Resistance is Our Heritage: An Archive of Survival and Efforts to Resist Gentrification in Little Jamaica.

by
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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

Rooted in my experience as a community member and organizer, this thesis documents the history and resistance of Little Jamaica in Toronto as it continues to face the impacts of gentrification and displacement. Using Black archival practice as my methodology, I draw from oral histories, protest materials, community reports, and digital media to center the voices and experiences of residents, business owners, and activists. Grounded in the framework of racial capitalism, this research understands gentrification as part of a longer history of displacement, extraction, and state neglect targeting Black communities. It traces the development of Little Jamaica through Caribbean migration and examines how planning interventions—particularly the Metrolinx Light Rail Transit construction—have intensified economic pressure, disrupted local business, and contributed to cultural erasure. By amplifying community narratives and mobilizing knowledge for advocacy, this thesis not only documents the fight to preserve Little Jamaica's cultural identity, but also contributes to broader discussions on gentrification, displacement, and resistance. It highlights the everyday strategies, care networks, and collective organizing that continue to sustain the neighborhood. Ultimately, it seeks to equip residents with knowledge and tools for organizing while challenging dominant narratives of progress and revitalization. At its core, this work affirms that the fight for Little Jamaica is ongoing—and that resistance has always been part of its story.

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Dedication

To my younger self who constantly doubted himself. I hope you are proud.

To my father who is living through me as I write this thesis. I hope you are proud.

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Chapter One: Introduction

My connection to Little Jamaica, Toronto begins with my father who moved to the neighborhood on November 18, 1988. Moving from the small tropical island of Grenada with a population of just under 90,000 at the time to the largest city in Canada in the middle of the winter was a tall task and a tough transition. Aside from the obvious issue of dealing with a much colder climate, my father retells how scary it was to move half-way across the world without genuine social connections already established. When he first arrived, he quickly heard about Little Jamaica—back then, it was just "Eg West" to most Caribbean expats. He learned that Eglinton was synonymous with Black culture, a hub where everything he needed was within reach. From Caribbean restaurants and grocery stores to record shops, barbershops, tailors, and places of worship, it truly was a one-stop shop. The neighborhood pulsed with energy, especially late-night after bashment parties where the latest dancehall, soca, reggae, and hip-hop hits blared through the air. But perhaps the most valuable part of the neighborhood was the freedom to be himself. There was no need to code-switch or adjust his identity to fit in. He felt comfortable embracing his authentic, Black, Caribbean self—something that could only happen on Eglinton.

Lately when I hear people discuss Little Jamaica it's almost as if it's a common understanding that it won't be here forever. The common tone is that it's a thing of the past. I remember a few years ago there were talks about putting up a "remembering Little Jamaica" mural in the new LRT station that is opening up. The idea of Little Jamaica being a thing of the past shook me to my core. This neighborhood is a part of me. This neighborhood is where I've grown up for my entire life. This is my home. I went to school here, the people in this community have watched me grow from a child into the man I am today. The restaurants have kept me fed, the barbershops and clothing stores have kept me in style, the elders have blessed me with their wisdom, the community has kept me safe and out of trouble. I can't help but wonder what would happen if this neighborhood would disappear. Where would Caribbean families in the city go to reconnect with their culture? Where would Black folks come to feel seen and safe? Where would youth go to learn about the history of the neighborhood? If the neighborhood is gone, does all the history, knowledge and wisdom go with it? What does the erasure of this neighborhood mean for the future generation of Caribbean youth? These questions are uncomfortable but necessary ones to ask because unfortunately this is our reality.

I have seen first-hand how the closures of long-standing businesses, and the influx of non-Caribbean people in the neighborhood has changed what Little Jamaica is and how people experience the neighborhood. I've watched this once-vibrant neighborhood, rich in culture, slowly struggle for survival. Many of my friends, neighbors, and familiar faces have been displaced due to rising rents. Even those that can afford to remain in the neighborhood face what Leslie Kern (2022) refers to as slow violence – many aspects of their lives are disrupted by other local changes such as proximity to culturally relevant resources and services. As the demographics shift, new culturally-irrelevant social spaces replace long-standing local establishments, leaving many residents feeling forgotten and out of place in the very community they've always called home. The shops I once frequented, those that felt like second homes, have

largely disappeared. Family-run restaurants, b4arbershops, and grocery stores—places that were the heartbeat of Little Jamaica—are now slowly being replaced by businesses that don't reflect the neighborhood's essence. The displacement of the people and places that made this community vibrant isn't just a loss of business; it's a loss of culture, history, and belonging. What's happening in the neighborhood is more than an economic transformation—it's a quiet but devastating erasure of everything that made Little Jamaica what it once was for Caribbean folks in the city.

Little Jamaica

Little Jamaica, also known as "Eg West", "Eglinton West", or simply "Eglinton" is a 3-kilometre strip along Eglinton Avenue West, from Keele Street to Marlee Avenue in Toronto, Ontario, Canada (Henry, 1994).[1] The neighborhood has been a home and a place of belonging to Caribbean and African residents in Toronto dating back to 1960's (Henry, 1994). The once thriving Caribbean cultural hub is now experiencing major neighborhood changes, including gentrification – a complex process of neighborhood change that involves the displacement of lower-income residents by wealthier people moving in (Black Urbanism Toronto, 2020). Today, Little Jamaica is undergoing the early stages of gentrification.

