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### Sidewalk Wars: Los Angeles Street Vendors in the 1980s

On May 9<sup>th</sup>, 1972, Benning Alan Richardson called the Los Angeles Police Department to arrest his wife. He told dispatch that she violated the city's anti-street vending ordinance. His wife, Lois Jean Richardson, was selling flowers on a sidewalk in Glendale. Police did not arrest Lois, but she received a citation, and they requested her appearance at the Glendale Municipal Court two weeks later. The Police confiscated the flowers for evidence against her violation. After speaking with Benning, the Police concluded that he was testing the new ordinance because he was confused about the regulations in the city. According to Police, he claimed he held leases on multiple corners and that he had a city-approved vendor's license. However, his license was suspended by the city in a letter sent to him. The ordinance passed after Los Angeles City Council voted in favor of local businesses that complained about losing clientele to weekend vendors. Many small business owners believed that street vendors held an unfair advantage because they did not pay taxes like businesses.<sup>1</sup> The bizarre story of the Richardson's in Glendale is reflective of the history of street vending in the Los Angeles metropolis. Why would someone who is a successful street vendor and has a firm understanding of the region and its laws send his wife to test them? The answer is because street vending has a unique history in Los Angeles. Since 1974, the metropolis passed a complex series of regulations, which have created a complicated arena for street vendors, but its popularity and support allowed it to persist despite increased backlash towards the end of the twentieth century. By the end of 1994, vendors and city officials negotiated new regulations that legalized limited street vending in Los Angeles.

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<sup>1</sup> Jack Birkinshaw, "Tests Antivending Law: Man Turns Wife in to Police" *Los Angeles Times*, May 09, 1972. <http://libproxy.csun.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.csun.edu/docview/156995744?accountid=7285>.

There are four eras of street vending history in Los Angeles, the third wave that started in the 1970s became the most controversial because opponents responded vehemently and set the foundation for the future of street vending in Los Angeles.

Presently, Los Angeles is the food truck capital of the world, but the history of street vending has been unfavorable for vendors in Los Angeles. When California achieved statehood into the United States in the mid-nineteenth century, Los Angeles was not the cultural and economic juggernaut that it is today. However, transportation advancements in the 1870s led to the growth of the city and attracted Mexican and Chinese immigrants who chose to sell foods and goods on sidewalks. Chinese and Mexican immigrants are the earliest testimonies of street vending in Los Angeles. The early vending history of Los Angeles primarily consisted of Mexican immigrants that sold *tamales*.<sup>2</sup> The growing presence of street vending collided with opposition in the form of regulations that attempted to restrict or ban them. However, these efforts failed because street food was immensely popular. The influx of Mexican immigrants in the early 1920s led to the formation of a downtown enclave for street vendors. The rise of the automobile culture in Los Angeles chipped away at the popularity of street vendors because people interacted less with sidewalks. Recent literature states that in the 1930s, street foods were trendy in Los Angeles and more so in the 1940s because of more efficient connectivity to different ranges of the city thanks to railroad advancements.<sup>3</sup> However, the following three decades experienced a decline in the popularity of street food and, consequently, its viability to make money because of the automobile and rise of fast food. The recipes of traditional Mexican and Chinese foods were mimicked by fast-food restaurants and harmed vendor sales. A food

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<sup>2</sup> Farley Elliott, *Los Angeles Street Food: A History From Tamaleros to Taco Trucks* (Charleston: American Palate, 2015) 20.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

critic visited Los Angeles in the early 1970s and concluded that the city was ripe for a vibrant street food scene to emerge.<sup>4</sup> The food critic's report demonstrates newcomers experienced Los Angeles without popular street food or a street vendors. The lack of awareness regarding the food vending history in Los Angeles is a fundamental consideration because of the increasing migration to the city following the Second World War.

There are four significant eras of street vending in Los Angeles. The first commenced in the 1870s, the second wave kicked off in the 1920s, the third wave re-sparked street vending in the 1980s and saw the most opposition, and lastly, President Trump's successful presidential nomination ushered in the current wave in 2016. The history of street vending in Los Angeles began as early as the 1870s. The seminal literature that examines the early history of street vendors in Los Angeles is Gustavo Arellano's book *Taco USA: How Mexican Food Conquered America*. He acknowledged that the early roots related to street vending in Los Angeles are difficult to trace.<sup>5</sup> However, newspaper accounts have helped construct the starting point at 1870. By the 1880s, newspapers helped construct the narrative that tamales were must-have food for tourists. *Tamaleros* are the face of the first era of street vending history in Los Angeles. They are Mexican natives, descendants, or immigrants that sold tamales on sidewalks, and made a profound impact on how Angelenos perceived Mexican immigrants. Sarah Portnoy states that San Antonio and Los Angeles were hub cities for *tamaleros* to make money and have a visible presence.<sup>6</sup> They took advantage of growing populations and became integrated into the food culture in these cities. *Tamaleros* in San Antonio were typically women, but the uniqueness of

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<sup>4</sup> John Pastier. "L.A. has Unrealized Potential for Street Eating Facilities: Street Food Facilities." *Los Angeles Times*, July 11, 1971. <http://libproxy.csun.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.csun.edu/docview/156641033?accountid=7285>.

<sup>5</sup> Gustavo Arellano, *Taco USA: How Mexican Food Conquered America* (New York: Scribner, 2012) 54-56.

<sup>6</sup> Sarah Portnoy, *Food, Health, and Culture in Latino Los Angeles*, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2016) 11-18.

Los Angeles was that the *Tamaleros* were normally men. They were identifiable by their bright and colorful attire, which made them easy to recognize on the streets, and added vibrancy to the urban scene.

The *Tamaleros* became popular and successful in Los Angeles. According to Portnoy, they are significant because they were the first to introduce Mexican food to mainstream America.<sup>7</sup> Their popularity led to other racial groups selling tamales in other regions of California, including but not limited to the Bay Area. Portnoy cites the song "here comes the hot tamale man," which featured a bell used by vendors as a background instrument. The success and popularity culminated into the second era of street vending history in Los Angeles. The "tamale craze" era shows that street vending was accepted and that *tamaleros* helped launch Mexican cuisine into the mainstream Angeleno culture. The *tamalero* song demonstrates the popularity of the food and how it branched out to other areas in California.

