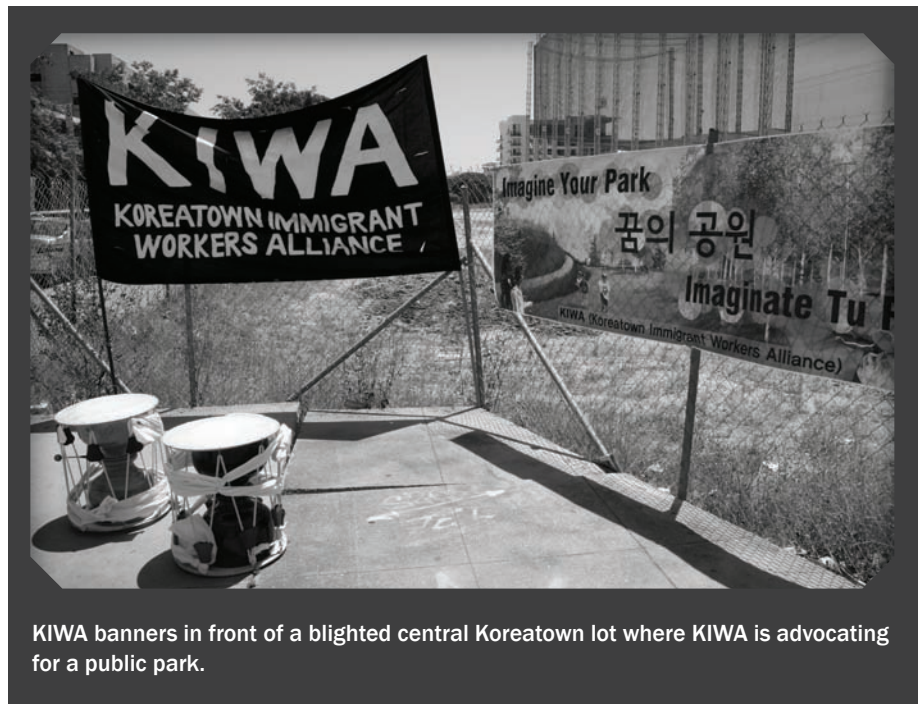
KIWA organizes low-income tenants to fight slum conditions and the destruction of their homes. When real estate developers receive favorable deals, KIWA has organized and advocated to ensure that there are community benefits agreements so that existing residents can remain in decent conditions with affordable rents.

When an expensive development project from a powerful local institution sought to evict community members, some of who had been living in the same apartment for decades, KIWA threw itself onto the front lines of stopping the evictions.

Parks and Urban Green Space

Campaign for Parks and Urban Green Space

Lacking in green space, Koreatown has been called a “park starved” neighborhood (Raya and Rubin, 2006). The elderly have almost no open or green space to sit and rest during the day, and some children have gone their entire lives without neighborhood spaces in which to run and play. This is why KIWA has recently turned to transforming the actual landscape of the neighborhood. KIWA’s most recent campaign is for a major park to be built at the corner of 7th Street and Hobart Boulevard, just off Wilshire Boulevard. Purchased by a transnational developer during the real estate boom of the mid-2000s, with the intention of building two market-rate condominium towers, the lot now lays empty and is contributing towards blight. KIWA supported the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) plan to purchase the southern portion of the lot for a community-designed Koreatown central park and helped coordinate outreach efforts to achieve a



KIWA banners in front of a blighted central Koreatown lot where KIWA is advocating for a public park.

diverse group of stakeholders. Since the state-wide dissolution of the CRA in 2012, KIWA has continued to explore alternatives for the park with the City, while continuing its broader campaign to promote the expansion of green space.

Leadership Development

KIWA’s campaigns have meant opportunities for hundreds of member leaders to be at the forefront of creating change in their community. KIWA’s approach to social change places stakeholders — those most affected by the conditions — at the center of defining and bringing about change. Specifically, KIWA’s work includes and promotes the leadership of Koreatown’s low-wage immigrant workers and tenants.

The actions above serve as examples of a community united and represent years of hard work filled with many challenges. The victories amount to a growing — and much-organized — interest in social justice in the neighborhood and the broader Los Angeles area. Koreatown residents, like any residents of a community, are intimately tied to their neighborhood. This report is an effort to advance the resurgent voice and interests of the community’s diverse and working residents.