The prolonged Metrolinx light rail transit (LRT) construction along Eglinton West has inflicted severe harm on the neighborhood (Patel, 2016). Persistent flooding, obstructed storefronts *(see figure 1)* and sidewalks, excessive construction waste, and the removal of parking have all contributed to a sharp decline in property values, destabilizing both local businesses and residents (CP Planning, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic further worsened conditions for many businesses and residents already in precarious situations, deepening economic instability and accelerating displacement. These pressures have left Little Jamaica especially vulnerable to exploitation. Developers have capitalized on the depressed property

[1] Little Jamaica is located on the traditional territory of the Anishinaabe, the Huron-Wendat, and the Haudenosaunee Nations (CP Planning, 2021).

values caused by years of construction-related damage to acquire properties at reduced costs. Situated in a desirable midtown location, Little Jamaica has immense geographic and cultural value. With the eventual completion of the LRT, these developers are poised to resell or lease these properties at significantly higher prices, reaping substantial profits while displacing the very community that built the neighborhood (Patel, 2016). What was once a thriving cultural hub now stands at a crossroads, facing the risk of erasure in the name of urban renewal. Without intervention, the forces of gentrification threaten to strip Little Jamaica of its character, displacing long-time residents and businesses while erasing the cultural legacy that has defined the Eglinton strip for generations.



Figure 1: Storefronts in Little Jamaica blocked by LRT construction waste. Photographed by Marcus Pereira (2020)

Displacement in Canada

The narrative of gentrification often begins with the displacement of current residents (Zuk et al., 2018); however, it is crucial to recognize that the displacement of racialized peoples is neither a recent phenomenon nor did it begin with the gentrification of Little Jamaica. Rather, it is a foundational process upon which this country was built (Hyndman, 2024). A key limitation in much of the existing gentrification research is its tendency to overlook the interconnected nature of displacement—specifically, that the displacement of Black communities is deeply intertwined with the original displacement of Indigenous peoples from their lands (Kern, 2022).

This thesis recognizes that any discussion of Black displacement in Canada must also acknowledge the prior and ongoing displacement of Indigenous peoples. Therefore, in addressing the impacts of gentrification on Black communities, this thesis consistently acknowledges the entangled history of Indigenous displacement.

This thesis then situates the gentrification of Little Jamaica within the broader historical framework of racialized displacement, acknowledging that such processes are deeply embedded in Canada's colonial history. This history is marked by the violent dispossession, erasure, and genocide of Indigenous peoples, a foundational act of displacement that set the stage for ongoing patterns of forced removal (Kern, 2022). As Indigenous communities continue to resist dispossession and displacement, Black and Caribbean populations have likewise been systematically uprooted—first through migration driven by socio-economic push factors and later through policies and developments that render their communities increasingly precarious (Teelucksingh, 2006). By tracing these interconnected histories, this thesis highlights how gentrification in Little Jamaica is not an isolated event but part of a continuum of colonial and racialized displacement.

While many Canadians even today aren't taught its story, it is essential to examine Africville, Canada's first Black neighborhood, as a historical precursor to the ongoing displacement and gentrification of Little Jamacia that this thesis explores. The story of Africville underscores how logics of systemic racism and exclusion have long forced Black communities to resist marginalization while building self-sustaining spaces, only to face eventual displacement and destruction. Understanding Africville's history provides a critical backdrop for analyzing the patterns and consequences of gentrification in Little Jamaica today.

Africville

Situated on the southern shore of Bedford Basin in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Africville was established in the mid-19th century by Black settlers, including descendants of Jamaican Maroons and African American refugees who sought refuge from oppression in the United States after the American Revolution and the War of 1812 (Clairmont & Magill, 1999). Despite being promised equal treatment, these settlers faced systemic racism and exclusion from white Canadians, which forced them to create a self-sufficient community. Africville, formally founded in 1848, grew steadily as other Black families settled in the area, attracted by its access to fishing and wage labor opportunities (Nelson, 2000). By 1849, the community had about 80 residents and had established the Seaview African United Baptist Church, its first socio-cultural space and a vital hub for celebrations, civic events, and spiritual life (Clairmont & Gill, 1999).

As Africville grew, it became a thriving community of Black-owned businesses and services (Carvery, 2008). However, the systemic neglect became increasingly evident. Africville residents paid taxes but were consistently denied access to essential public services such as paved roads, running water, sewage systems, garbage collection, and public transportation (Nelson, 2008). This neglect continued even as Halifax expanded, and other neighborhoods gained these amenities. The city's disregard for Africville intensified in the 20th century with the placement of hazardous facilities—such as an open-pit garbage dump, infectious disease hospitals, and sewage disposal units—in or near the community. (Nelson, 2000). These facilities severely contaminated the environment, creating unsafe living conditions for Africville residents. This marginalization led to Africville being stigmatized as a slum, laying the groundwork for its ultimate destruction.