The first era of street vending is significant because of the sense of purpose and economic viability sidewalk sales offered vendors. Arguably, the legally stable ability to practice selling food on the sidewalks prompted tamales to become a popular food, especially for working class citizens. Portnoy echoed this point by arguing that it culminated into "the tamale craze" era in the 1920s. She describes this era as unique because the Tamale became synonymous with Los Angeles. In her book, she cites a newspaper that encouraged tourists to try tamales from street vendors.<sup>8</sup> The praise of tamales as a tourist attraction indicates that they were a popular food, and street vendors were the leading suppliers of a unique cultural experience that belonged to Los Angeles when it was a growing city. The Mexican Revolution influenced a higher number of Mexicans to flee towards the United States and many went to Los Angeles.

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

At the same time, the city was attracting Anglos from other regions of the United States. Many scholars have concluded that the more Los Angeles grew industrially, economically, and the total population, the more it became divided by race. Essentially, the success of *tamaleros* was not supported by many Anglos. By the 1920s, *tamaleros* established their presence on the sidewalks throughout the metropolis. They clashed with relentless opposition that wanted them outlawed. The movement against street vendors came from Anglos that were threatened by the presence of "the Other" immigrant groups and wanted to eradicate their presence.<sup>9</sup> Anglos depicted Tamale vendors as dangerous threats to society and magnets of crime. Initially, restrictions prevented vendors from selling on sidewalks. Some of the notable restrictions were cities throughout the metropolitan forcing them to purchase operating licenses as an attempt to criminalize those that could not afford them. The most notable response by the city was to place a ban on tamale vendors and all other street vendors with the 1926 ordinance that banned sidewalk sales in business districts. This law set the precedent that officially legitimized street vendors as criminals and threats to the predominant Anglo vision of the future of Los Angeles' urban culture.

Further racialized policies such as Redlining, segregated neighborhoods and ironically allowed street vending to persist within Mexican enclaves. The third and most recent wave of street vending began in the mid 1970s and became a passionately zeal question for Angelenos throughout the 1980s. This era saw the reemergence of *tamaleros* in the form of *loncheras*, or a food truck. The food truck became the leading symbol for food vendors and one of the primary targets for those that sought to continue to quell vendors.

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

The support vendors received usually justified their place in the city, but vehement opposition concerned with the future of the city grew anxious over the use of public space. During the 1980s, the burgeoning vendors were growing along with the privatization of space in Los Angeles. The simultaneous development of the sprawling street vending culture along with the rise of the privatization of public space were at the opposite side of the spectrum of the urban culture of Los Angeles. David R. Ruiz's article, "Street Vendors: The Battle Over Cultural Interpretation" provides an overview of how street vendors were perceived by those that were threatened by their use of public space and what it meant for the future of the urban culture of Los Angeles. Ruiz argued, the most crucial concern regarding street vendors was undoubtedly "the future of the city and who will control urban cultural patterning in Los Angeles."<sup>10</sup> His argument overlooks the practical reasons for everyday people that opposed street vendors. However, Ruiz is correct to state that vendors threatened Anglos and elites that wanted the use of public spaces in downtown such as Broadway to their notions of reflect economic and social prosperity. The following is a photograph that shows

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<sup>10</sup> David R. Ruiz, "The Battle Over Cultural Interpretations" in *The Latino Condition* ed. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (New York: New York University Press, 1998) 661.



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Street vendors were the biggest threat to the vision of a postmodern city because they were the most visible agents of the informal economy and were creating bicultural communities. Ruiz states that another reason they were prime targets to the city's elites was because they were visibly reverting towards a diverse city opposed to a European-dominated society that established that street vending did not belong in Los Angeles.<sup>12</sup> The prime example that Ruiz uses to illustrate that the battle against street vendors was about the future of Los Angeles' cultural and spatial patterns was downtown elites joining against vendors. Elites in their sky rise offices were bothered by their inability to remove vendors that were literally and figuratively

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<sup>11</sup> William Reagh, *Food Vending Truck Selling Mexican Food*, 1985, Broadway, Los Angeles, Los Angeles Public Library.

<https://calisphere.org/item/0cc8197aa8fcd809f5efe96dc5043c7b/>

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 662.

below them and wanted to impose the suburbanite ideals on the city's sidewalks. Elites were more concerned with regaining the cultural landscape, especially in downtown.

Elites aspired a middle class civic downtown environment but the vendors were occupying the spaces that they designed for middle class people, which symbolized economic power. Failed subsidized programs launched to achieve this vision failed. Instead, street vendors in the downtown area were primarily people of ethnic backgrounds and began to occupy sidewalks. Thus, Ruiz argues persuasively, that throughout the 1980s, one of the critical problems was not street vending or people walking on sidewalks, but it was the racial background of the people that were utilizing the spaces.

The influx of Latin American immigrants that arrived in the 1970s cultivated the third and most controversial wave of street vending history in Los Angeles. Changes in public policies that include the ban on bilingual education, Prop 187, and the conservative movement to slash public spending on public services used by most immigrants reflect an anti-immigrant and anti-Latin American sentiment. The controversies concerning street vendors between 1974 and 1994 showcase another example of this reaction.

Backlash against street vendors varied throughout the city but the most common complaints about street vendors were that they increased traffic and the amount of trash in communities. Increased traffic was a common complaint, especially towards food vendors because they drew large crowds, parking became scarce, and typically, vendors occupied busy streets to maximize profits. Increased traffic was a complaint that homeowner's associations, property managers, residents, and city officials addressed in city council meetings. Vendors intensified traffic in Los Angeles after it already had pre-existing issues. Street vendors became stigmatized with leaving trash when they finished with their day, consumers of vendors became



notorious for littering, and vendors faced criticism for cluttering sidewalks with trash. Cities did not address traffic, noise, and trash until they organized sweeps against vendors in efforts to shut them down.

