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Eva Nip

Washington University in St. Louis

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FROM HOP ALLEY TO PARKING LOT TO STRIP MALL: THE DECENTRALIZATION OF PHYSICAL SPACE AND COMMUNITY FOR CHINESE AMERICANS IN ST. LOUIS CITY

Eva Nip

Mentor: Carol Camp Yeakey

For almost a century from 1869 to 1966, Hop Alley in downtown St. Louis, Missouri, was a space for new Chinese immigrants to find a social community, job opportunities, and a haven from an unknown country. However, in 1966, the physical Chinatown was razed for Busch Stadium's parking lot. The Chinese community bounced around from location to location, eventually settling on Olive Boulevard. Even so, the centralized physical presence of Hop Alley was never replicated. As a result, the Chinese community has become a cultural community. The removal of the physical Chinatown and the eventual appearance of a New Chinatown on Olive Boulevard influenced as well as reflected how the Chinese American community in St. Louis shifted their social, cultural, and economic needs. This thesis will dive deeper into the change of the community's needs after displacement through examining the economics, institutions, and social networks, from Hop Alley to Busch Stadium parking to Olive Boulevard. Some questions to be considered include: why has the Chinese community become decentralized? How has the Chinese community network and ethnic identity changed due to displacement? What does the social and economic network look like without a centralized location? Are cultural expressions of identity prevalent when there is no centralized Chinatown or physical space? The influence of physical space on community experiences and how each change in response to the other reveals how the Chinese community in St. Louis was shaped and shifted from isolated and insular to independent, decentralized, and assimilated.