In the 1960s, under the guise of "urban renewal," Halifax began forcibly relocating Africville residents (Nelson, 2008). Using the socially constructed negative stigma of Africville

as a justification, city officials systematically displaced the community, often using coercion and intimidation tactics. Residents received compensation based on property ownership, with many long-term residents, unable to provide formal deeds, receiving only $500 (Clairmont & Magill, 1999). Homes were demolished without adequate notice, and residents were moved to poor-quality housing elsewhere in Halifax. The final blow came in 1967 when the Seaview United Baptist Church was demolished (Nelson, 2000). By 1969, Africville was completely erased, its land repurposed for industrial and urban development (Nelson, 2008).

The destruction of Africville provides a powerful lens for understanding the gentrification of Little Jamaica, another Black neighborhood under threat in Canada. Like Africville, Little Jamaica has long been a hub for Black culture, identity, and economic activity. However, redevelopment projects, rising property values, and systemic neglect are displacing its residents and businesses. Situating Little Jamaica's struggles within the broader history of Africville highlights the persistent patterns of systemic racism and cultural erasure faced by Black communities in Canada. Yet, while Africville's destruction serves as a stark reminder of Black dispossession, Little Jamaica remains a site of active resistance. This thesis argues that rather than accepting displacement as inevitable, we must recognize and support the community-led efforts to challenge gentrification, preserve cultural identity, and assert Black presence as a fundamental aspect of Canada's urban landscape.

Colonial Influences on Caribbean Migration to Canada

Since the erasure of Africville, an increase in Black migration to Canada has led to the formation of other Black neighborhoods across the country. Little Burgundy in Montreal and Hogan's Alley in Vancouver are just a few examples of these historically significant Black

neighborhoods (Mensah, 2002). Toronto's Little Jamaica is among these notable Black communities. However, like Africville, it is currently under threat from gentrification, which poses significant risks to the cultural and social fabric of the area. To fully understand the challenges facing Little Jamaica today, it is essential to explore the migration story of Afro-Caribbean individuals who established roots in this neighborhood. These migration patterns were shaped by a combination of systemic inequalities in their homelands, Canada's immigration policies, and the socio-economic opportunities available upon their arrival (Walker, 1984). By examining these historical and social contexts, we gain a clearer picture of how Little Jamaica became a cultural hub for the Afro-Caribbean community in Toronto and why it is important to organize to resist the pressures of gentrification.

Displacement, Enslavement and Genocide in the Caribbean Region

Prior to European conquest, the land which we call the "Caribbean", "West Indies" or "Antilles" was home to a diverse Indigenous population with different groups such as the Taino, Kalinago, Maya, Carib, Ciboney and Arawak whose beliefs and traditions laid the foundation for today's vibrant Caribbean culture (Wilson, 1993; McD & Shepherd, 2004). This unique history is often overshadowed by the tragedy of their near-erasure, as they were among the first Indigenous peoples to face the devastating consequences of European colonization. Following the violent arrival of Christopher Columbus in 1492, Spanish, Portuguese, British, Dutch, and French colonizers subjected these Indigenous communities to brutal colonial practices, including forced labor, rape, slavery, and outright genocide (Klein & Vinson III, 2007). Additionally, they suffered indirect impacts such as devastating diseases, famine, and environmental degradation (Beckles, 1997). European colonizers began extracting the region's resources through mineral and agricultural production, triggering dramatic demographic shifts as the Indigenous population

was effectively erased (Horne, 2018). This violent erasure of Indigenous populations created a labor crisis, prompting European powers to turn to African slave labor to sustain the plantation economy, showing again the linkages between Indigenous and Black displacement stories.

Millions of Africans were forcibly transported to the Caribbean, primarily from West Africa, to work on plantations producing sugar, tobacco, and coffee (Sheridan, 1972). The transatlantic slave trade brought profound suffering, with millions dying en route or laboring under brutal conditions (Mintz, 2017).[2] Enslaved Africans' labor enriched European powers while impoverishing the Caribbean, laying the groundwork for entrenched economic dependency. After emancipation in the 19th century, indentured laborers from India were recruited to address the labor shortage (Lal, 1998). The program targeted young men and women from India whose contracts required them to work in exchange for transportation to the Caribbean, minimal wages, and occasionally a promise of land (Vertovec, 1995). These contracts lasted between one and fourteen years, with many being coerced into re-signing into longer ones once they were up. Once they arrived, they were confined to plantations or estates, where the conditions they faced were often similar as those faced by enslaved Africans (Vertovec, 1995).