Other complaints were cultural and echoed anti-Latin American sentiment. Street vending was a standard and widespread practice in Latin American countries and immigrants imported it to Los Angeles. It was familiar and popular in Los Angeles before the 1950s and many new residents were unfamiliar with Los Angeles' street vending past. The lack of awareness of Angelenos created a unique scenario because residents did not like street vendors and its increasing visibility and popularity in the 1970s. The anti-Latin American sentiment was expressed by residents that found street vending as an informal sector of the economy that was not beneficial for anyone. They also argued that it mirrored the practices of a third world countries. This backlash was the most profound and received support for regulations attempting to ban street vending entirely.

Another form of backlash were the critics that believed that vendors held an unfair business advantage. Merchants and vendors had an ambiguous relationship. Most of these relationships began as mutually beneficial. Vendors typically set up shop in busy business districts and drew crowds. These benefited merchants, especially those that struggled with drawing attention. The relationships between street vendors and merchants turned bitter when they sold similar merchandise. Merchants often complained to city council members and called the Police. Small business owners usually reported complaints to the Police.

The rising popularity of street vendors led to concerns over public health. Vendors viewed health officials as city officials that were harassing them. Public health officials were concerned with how the food was prepared, cooked, and the ingredients that vendors used to

cook the food. Public health officials scored victories against street vendors by forcing them to acquire specialized permits from the county.

On August 20<sup>th</sup>, 1974, Los Angeles city council voted unanimously to ban street vending. The only exceptions made for this ordinance were food and drinks for immediate consumption from catering and ice cream trucks.<sup>13</sup> Shortly after, Mayor Bradley vetoed this decision. The reasons for the veto dispute most of the complaints and backlash that street vendors received. Mayor Bradley defended his veto by stating that the ordinance would make it impossible for residents to launch businesses as street vendors. Most of the economic elites began their careers as street vendors and street vendors need to be protected so that there is opportunity to climb the ladder of social mobility, Bradley argued. He acknowledged that street vending needed regulations. His counter proposal to the city council argued for regulations that would prevent traffic from building or hazards that “otherwise interfere with public convenience, safety, and welfare.”<sup>14</sup> He was arguing against the ordinance on economic terms, however, backlash throughout Los Angeles was also concerned with cultural expressions.

Opponents defended their claims by strategically citing the 1926 ordinance that banned sidewalk sales. Street vending has a unique history in Los Angeles because regions of the city did not enforce bans on street vending effectively. Meanwhile other regions have promoted, protected, and loosely enforced city wide bans against vendors. Recent literature contends that food vending became a staple for Mexican people since the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo rewarded the United States with the heavily Mexican populated states that included California. Furthermore, “Through waves of popularity and potential interlopers, through years of harsh

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<sup>13</sup> Erwin Baker, "Bradley Vetoes Ban on Street, Sidewalk Vending: Vending Ban Veto." Los Angeles Times, Aug 30, 1974., 2-c1. <http://libproxy.csun.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.csun.edu/docview/157584360?accountid=7285.C1>.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

citywide enforcement and foggy regulations, street food remains an indelible part of this city.”<sup>15</sup> The primary ordinance that is highlighted by lawmakers and opposition to street vending is an ordinance passed by Los Angeles in 1926 that led to citywide ban. The 1926 ordinance “forbids vendors in business districts but does not define a business district.”<sup>16</sup> The vagueness of this city ordinance further complicated street vending for decades. When loosely regulated areas such as Anaheim decided to enforce limitations, or ban street vending altogether, they cited the 1926 ordinance.

One of the premier places that street vendors had a strong presence was in Venice. Their presence in Venice further illuminates the complicated history in Los Angeles. In a *Los Angeles Times* Article with the headline “Street Vendors Walking Legal Tightrope: They’re Not Supposed to be There, but They’re Tolerated”, they report that “the merchants have come to be regarded as many as an integral part of the community wheeling uniqueness.”<sup>17</sup> The headline showcased that vendors were not allowed to be there. Common goods that they sold were jewelry, arts and crafts, handmade clothing, and stolen goods from department stores.<sup>18</sup> Small businesses tolerated vendors because they pay for their space. The *LA Times* reports that they paid two dollars and fifty cents per day and others paid ten percent of their earnings. These are organic regulations between owners of lots and private property that allow the vendors to hold their space. A successful vendor named William Gutzwiller, whom rented a lot in Venice told the *Los Angeles Times* that he found himself at the head of a crisis that threatened to end the

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<sup>15</sup> Elliott, *Los Angeles Street Food: A History From Tamaleros to Taco Trucks*, 40.

<sup>16</sup> Roxana Kopetman, "Anaheim Vendors Win Temporary OK to Sell in Areas of City's Ban." *Los Angeles Times*, September 25, 1. <http://libproxy.csun.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.csun.edu/docview/154799502?accountid=7285>.

<sup>17</sup> "Street Vendors Walking Legal Tightrope: They're Not Supposed to be there, but they're Tolerated Venice Vendors." 1978. *Los Angeles Times*, Aug 13, 2-ws1. <http://libproxy.csun.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.csun.edu/docview/158698344?accountid=7285>.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

tradition of vending in Venice.<sup>19</sup> The reason for the disruption were the tensions between traditional shopkeepers and street vendors dealing the same goods. He informed the *Los Angeles Times* that initially the shopkeepers welcomed them and tolerated them because they attracted crowds and benefited them. As soon as they competed for customers over the same goods such as yogurt and roller skates, the shopkeepers filed complaints in City Hall and the city had to uphold a long lineage of ordinances that were against street vendors.<sup>20</sup> The vendors turned to Councilwoman Pat Russell and received her support because she saw this as “a unique situation and should be allowed.”<sup>21</sup> Vendors often caught themselves in temporary bans or acquired temporary permission to resume their sales while cities decided their fate. Such was the case in Venice and Gutzwiller was pleased with the decision by the city but he believed that there were many ill feelings towards street vendors. Below is a photograph of a boy buying from a food truck in Venice Beach.