CONCLUSION: Working Towards a Koreatown for All

Global trends, overlapping and uneven in their effects, have converged in Koreatown. Once a business center for the West Coast offices of U.S. industrial giants, Koreatown has been remade by Korean American and other businesspeople. All the while, low-income immigrants from dozens of nations seek a foothold in the quickly shifting economy that has transformed the neighborhood. Today, these low-income residents who are struggling to make ends meet have been joined by a class of white-collar professionals, drawn by

Koreatown's unique character, amenities, and central location.

Demographic change and economic restructuring has put this neighborhood at a crossroads: Will Koreatown continue to gentrify and exacerbate the gaps in income and quality of life, with professionals enjoying the many amenities of Koreatown, while many next-door neighbors struggle for a living wage? Or will Koreatown grow with equity so that all its residents live well? Koreatown's losses and triumphs alike point to



Masako Mochizuki, who lived in the same Koreatown apartment for 36 years, speaks at a KIWA press conference after the demolition of rent-controlled apartments.

possible solutions for communities facing similar issues.

Old issues of poverty, inequality, and alienation still exist. But 20 years after the 1992 civil unrest, they sometimes present themselves with new quirks (such as the change in working poverty) and often are more ingrained. Creative new strategies are required that reflect the multiple scales and scope of forces that connect single neighborhoods to the region and globe. We offer three broad directions for how local organizations can hitch equity to growth in Koreatown:

1. Organizations should continue working to improve conditions with and for workers, as they have been for years.

The broader mission of lifting workers out of working poverty conditions to living wages is still key. An increased amount of attention should be placed on the growing service-sector economy and the workers within it. Ongoing attention to workers in the food and recreation industry will be important in the effort to stem poverty. KIWA's efforts, and those of others across the country, hold promise in linking the struggles of low-wage workers to multi-class alliances based on

shared interests. What will enhance their effectiveness is a consistent framing that supports the equity and growth connection.

2. An affordable housing solution has always been a pressing need in many communities going through transition.

Gentrification and displacement are deep concerns among these communities and housing is the primary means to a stable neighborhood. Thus, affordable housing should be the foundation for keeping poor residents within the neighborhood as it continues to undergo improvement. Making it possible for residents to continue to live in their neighborhoods as they improve is the key to equitable reinvestment.

3. Organizations should continue pressing creative alliance-building strategies — as in the KIWA parks and urban green space campaign.

This includes not only traditional partners like allies in the labor movement or ideologically-aligned affordable housing developers, but also those who may seem like “uncommon” allies but that have shared interests. This includes business allies, particularly in the restaurant industry, and broadening their base to include new residents — like those in the professional or creative class. Neighbors sharing the same



KIWA marches in support of Occupy LA, 2011.



Member Bae Dong Hee drumming at a rally for parks and urban green space.

PERE, 2011). Viewing social inequality through the lens of global neighborhoods like Koreatown, and other neighborhoods like it, provides a strong argument for the necessity of equity-driven growth. This is the only way to remake neighborhoods like Koreatown as places, not of growing inequality, but home to a resurgent and diverse middle class.

Koreatown has the opportunity to be a place of innovation. In many ways it already is — the experiment of globalization is felt locally here. In addition, as research shows that equity is actually good for economic growth, KIWA is likely to forge new best practices in how to meet the needs of diverse residents in a neighborhood with strong ties to the global market. How can organizations build the capabilities of those who are the furthest behind? How can typically excluded residents participate in the neighborhood and region? What does this new demography mean for economic development in the next 20 years? Questions like these will guide KIWA's work over the next 20 years. It is not alone — throughout the region, grassroots organizations are working alongside it to build a region and a nation that more exactly represents our hopes for a just, inclusive, and livable future.

streets, cityscape, future parks, and shops can be brought together for change, and from different vantage points.

While all of KIWA's past campaigns emerged from global and regional as well as local conditions, their interconnections may be emphasized to more clearly tie local struggles to regional efforts and beyond. In all three directions, we strongly believe that efforts must link local struggles to a vision of regional transformation. In Los Angeles, global forces do not work in isolation on neighborhoods but are instead mediated through regional structures and processes.

Past research has taught us that urban neighborhoods are both at the forefront of economic change, and often foreshadow the changing demography of other smaller cities and eventually the entire country. By 2042, people of color will make up a majority in the US, even as trends of inequality are deepening (PolicyLink and

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