Indentured laborers and African slaves in the Caribbean differed greatly in status, conditions, and impact (Hassankhan et al., 2016). Enslaved Africans, forcibly taken from their homelands, were treated as property, enduring lifelong servitude without rights or compensation under brutal conditions. Indian indentured laborers, recruited through contracts, were free

[2] The majority of these slaves came from West Africa, including countries like Nigeria, Ghana, Mali, Senegal, and Benin. By some estimates, up to 12 million African slaves were forcibly brought to the Caribbean, with the highest number arriving in Jamaica, totaling around 2 million. The conditions aboard the slave ships were brutal and inhumane, leading to the death of approximately 12 percent of enslaved individuals during the voyage (Sheridan, 1972).

individuals with defined service terms, wages, and limited legal protections, though often deceived and harshly treated (Roopnarine, 2018). Both groups faced exploitation, but these systems shaped the Caribbean's social, economic, and cultural dynamics differently. Indo-Caribbean communities often held slight structural advantages, reflecting Walker's (1984) observation that social status was determined by skin color. These exploitative labor practices entrenched socio-economic and racial hierarchies in the region that deeply influenced employment and educational opportunities, migration patterns, and other dimensions of social mobility (Kempadoo, 2017). For example, Afro-Caribbean individuals, excluded from land ownership and educational opportunities, faced significant barriers to meeting restrictive immigration policies in countries like Canada and the United Kingdom. Indo-Caribbean individuals, who often accessed marginally better educational and economic opportunities under colonial systems, were more likely to meet these migration criteria (Walker, 1984). As Lloyd W. Brown observed, Afro-Caribbean migration was driven by widespread unemployment, restricted socio-economic mobility, and the search for autonomy and dignity (as cited in Algoo-Baksh, 1991).

Throughout this thesis I use the term "Caribbean" to reflect a blend of identities, including Afro-Caribbean, Indo-Caribbean, Indigenous-Caribbean, British-Caribbean and Canadian-Caribbean experiences. However, when discussing the migration of Caribbean peoples to Canada and the United Kingdom, and their experiences upon arrival, I focus specifically on Afro-Caribbean migrants. This focus on Afro-Caribbean migrants is informed by both personal and scholarly perspectives – my own Afro-Caribbean identity as the son of a Grenadian migrant, and my understanding of the disproportionately challenging pathways they navigated on route to Canada. This next section explores the distinct migration journey of Afro-Caribbean peoples to

Canada, highlighting the systemic barriers they faced, and the resilience that shaped their experiences.

Double Lap Migration from United Kingdom

Until 1962, Caribbean migrants didn't need a visa to work, visit, or settle in Britain (Fryer, 1984). Following the Second World War, many Black individuals who had supported the British war effort chose to stay in Britain, leading to a significant rise in the country's Black population (Fryer, 1984). However, this increase was met with resistance from segments of the White British population (Hall et al., 1978). Racial tensions escalated in Britain urban centers, where Blacks mostly lived and congregated (Glass 1960). The racial tensions of the time were starkly illustrated by events such as the 1948 attacks in Liverpool, the 1949 attacks in Deptford, the 1954 attacks in Camden Town, the Notting Hill riots of 1956, and the Nottingham riot of 1958 (Hall et al., 1978). These incidents made Britain a place where many Black individuals felt neither safe nor welcome (Fryer, 2014). The United Kingdom, which had a relatively liberal process for migration of people from the British nations, began to tighten its immigration requirements in response to demands to limit the influx of Black migrants as a way to alleviate racial tensions (Sutherland, 2006). This resulted in the passage of the First Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962 which reduced the right of Commonwealth members to migrate to Britain (Collier, 1969). The Second and Third Commonwealth Immigrants Acts, passed in 1968 and 1971, introduced progressively stricter limitations on the entry of Black migrants into Britain (Evans, 1972). Due to these restrictions, many Blacks who would have chosen Britain as their destination to immigrate – began a second migration to go to Canada or the United States of America instead (Sutherland, 2006). These restrictions happened to occur at the same time that Canada was beginning to open its doors to Caribbean immigrants. As a result, what Frances

Henry (1994) describes as the "Double Migration" emerged, with Caribbean migrants who had first settled in Britain starting to move to Canada in search of better opportunities and improved race relations – forming a unique segment of double lap migrants.

West Indian Domestic Scheme

In the mid-20th century, the Canadian workforce was changing as women began entering new industries, leaving many positions traditionally held by women unfilled (Cohen, 1994). Domestic work, often labeled as "women's work," faced a labor shortage, prompting Canada to explore alternative ways to fill these roles (Schecter, 1997). The federal government often sought to address labor shortages by increasing immigration during periods of high unemployment or when specific skills were in short supply, using immigration as a tool to fill these gaps in the workforce. The West Indian Domestic Scheme is a prime example of this.

The West Indian Domestic Scheme was introduced in 1955 by the Liberals as a targeted immigration program to bring Caribbean women to Canada to work as domestic servants (Cohen, 1994). To qualify, women needed to be unmarried, aged between 18 and 35, possess at least an 8th grade education (Cohen, 1994). The program originally aimed to include just 100 women, but as it grew in popularity, around 3,000 women ultimately arrived from countries such as Jamaica, Trinidad, Grenada, Barbados, Guyana, Antigua, and others (Mensah, 2002). At the time this program was the best opportunity for Caribbean women to get permanent residency abroad in Canada, as after one year of work they were granted landed immigrant status, and after five years of living in Canada they were eligible for Canadian citizenship (Algoo-Baksh, 1991).