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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Carol Westwood, *Skater Kid at the Food Truck, Venice Beach*, 1980, Venice, Carlo Westwood Collection. <https://tessa.lapl.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/photos/id/117668/rec/1>

Ronald Soble offers reasons to embrace positive mentality for street vendors. He argues that the Great American Dream of a kid establishing themselves as a pushcart vendor and climbing the ladder of social mobility are present in New York and San Francisco with hot dog and flower vendors, respectively. However, this is missing from Los Angeles. He argues that it is because “the laws of the city are such that sidewalk vendors are effectively barred from hawking their wares on downtown public streets.”<sup>23</sup> The city needed to reform its thinking and laws about street vending. Soble stated, “such action might be good for business to the extent that vendors add a colorful touch to the city and hence attract more tourist dollars; and overhauling the laws would clear up a bit of the “Catch 22 situation.”<sup>24</sup>

One of the critical changes in street vending culture during the 1980s was the economic opportunities that it offered Latina immigrants. Food vending became a popular means to achieve income for first generation Latina immigrants that migrated to the Los Angeles metropolis. Men dominated the first two eras of street vending in Los Angeles. This era featured a more balanced experience. Fazila Bhimji argues in her article “Struggles, Urban Citizenship and Belonging: The Experience of Undocumented Street Vendors and Food Truck Owners in Los Angeles”, that street vending was one of the limited options of income for these women.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, many of these immigrants found easy work as vendors. There is scarce literature on the experience of street vendors in Los Angeles, but Bhimiji provides a reliable analysis on the immigrant women in Los Angeles’ food vending scene in the 1980s. The thesis of this article is

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<sup>23</sup>Ronald L. Soble, "Sidewalk Vendors Need Lower Curbs." *Los Angeles Times*, Jul 17, 1977. 1-H3.  
<http://libproxy.csun.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.csun.edu/docview/158261702?accountid=7285>.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Fazila Bhimji, "Struggles, urban citizenship, and belonging: The experience of undocumented street vendors and food truck owners in Los Angeles." *Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development* (2010), 457.

that “women street vendors, although unrecognized by the city and persistently criminalized, nevertheless gain a sense of citizenship and belonging through their varied experiences and struggles.”<sup>26</sup> She also describes how food vendors challenged the natural flow of Los Angeles by pointing out that it is an automobile oriented city.<sup>27</sup> An automobile environment dominated the metropolis, and therefore a vibrant street life is absent. It helps bring to light conceivable reasons for the initial backlash that food vendors encountered. Bhimiji states, “the Latina street vendors and the food trucks lend vibrancy to the quiet parks, street corners, and strip malls, such that people stop to eat, chat, and line up as they wait for their favorite *taco*, or *tamale*, or *raspada*.”<sup>28</sup> Thus, helping to solidify an identity and sense of belonging for the Latina women in Los Angeles.

Food vending became a divisive issue between immigrant vendors and Americans because of cultural and urban differences. Food vending was a standard practice in Latin America. Three countries with large emigration numbers to Los Angeles were Mexico, Guatemala, and El Salvador and migrants brought with them the traditional practices of street vending from their countries of origin. Bhimiji argues that there were driving forces in the United States that influenced many Latina women towards food vending were the recession of 1982 and the passage of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA).<sup>29</sup> The latter penalized employers for hiring and employing illegal immigrants. The passage of the IRCA indicates that illegal immigrants faced backlash for many other reasons not pertinent to this study, but it led many to resort to the familiarity of street vending.

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 461.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

The laws against street vending in 1982 reflected condemnation for vendors. More revealing is the lengths that police officers went to enforce these laws in specific regions of the city. In 1982, street vending would result in a misdemeanor, a fine up to one thousand dollars, and the chance of jail time for one hundred and eighty days. Based on her research that includes interviews and personal testimonials, Bhimji argues that vendors were constantly harassed, ticketed, and arrested in the early 1980s.<sup>30</sup> Street vending became a severe offence in the 1980s in Los Angeles. In some cases, Latina women that made twenty dollars a day were cited and imprisoned.<sup>31</sup> Los Angeles paid close attention to this sector of the informal economy.

Latina food vendors had a significant influence on how immigrants from the 1980s into the Los Angeles were perceived. Scholars contend that excluding Mexico, most the immigrant influx during the 1980s from Latin America were women. Scholars argue that the boom of the 80s led to the recession. Furthermore, many of the formal jobs were eliminated and became unavailable for immigrant women. The result of this was higher unemployment and more illegal immigrants turning to informal sectors of income including street vending.<sup>32</sup> Bhimji and other scholars agree that that the IRCA had a direct impact on pushing illegal immigrants towards the informal economy and consequently to becoming street vendors. The benefits of street vending for women were expertise, being self-employment, no language barriers, choice of hours, working in proximity to their neighborhood, and time off in the case of emergencies. Street vending emerged as a popular economic solution for Latina women that migrated to Los

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 466.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>32</sup> Norma Chinchilla and Nora Hamilton. "Negotiating urban space: Latina workers in domestic work and street vending in Los Angeles." *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations* (1996): 25.

Angeles. At any given time throughout the 1980s, there were upwards of three thousand street vendors in the city, without accounting for part time vendors.<sup>33</sup>

Street vendors represented the most visible sector of the informal economy. Furthermore, scholars assert that the most populous group of vendors in Los Angeles were Latinos.<sup>34</sup> It is plausible to conclude that Latino vendors faced backlash as street vending proliferated in the 1980s because of their increased numbers, presence, and the visibility of nontraditional customs that changed the urban landscape.