However, the West Indian Domestic scheme had several significant drawbacks. While many women were drawn by promises of better employment, education, and the chance to escape difficult conditions at home, they were often sold a false dream. Upon arrival,

participants found themselves confined to domestic work, severely limiting their career options and perpetuating the same gendered and racialized labor roles they sought to escape (Henry, 1968). These women, whom on average made about $35 per month, were also barred from changing jobs without the approval of the department of labour (Schecter,1997). Many endured exploitation, harsh working conditions, and widespread racial discrimination that infiltrated nearly every aspect of their lives (Henry, 1968). Furthermore, the restriction to domestic work devalued their broader skills, making it difficult to transition into other fields (Cohen, 1994). Amid all of this many of them expressed disappointment and frustration with local Canadians who they described as unfriendly, ignorant, and prejudiced (Henry, 1968). Despite these challenges, the resilience of these women laid the foundation for the future waves of Black Caribbean migration to Canada, and ultimately the establishment of their own ethnic enclaves such as Toronto's Little Jamaica and Montreal's Little Burgundy.

The Points System

In 1967, Canada introduced a point-based immigration system, which assessed prospective immigrants on factors such as age, education, and skills in demand, rather than race (Simmons & Plaza, 2006). This shift opened the door for individuals from the Caribbean and Africa to immigrate to Canada independently, leading to the establishment of Canadian immigration offices across the Caribbean in countries like Jamaica, Haiti, Barbados, and Trinidad and Tobago (Walker, 2022). For West Indian women, this represented an important shift from earlier programs such as the West Indian Domestic Scheme, which primarily funneled them into domestic labor. The points system allowed for greater access to professional and skilled labor opportunities, enabling some women to enter fields beyond domestic service, though structural barriers and labor market discrimination still limited mobility (Calliste, 1994).

Following this, the 1976 Immigration Act facilitated the employment of foreign workers for temporary positions, particularly in sectors such as agriculture and domestic work where local labor shortages existed (Matas, 1996). While this policy reinforced the reliance on migrant labor for specific short-term roles, the broader immigration framework increasingly recognized skilled workers, which contributed to expanding employment opportunities for Caribbean women in Canada beyond traditional domestic roles (Reitz, 2005).

Formation of Little Jamaica

As immigration pathways expanded and job opportunities became more accessible, Canada became an increasingly popular destination for Caribbean migrants. Drawn by the promise of economic stability, growing social networks, and a welcoming society, many arrived envisioning a better life in what they believed to be a safe haven of opportunity (Henry, 1994). However, their experiences often fell far short of these expectations, revealing Canada as less of a glorified safe-haven and more of a challenging and exclusionary environment. Culture shock is a sentiment that many Caribbean migrants felt once they arrived in Canada (Henry, 1994). One of the first shocks upon arrival was the stark difference in climate, with harsh winters, a complete contrast from the tropical weather they had just left behind. This initial discomfort was quickly overshadowed by the systemic racism and hostility they faced daily—discrimination rooted in their appearance, accents, and cultural differences (Teelucksingh, 2006).

Statistics from one study depict the harsh reception Caribbean migrants encountered in Canada: 93% of respondents reported feeling rejected by Canadians, and over 66% had personally experienced racial discrimination since their arrival (Walker, 1984). Caribbean migrants often stood out in a white Canadian society unprepared to embrace diversity, making it difficult to secure housing, employment, and other basic necessities. Furthermore, adapting to a

predominantly white society presented its own challenges, as Black and Caribbean culture, tastes, and traditions were neither recognized nor respected (Walker, 1984). With the absence of an established Caribbean community, many of the first Caribbean newcomers were lonely and isolated (Henry, 1968).

In the 1960's, a substantial number of Caribbean migrants established themselves in the Eglinton West neighborhood (Gordon, 2018). While no singular reason can be definitively identified, some local historians suggest that it was because of its proximity to the homes where many Caribbean migrant women worked in domestic service (Henry, 1968). At the time, Black newcomers faced severe housing discrimination, with limited options for purchasing or renting property due to exclusionary practices in the real estate market (Henry, 1994). As more Caribbean families made Eglinton West their home, the neighborhood gradually became known as a welcoming space for Black immigrants who faced exclusion and barriers in other parts of the city (Black Urbanism Toronto, 2020).

Another significant factor contributing to the clustering of Caribbean immigrants in the Eglinton West neighborhood is the concept of chain migration. Chain migration refers to the process by which new immigrants settle in areas where friends or family members have already established themselves (MacDonald & MacDonald, 1964). For Caribbean migrants arriving in Toronto and navigating the challenges of life in a new country, the presence of a familiar community offered crucial support and guidance (Henry, 1994). This proximity to individuals from the same cultural background not only eased their transition but also made the neighborhood increasingly attractive to newcomers (Henry, 1994). Eventually as more Caribbean immigrants settled in Eglinton West, the area naturally evolved into a cultural hub, solidifying its role as a central space for the community (CP Planning, 2021). By the 1970's Little Jamaica had

become one of the largest Jamaican expatriate communities in the world (Black Urbanism Toronto, 2020). In Canadian society at the time, the lack of cultural recognition and acceptance was profound. Restaurants did not cater to Caribbean tastes, grocery stores lacked Caribbean food products, and beauty stores and barbershops favored Eurocentric beauty standards, excluding products suited to Black hair and skin (Sabeta, 2024).

With the formation of a lively Caribbean community, Little Jamaica developed cultural infrastructure that included social and cultural organizations, sporting clubs, grocers, barbers, real estate agents, healthcare professionals, and lawyers (Walker, 1984). This network not only provided practical services but also fostered a sense of Caribbean pride, transforming the neighborhood into a space where Caribbean immigrants, visitors, and Black Canadians could come together, share experiences, and feel a deep sense of belonging (Black Urbanism Toronto, 2020). In the 1970s, Caribbean newspapers *Share* and *Contrast*, along with magazines and radio shows, played a pivotal role in strengthening the cultural identity and sense of community within Little Jamaica (Teelucksingh, 2006). These platforms spoke to issues of local concern while also providing timely updates on events in the Caribbean, topics often overlooked by mainstream press (Walker, 1984). By giving a voice to the community, they helped cultivate a space where Caribbean narratives and struggles could be heard and celebrated, further solidifying Little Jamaica as both a cultural and social hub.

Caribbean residents transformed Eglinton Avenue into a home away from home, as it became a reflection of the culture in the islands. By the late 1970's Little Jamaica turned into the country's reggae hotspot – just as the genre was entering its prime (McCuaig, 2012). The neighborhood attracted some of reggae's most iconic artists, including the legendary Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, Gregory Isaacs, Barrington Levy, and Beres Hammond, who recorded,

performed, and socialized in the area (Black Urbanism Toronto, 2020). This cultural energy fostered a thriving local reggae scene, with artists like Nana McLean, Pluggy Satchmo, and Jay Douglas emerging from the community (McCuaig, 2012), all of which whom are celebrated today through the iconic Reggae Lane mural, located at the heart of Little Jamaica, honoring the neighborhood's enduring musical legacy *(see figure 2)*.



Figure 2: Reggae Lane Mural - Photographed by Marcus Pereira (2021)

Throughout the 1990s, Little Jamaica further cemented its role as a cultural epicenter with the introduction of Kiddie Caribana, the youth-focused wing of Toronto's annual Caribbean Carnival (Taucar, 2014). This event brought the heart of the neighborhood and spirit of the islands to life, as children dressed in colorful costumes paraded along Eglinton Avenue from Dufferin Street to Oakwood Avenue. The parade was not only a joyous celebration but also a powerful expression of Black identity and Caribbean heritage, proudly showcased in a public space (Taucar, 2014).

Growing up in Little Jamaica in the 2000s, it was clear this was a Caribbean neighborhood. Everywhere you looked, the Black and Caribbean presence was undeniable. The streets were filled with our people, Caribbean flags waving from windows, Rastafari colors draped over storefronts, and murals of Haile Selassie and Bob Marley watching over the block. It was one of the few places in Toronto where you'd see more Black faces than anywhere else in the city—a place that looked and felt like home. But it wasn't just what you saw that told you this was Little Jamaica—it was what you heard. Reggae and dancehall blasted out of record shops like Tre Jah Isle (See figure 4), and the music didn't just stay inside the restaurants like Mainsha, Rap's, or Hot Pot when the block was still alive late at night. The sound was part of the whole atmosphere—it followed you down the street. One of the major markers of when you've reached the Caribbean side of Eglinton West is the smell – the smoke from jerk chicken on the grill (see figure 3) and the scent of marijuana let you know exactly where you were. ***Little Jamaica wasn't just a place—it was a feeling.***

Among all the cultural markers in Little Jamaica, perhaps what stands out the most is the abundance of barbershops (see figures 5,6,7). For someone unfamiliar with the neighborhood, it might seem odd to see five or six of them lined up next to each other, but for us, they were more than just places to get a cut. These barbershops were woven into the fabric of the community—spaces that represented so much more than haircuts. Growing up in Little Jamaica and going to high school just down the road at Oakwood Collegiate, the local barbershops became social hubs, places where you'd walk in for a haircut and leave with life lessons. For me, they became spaces where I could get the wisdom and advice every teenager needs, especially on topics I didn't feel comfortable bringing up at home. Whether it was advice on navigating relationships, handling school, or just figuring out how to survive, these were the places where older heads shared their knowledge to us freely. But it wasn't just personal stuff we talked about. These barbershops kept us tapped into the pulse of the community. The barbershop is where we would be kept up to date on politics – both street and governmental. It was there that I first learned about government policies and local issues that directly affected us, things we didn't always hear about in school or at home. In fact, it was at Bookie's Barbershop on Oakwood Avenue, where I first heard the word "gentrification." It's funny how that space, meant for cutting hair, became a classroom in its own way—a place where we learned not just about ourselves, but about the forces shaping our neighborhood, a place of political education.

As much as barbershops served as cultural anchors and community hubs, they were also microcosms of a larger issue—spaces that thrived because they filled the gaps left by formal systems of support. In many ways, their existence and influence stood in contrast to the neglect and disconnection that other entities, like the local BIA boards, have shown toward Little Jamaica.

This space has been dear to us for so long – a space that has played significant parts in the lives of multiple generations. For the first wave of brave migrants and domestic workers, the neighborhood was a place where they felt safe and were able to connect with other Caribbean folk. As more arrived in the neighborhood, they turned it into a true cultural hub where they felt a sense of belonging. Those people grew older and birthed a generation of children like me.