In 1986 Anaheim presented a robust case study to reveal the vagueness of the regulations and the struggle for legality for vendors. They were banned from the streets by the city officials. Nevertheless, for the first time, they used the 1926 ordinance to their advantage by claiming that it is ambiguous and vague. Salvador Sarmiento, the attorney for the vendors, argued that the vagueness of the ordinance led city officials to enforce to the ban vendors based on arbitrary and capricious enforcement. As expected, the Deputy City Attorney Lou Ann Merritt argued that the ordinance was not vague and that the city intended to continue enforcing it. The Orange County Superior Court Commissioner Eleanor M. Palk granted the vendors request for a restraining order to protect them from city officials that attempted to shut them down. The ordinance enforced in December of 1985 after complaints from residents.

The backlash started with residents of Anaheim that complained about congested streets, noise, and litter. *Los Angeles Times* writer Roaxana Kopetman states that more than one hundred people attended the city council meeting regarding street vending to support the vendors and argue that the ban served as an example to illustrate the treatment of Latinas in the city.

However, more than fifty people supported the action to uphold the city's ordinance. Kopetman

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 31.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*. 31.



states that the central focus of the public meeting was illegal immigration instead of street vendors. One of the attendees of this meeting was a resident of Orange named Artha Wilber. She complained that she did not want a pushcart society to develop in the United States.<sup>35</sup> Also, another resident named Ruth Kozusyn argued that pushcarts and trucks trashed the city and their services and lacked sanitation. For these reasons, Ruth and Artha argued that the city “should not be accommodating people who want to change our society and have us conform to their customs.”<sup>36</sup> Ruth and Artha represented the many who opposed street vending because on cultural grounds. City officials stated that because of the enforcement of the ordinance, neighborhoods are quieter and cleaner.

The vagueness of the 1926 ordinance granted a temporary safeguard for street vendors that were recognized by the county. These were twenty-seven members of the *Union de Comerciantes Latinos Del Sur de California* (Union of Southern California Merchants). Vendors not members of this union were subject to citation and enforcement by the Anaheim police.<sup>37</sup> The ordinance’s interpretation by Palk provided vendors a legitimate right to continue their practice. The response by the Anaheim City Council was to draft more restrictive regulations against street vendors.

The struggle for space between vendors and their foes intensified in April of 1986. Kopetman continued to cover the story and illuminated the backlash against street vendors, their response, how they were supported, and hinted at an ensuing ballot which would further restrict street vendors. She wrote that residents received an invitation to join to a city council meeting. One of the proposals attempted to grant permission to truck vendors to post nearby apartments

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<sup>35</sup> Roxana Kopeman, "Anaheim Vendors Win Temporary OK to Sell in Areas of City's Ban." *Los Angeles Times* September 25, 1986, 1.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

again, but the new regulation would ban the music and bells that vendors used to attract the attention of tenants and nearby residents. The regulation also aimed to ban pushcarts and non-motorized vehicles all together. The major complaints against vendors from residential areas in Anaheim were the noise and trash that were associated with sales made by vendors. Kopetman states that the amount of sellers increased and therefore the volume of complaints increased as well. The number of vendors increasing was due to the immigration from Latin American countries. Vendors acknowledged these complaints in a City Council meeting and stated that they were aware of the littering and traffic that they caused but vowed to help clean the streets and not allow traffic buildup.

Vendors acknowledging complaints showed an effort to seek legalization. Furthermore, Jose Luis Bucio told the City Council that if pushcart vendors were banned they would soon organize with the *Union de Comerciantes Latinos del Sur* and lobby for more favorable regulations.<sup>38</sup> Kopetman points out that apartment residential areas were the most essential spaces for vendors because that is where they experienced the highest volume of sales. Despite the backlash they were receiving, there was still support for them. Kopetman states that vendors received fourteen thousand signatures in support of continuing their practices without interference.<sup>39</sup> She states that most of the support was from the Latino community and because they found street vendors to be a valuable service.<sup>40</sup> They were a valuable service to the Latino community because they provided food and goods from their country of origin. Most

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<sup>38</sup> Roxana Kopetman. "Anaheim Plans Showdown Over Street Vendors." *Los Angeles Times*, Apr 16, 1986. <http://libproxy.csun.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.csun.edu/docview/154809583?accountid=7285>.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

importantly, they spoke the same the same language. The new wave of Street vendors of the 1980s provided home away from home to the new immigrants.

In the end of her newspaper article, Kopetman concluded that in the City Council meeting, Robert Nava, the staff specialist with Orange County Human Relations Commissions whom represented the street vendors, told the council that the group's position was not that the city was discriminating against Latinos. However, Kopetman adds, "Various members of the vendor group had individually said that the city's crackdown was discriminatory."<sup>41</sup> In the same meeting with the City Council, Bucio pointed out a stationary luncheon wagon outside of the Anaheim City Hall building. City Hall was, by way of the definition of the 1926 Ordinance, a business district, and Buccio convincingly argued that this was selective enforcement of the law. The mayor quickly stated that Police would handle the violation and issued a citation immediately.<sup>42</sup>

There was an undeniable growing feeling of racial discrimination among vendors. They felt that they were targeted, discriminated, and harassed by Police. Maria Elena Chacon was a Salvadorian refugee that claimed that she supported her family by selling food and clothes within her neighborhood expressed frustration. She told the Los Angeles Times that she was tired of police crackdowns. During encounters with the Police, she claims that the Police arrested her and friend, confiscated their goods, and stole their personal belongings stolen. To conclude her testimony, Chacona stated, "We fled from oppression, we expected to find more opportunity here." Vendors felt their sense of identity within the city was threatened and the spaces in which they conducted business were being confiscated. Los Angeles Councilman Michael Woo presented the idea of creating a taskforce in efforts to support the full legalization of street

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

vending. He acknowledged that Los Angeles was a city of immigrants and street vending provided an avenue for them to grow and stabilize economically. The most important statement made by councilman Woo, was that Los Angeles had the harshest laws against street vendors. He stated, "This city has the most restrictive ordinances of any major city in the country, maybe even the world. That's absurd. Properly regulated, street vending adds vitality to the streets. It also provides a livelihood for immigrants."<sup>43</sup> These statements from Woo are vital because they legitimize the backlash, unprecedented crackdowns, and experience that vendors were explaining to the *Los Angeles Times*.