For the youth of Little Jamaica that grew up in the 90's and 2000's, Little Jamaica was a unique space. Many of us Canadian-born Caribbean youth are caught in a unique situation where we didn't face the hardships that our parents did to come to this country, nor did we contribute to the foundations of the neighborhood. We didn't face the same culture shock, harsh discrimination, and our parents faced. There was no need to adapt to Canadian culture, we were born and raised within that culture.

So why would Little Jamaica be that important to us?

Yes, we benefited from the fact that there was an established Caribbean community with cultural infrastructure that was built in for us already – Caribbean culture was all around us. Little Jamaica became a space where we could connect with our culture, learn about our roots, our history, our struggles, are victories - things that weren't taught to us in our schools. We had the privilege of learning from the wisdom of elders.

This is what made it so important.

Today, we fear that this neighborhood that we've been part of for multiple generations will soon be gone – erasing a 60+ year history. This hurts me because I've always said that I want to raise my children in Little Jamaica. "Eglinton is the closest thing to back home" is something my father always says. Well, for me – "Back home" is Little Jamaica.

Where will my children go to learn about their history? Where will my children go to connect with their culture?

Little Jamaica's existence is currently under threat. Gentrification is the word many of use to describe what's happening here. Cultural erasure, displacement, poorly planned transit development, poor BIA relations and a lack of care are all part of this tragedy.

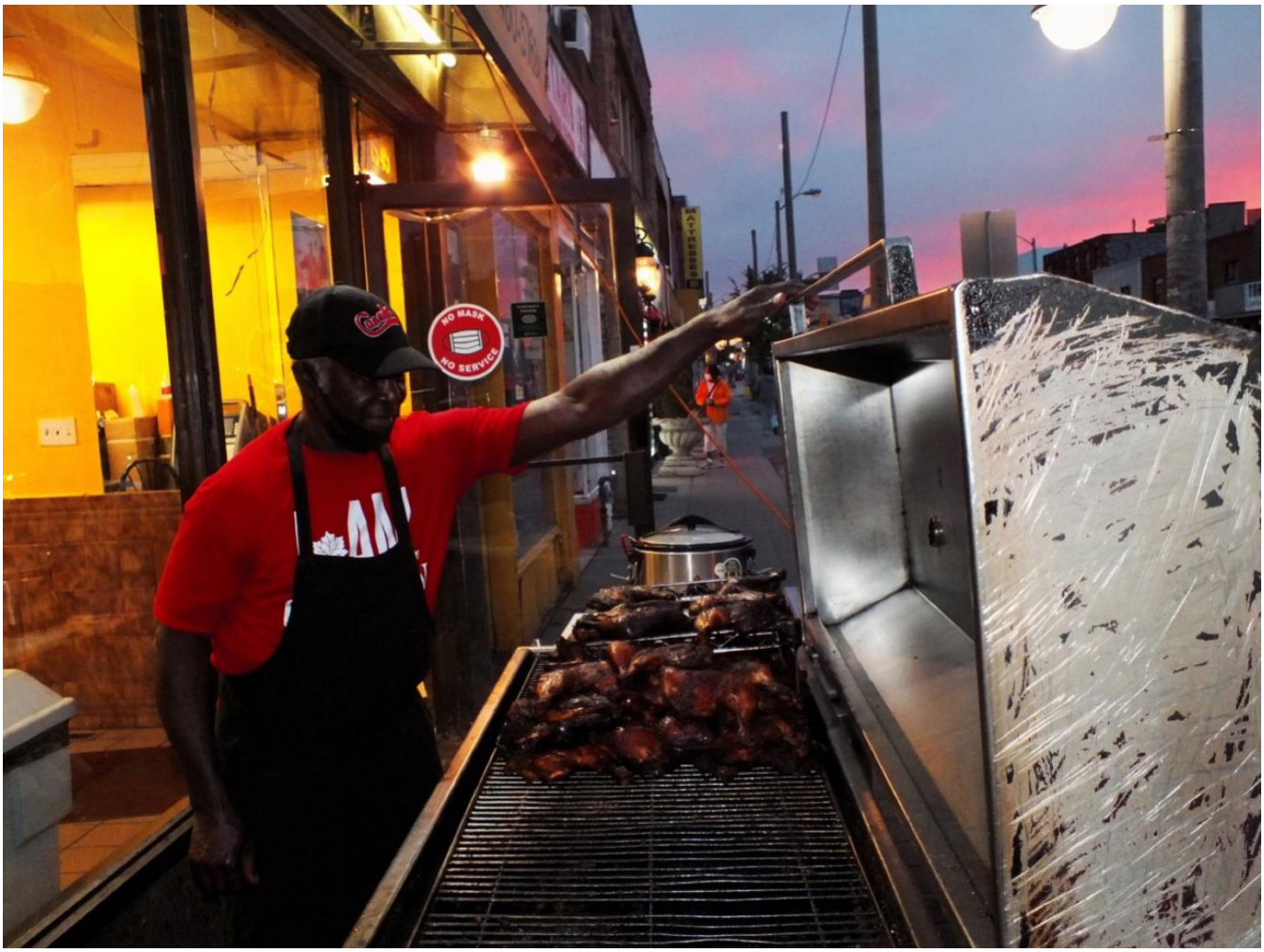


Figure 3: Hotpot Restaurant Jerk Chicken. Photographed by Marcus Pereira (2021)