The response by the Latino Community in July of 1988 was to create a space within Los Angeles that would protect street vendors. It resulted in Olvera Street declaring itself as a sanctuary zone for vendors. The *Los Angeles Times* reported that the Church decided to intervene on behalf of the vendors. They were struggling to survive against authorities that were clamping down on illegal street sales because they were under resourced. In an exciting sequence of events, Father Luis Olivares stated that he did not want to give the impression that he disobeyed laws, however, the church decided to extend their support because "subsistence is a basic human right."<sup>44</sup> The news article asserts that there was a robust anti-vending police campaign in the late 1980s. The creation of the Police Department's Illegal Vending Taskforce led by Bob Lamont illustrates the strong resentment towards Los Angeles street vendors. However, they did not shut

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<sup>43</sup> Alan Citron, "Task Force Formed to Study Legalizing of Street Vendors: Woo Says L.A.'s Laws are Toughest of any Major City." *Los Angeles Times* July 08, 1989, 2. <http://libproxy.csun.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.csun.edu/docview/1218253544?accountid=7285>.

<sup>44</sup> Iris Schneider "Olvera Street Church Declares a Street Vendors' Sanctuary Zone. *Los Angeles Times*, July 14, 1988. <http://libproxy.csun.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.csun.edu/docview/909690709?accountid=7285>

down vendors on church property after the Olvera Street Church declared it a sanctuary zone in July.

The Police Department's Illegal Vending Taskforce was a small unit composed of three members and they were responsible for attending to complaints against street vendors. Schneider reported on the unit created a year and a half before the publication of the newspaper article, therefore the taskforce was assembled in early 1987. In that year and a half between 1987 and mid 1988, Lamont told Schneider that they made one thousand-two hundred arrests. Their main objectives were to alleviate traffic and to respond to the complaints, primarily comprised of merchants that were concerned with them stealing their clientele. The city respected the church's declaration of becoming a sanctuary zone and in turn, vendors agreed to promise the church that they will prevent traffic build up and keep the streets clean.<sup>45</sup> The creation of the Illegal Vending Taskforce illustrated a high and increasing number of complaints, the resentment that residents had towards street vendors, and how quelling street vending became an increasing priority for the Police. Simultaneously, the Olvera Street Church felt the need to intervene and protect some of its members. Street vending in the 1980s became an increasingly complicated struggle for space and identity for new immigrants.

The protection that the Olvera Street Church provided street vendors did not last long. On August 1<sup>st</sup>, 1988, one month after the church declared its property a sanctuary zone for vendors, officials of the Central American Refugee Center claimed that police and health inspectors were harassing sellers on the church's property. It was one month after Lamont stated that vendors were abiding by the cities laws because they were on the church's private property. Olvera Street became the site of a massive street sweep that was charged by health inspectors that were

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

escorted by Police. John A. Oswald wrote that vendors and their lawyers believed that the Police were trying to intimidate them.<sup>46</sup> They intimidated them by adding new requirements that vendors needed to comply with to satisfy health standards in the city, asking for identification, taking photographs of them, and demanding trivial changes.<sup>47</sup> The health department responded soundly by stating that food was too close to the sidewalks which had running urine and their job is to ensure public safety. Furthermore, they informed the vendors that they needed a sales permit approved by the Health Department that costs between sixty-six to one hundred twenty-four dollars. Requiring new licenses kicked off an ongoing conflict between street vendors and public health officials.

By the end of the decade street vendors in Los Angeles faced unprecedented backlash which resulted in constant interactions with Police but there was an increasing amount concern for public health. In 1987 Los Angeles launched city wide sweeps against illegal street vendors. Police focused on southern Los Angeles, they defined the parameters of this area from Crenshaw to San Pedro.<sup>48</sup> Police planned to have a two-day sweep comprised of sixty police officers accompanied by health officials. The expectation was to shut down vendors, confiscate their merchandise or food, and issue citations for violating the city and county laws against sidewalk vending.<sup>49</sup> Police detective Tony Celi stated that most complaints were coming from the business community because they believed that street vending was unfair business advantage. The business community filing complaints and calling Police was common throughout the city. The

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<sup>46</sup> John Oswald, "Group Alleges Officials are Harassing Street Vendors." *Los Angeles Times*, August 02, 1988. 1. <http://libproxy.csun.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.csun.edu/docview/909711304?accountid=7285>.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Dean Murphy, "Authorities Out to Get Street Vendors to Hit the Road." *Los Angeles Times*, May 14, 1987, 2. <http://libproxy.csun.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.csun.edu/docview/814621294?accountid=7285>.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

city ran sweeps for two reasons. The first was to dedicated time and resources in a consolidated time and the second was to send a message to the street vending community about how serious the city was about the anti-street vending laws. The Police claimed that they had limited resources to attend to the high amounts of complaints and against street vendors and that they were going to do their best during their sweep by citing and arresting people, confiscating their goods, and taking photographs as evidence.<sup>50</sup>

Health officials critiqued the practices of food vendors. The county health department grew increasingly concerned with the increasing presence and consumption of street food. Tom Barnett, manager for the Los Angeles County Health Department is quoted stating, “There is an increase in the variety of foods and the style of the presentation, and there is growing concern that it is getting out of hand.” He states that the Health Department was concerned with consumers assuming the food meets public health standards.<sup>51</sup> The Health Department pitted themselves against street vendors because they knew that most of them did not possess a city approved license. Street vendors claimed that they could not afford newly issued mandated licenses

By 1992, the politics of street vending in Los Angeles experienced a new episode defined by compromise. It became apparent that street vending was increasing in popularity for consumers and as a form of income for immigrants that struggled to find employment. Simultaneously, backlash from business owners, homeowners, residents concerned with the cultural changes that mirrored Latin American cities, and public health officials. Both groups begun discussions to agree on the street vending question in the city. The first meeting of its kind occurred in Panorama City in 1992. During this meeting, vendors asked questions about legality,

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

rules, concerns with Police, health standards, and how to remain in compliance.<sup>52</sup> The willingness to compromise is evidence that city officials warmed up to accepting street vending as a staple of Los Angeles' urban culture, whether they wanted to or not.

Another example of willingness from city officials to meet with street vendors was another Los Angeles City Council meeting in January 1992. In this meeting, the city voted in favor of creating designated vending districts and require vendors to obtain city permits.<sup>53</sup> The designated zoning areas for consideration were Bole Heights, MacArthur Park, downtown Los Angeles, the Pico-Union district, and Hollywood. This meeting was essential and hundreds of people attended. During this meeting, Cardinal Roger Mahony mimicked the Olvera Street Church priests in favor of the vendors. He stated, “scarce political resources have been diverted to arrest and ticket people who are doing nothing other than seeking honest work to support themselves and their families.”<sup>54</sup> These meetings were ambiguous because supporters constantly cheered when vendors made solid points. There were also opinions shared by people who believed that vending should either be non-existent or confining it to very few neighborhoods in the city. One of the newest points made during this meeting public meeting was that homeowners were fearful of property values decreasing.<sup>55</sup> The increasing backlash led to higher fines and more arrests. Street vending remained illegal and they faced a maximum fine of one thousand dollars and six months in jail. Arrests numbers nearly doubled from one

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<sup>52</sup> Jeff Schnaufre, "Street Vendors Meet with City Officials." *Los Angeles Times*, November 17, 1933. 1. <http://libproxy.csun.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.csun.edu/docview/1851829860?accountid=7285>.

<sup>53</sup> Louis Shagun, "Council OKs Districts for Street Vendors: Home Edition]." *Los Angeles Times*, January 15, 1992. <http://libproxy.csun.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.csun.edu/docview/281656237?accountid=7285>.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*



thousand four hundred in 1989 to two-thousand seven-hundred in 1990.<sup>56</sup> Meanwhile, city officials were becoming polarized about the issue.

Councilman Woo's original plan to legalize street vending shut down but consequent proposals were more welcoming for people that opposed street vendors. Woo's original plan to legalize street vending throughout the city was too radical to pass during this time. The main opposition for his plan were homeowner groups owners of small businesses.<sup>57</sup> Each group feared that an increasing amount of pushcart vendors led to increased crime and blight, decreased property values, and would put small business owners at an unfair disadvantage because street vendors did not pay rent and many of them did not possess the legal documentation to function as businesses. Woo realized his plan would fail and supported the motion created by Councilman Richard Alatorre which allowed for designated vending zones. The LA Times article, "Council Ok's Districts for Street Vendors" named council members Nate Holden, Joan Milke Flores, and Ernani Bernardi as members who were not in favor of the plan. They stated, "it's a gigantic horrible step backward to fill city streets with pushcarts."<sup>58</sup> However, the plan moved forward and significant details of this new structured plan required support by all involved. Merchants had to approve vending in their area with at least a twenty percent vote. The city selected sites that overtime became enclaves where street vendors thrived. as targeted areas for zoning, but the city restricted the number of vending sites.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, the various goods that street vendors necessitated different licenses. For example, vendors selling toys and electronics required

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> James Rainey, "L.A. Looking for Palatable Solution to Street Vending: Ordinance: The Council Will Consider a Plan to Legalize and Regulate the City's 5,000 Sidewalk Merchants." *Los Angeles Times*, December 09, 1993. <http://libproxy.csun.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.csun.edu/docview/1833033441?accountid=7285..>

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

business tax and liability insurance.<sup>60</sup> Food vendors required an additional permit from the Los Angeles County Health Department.<sup>61</sup> These new regulations legitimized street vendors as official business and solidified their victories over public space. The city had no choice but to accept vendors as part of the increasingly diverse ethnic makeup of the metropolis. Street vending persisted throughout the city despite bans because of its popularity, success, cultural correspondence for incoming immigrants, and because of the lack of resources that Police had to enforce anti-street vending laws, regardless of their confusion. However, these compromises failed to maintain a sustainable solution in the metropolitan area.

Beginning in 2013, Los Angeles City council members Jose Hiuzar from East Los Angeles and Curren Price from South Los Angeles re-launched a movement to legalize street vending. A *Los Angeles Times* article covered the origins of the movement and focus on the council members rationalize to prove that street vending is beneficial to the city. The citations, arrests, and confiscation of equipment and produce persisted well into the twenty first century. Council member Hiuzar argued that the system was broken and needed to be change. The *Los Angeles Times* reports that he believed that Los Angeles had a world class street vending culture, yet many in the city ignored its existence.<sup>62</sup> The vision of the food critic that visited Los Angeles in 1972 and wrote about the potential for the city's street food scene came to fruition. In 2014, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that upwards of fifty thousand vendors were operating in Los Angeles' informal economy. Furthermore, street vendors accounted for five hundred million

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> Catherine Saillant and Kate Linthicum, "L.A. City Council Members Push to End Street Vending Ban," *Los Angeles Times*, November 6, 2013.

<https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-xpm-2013-nov-06-la-me-ln-end-street-vending-ban-20131106-story.html>

dollars of revenue.<sup>63</sup> The number of vendors and the revenue they generate are evidence of a prominent street vending culture. Furthermore, another reason why vehement opposition failed to ban them altogether.

Huizar and Price sparked negotiations towards legalizing street vending in 2013 based on the cultural and economic realities of street vending in Los Angeles. Huizar argued that Los Angeles gravely mishandled its stance on street vendors. He believed that the system did not favor anyone because vendors could not seek legal business licenses, public health concerns persisted, and untaxed revenue.<sup>64</sup> Vendors wanted to abide by city regulations were unable to because of the ban on street vending. Public health concerns persisted because public health officials did not have an adequate system to check food vendors. Lastly, the five hundred million dollars went untaxed. Ultimately, by 2013, the street vending system in Los Angeles posed many problems that needed to be solved because street vendors persisted despite the sweeps, citations, fines, and the confiscations. Furthermore, the LA Times reported that the Police arrested twelve hundred vendors in 2013.

Despite the efforts of Huizar, Price, and others that supported the legalization of street vending in Los Angeles, just like in the 1990s, their attempts failed. They argued that the other ten major cities such as New York City, Chicago, and San Francisco permitted street vending, therefore, small businesses and restaurants and street vendors proved co-exist.<sup>65</sup> The proposed regulations consisted asked for vendors to register with the city and agree to audits conducted by L.A. County Public Health officials.<sup>66</sup> These regulations were proposed in the 1990s and failed

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<sup>63</sup> Emily Alpert Reyes, "L.A. Officials Take a Step Toward Legalizing Street Vending," *Los Angeles Times*, December 2, 2014.

<https://www.latimes.com/local/cityhall/la-me-street-vending-20141203-story.html>

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Saillant and Linthicum, "L.A. City Council Members Push to End Street Vending Ban,"

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

to pass local legislation again in 2013. The future of street vending in Los Angeles seemed ubiquitous.

President Trump's successful nomination in 2016 was the turning point for street vending and ushered in a new era in Los Angeles. In 1926, Los Angeles banned street vendors. Since then, street vendors struggled to find spaces to operate, experienced harassment from Police, faced perceptions that described them as outcast in a city where they did not belong, and failed to achieve legalization through unions and support from local politicians. President Trump's victory in the 2016 presidential election catalyzed the legalization of street vending in Los Angeles and ended a historical ninety-year ban. In combination with California Senate Bill 946, which forced Los Angeles to make regulations regarding street vendors, President Trump's nomination led to widespread support for immigrants. California Senate Bill 946 forced Los Angeles to create robust guidelines that complied with the state's. The decriminalization of street vendors started as an initiative by the state. The bill states,

The bill would require the dismissal of any criminal prosecutions under any local ordinance or resolution regulating or prohibiting sidewalk vendors that have not reached final judgment. The bill would also authorize a person who is currently serving, or who completed, a sentence, or who is subject to a fine, for a conviction of a misdemeanor or infraction for sidewalk vending, as specified, to petition for dismissal of the sentence, fine, or conviction.<sup>67</sup>

The *Los Angeles Times* reported that the initiative responded to fears of deportation for immigrant vendors. However, in Los Angeles vendors faced fines and citations.<sup>68</sup> In 2018, Los Angeles legalized street vending for the first time since 1926.

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<sup>67</sup> "SB-946 Sidewalk vendors", California State Legislative Information, last modified September 17, 2018. [https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill\\_id=201720180SB946](https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201720180SB946)

<sup>68</sup> Emily Alpert Reyes, "After Years of Debate, L.A. Legalizes Sidewalk Vending," *Los Angeles Times*, November 28, 2018. <https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-vending-legalize-20181128-story.html>

Modern Street vendors experienced new freedoms with more explicit guidelines issued by the city. The most significant change, in the words of a vendor named Edgar Suy is that they have new freedoms.<sup>69</sup> For many years, street vendors became stigmatized as magnets of crime, trash, and a cultural nuisance. It was important for vendors to not only pursue sales legally and without legal consequences, but they also valued being respected and appreciated for their services. Being characterized as contributors to an underground market and people that did not fit into the metropolitan area's vision affected the identity of vendors. Edgar Suy told the LA Times, "Now we can come out of the shadows. We aren't a menace to society."<sup>70</sup> Vendors gained the right to work on the sidewalks. The conditions were to pick up their trash, park away from street features such as driveways or fire hydrants, acquire a business and a health permit, and they must abide by park regulations.<sup>71</sup> Interest, the ordinance banned vendors from busy attractions including Staples Center, Dodgers Stadium, Universal Studios, and the Hollywood Walk of Fame. The debates that argue whether street vendors' cultural presence adds to the cultural vibrancy or degrades the experience for pedestrians because of congested streets and additional traffic in specific spaces in the city continue to this day.<sup>72</sup>

Most headlines on newspapers and blogs, quotes from politicians, and statements made by vendors claim that the fight for the legalization was a five-year battle. However, those impressions on the process of the legalization of street vending are far from the truth. The battle to legalize street vending started as soon as the city banned it in 1926 and neighboring communities such as Anaheim followed. Los Angeles street vendors added vibrancy and culture to the city, but many declined and undermined their value. *Tamaleros* were some of the first

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

notable successful food vendors and became synonymous with the cuisine in Los Angeles. Their popularity and success ultimately led to another era of street vending history where vendors became part of the urban and cultural fabric of the metropolitan area. Despite their success and value, the city banned them. Despite the prohibition, street sales persisted in following decades, but the viability of street vending dwindled because of the rise of automobile culture in the metropolitan area. During the 1970s, Latin American immigrants made Los Angeles their home. Lack of employment opportunities led to a rebirth of street vending culture that collided with vehement opposition throughout the 80s. Compromises with respect to with respect to street vendors collapsed in the 1990s. Street vendors continued to thrive and generate upwards of fifty million dollars of revenue in 2013 despite risking fines, arrests, and the confiscation of their goods. President Trump ignited the modern wave of street vending history because California forced Los Angeles to decriminalize and eventually legalize street vending. In 1972, Richardson called the Police on his wife because of the confusing nature of street vending in Los Angeles. Many vendors share the same experience today. The LA Times reported that since then, vendors have remained confused about where they can make sales, if they can remain stationary, the consequences of citations, and how the new permit system functions.<sup>73</sup> Los Angeles, issued the first permit to a street vendor in 2020.

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<sup>73</sup> Sonja Sharp, "Santa Monica Street Vendors Struggle Amid New Licensing Rules," *Los Angeles Times*, June 30, 2019.  
<https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-street-vendor-santa-monica-citations-20190630-story.html>

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