Figure 4 Tre Jah Isle Record Shop - Photographed by Marcus Pereira (2021)



Figure 5: Bookie's Barbershop. Photographed by Marcus Pereira (2020)



Figure 6: Barbers of Eglinton. Photographed by Marcus Pereira (2020)



Figure 7: Wisdom's Barbershop. Photographed by Marcus Pereira (2021)

The Problem(s)

Little Jamaica's history is marked by systemic inequities that have disproportionately disadvantaged its Black residents and business owners, creating conditions that make the area highly vulnerable to gentrification (Black Urbanism Toronto 2020). Black folks in Little Jamaica faced discriminatory lending practices that left their businesses unable to compete in a rapidly evolving economy (Teelucksingh, 2006). Similarly, racial discrimination in housing policies restricted opportunities for homeownership, leaving many Black residents dependent on rental housing and unable to build generational wealth (Henry, 1994). Meanwhile, public disinvestment in infrastructure and community services left the neighborhood economically stagnant, further marginalizing its residents and businesses (Black Urbanism Toronto, 2020).

The introduction of urban renewal projects, particularly the Eglinton Crosstown LRT, has only exacerbated these challenges. The prolonged construction disrupted access to storefronts *(see figure 8)*, diminished foot traffic, and forced numerous businesses to shut their doors permanently *(see figures 9,10)* (Black Urbanism Toronto, 2020). These disruptions, framed as necessary progress, came with insufficient compensation for impacted business owners, many of whom were already operating on precarious financial margins. Additionally, the cultural and economic devaluation of Black-owned businesses and properties has made Little Jamaica an attractive target for developers seeking to profit from "revitalizing" undervalued areas (St. Louis-McBurnie & Tam, 2022). As a result, the neighborhood has seen an influx of wealthier residents, reshaping its economic and cultural landscape while displacing long-term residents and eroding its cultural identity (CP Planning, 2021). These dynamics reflect deeper structural forces, where the exploitation of racialized communities serves as a foundation for economic profit. In the case of Little Jamaica, redevelopment and displacement are not incidental but intrinsic to a system

that prioritizes economic growth over community preservation. While there have been efforts to resist these forces these measures alone are insufficient to address the scale of the systemic inequities at hand (CP Planning, 2021).

Today, Little Jamaica faces new and pressing challenges that continue to threaten its survival as a cultural and economic hub for Toronto's Black community. From the impacts of Metrolinx's transit development to the fraught relationship between the community and its Business Improvement Area (BIA), the neighborhood is grappling with issues that undermine its ability to preserve its identity and resist cultural erasure. The following section will explore these ongoing problems in greater detail, shedding light on the structural and relational barriers that continue to place Little Jamaica at risk.



Figure 8: Storefronts blocked by Metrolinx LRT construction equipment and waste. Photographed by Marcus Pereira (2020)



Figure 9: Randy's Patties final day of business - February 26, 2022. Photographed by Marcus Pereira (2022)



Figure 10: Lineup down Oakwood Avenue for the last Randy's Patties. Photographed by Marcus Pereira (2022)

Community – BIA Relations

One of the most pressing challenges in Little Jamaica is the lack of meaningful community representation in decision-making processes that shape the neighborhood's future Too often, the individuals and organizations making these decisions are not directly connected to the area, nor do they actively engage with residents to understand their needs, aspirations, or concerns. This disconnect has created a growing sense of frustration among community members, who feel excluded from conversations that directly impact their lives (Black Urbanism Toronto, 2020). A striking example of this gap is the relationship between the neighborhood and its Business Improvement Area.

A BIA in Toronto is a non-profit organization formed by commercial and industrial property owners, along with their non-residential tenants (Flynn, 2019). These stakeholders collaborate under a volunteer board of management to implement enhancements and drive economic development within their designated area (City of Toronto, 2024). By uniting as a BIA, the idea is that local businesses gain both the resources and funding necessary to transform neighborhoods into distinctive, vibrant hubs for commerce and attractive destinations for tourists (Flynn, 2019). As of 2022, the 83 BIA's in the city of Toronto generate $50M in funding towards neighborhood beautification projects, marketing campaigns, street festivals, and crime prevention strategies (City of Toronto, 2024).

The BIA, an organization meant to support local businesses and drive economic revitalization, has frequently been criticized for operating in a way that appears misaligned with the community's cultural identity and priorities. In Little Jamaica, business owners and community members have experienced a lack of support from their local BIA boards (Black Urbanism Toronto, 2020). Little Jamaica, which stretches along Eglinton Avenue West from

Marlee Avenue to Keele Street, intersects with the catchment areas for three different BIA's – York-Eglinton BIA, Eglinton Hill BIA, and Fairview Village BIA. The Black Urbanism Toronto Report: A Black Business Conversation (2020), underscores the historical neglect of Black-owned businesses by these BIAs, highlighting the underrepresentation of Black individuals on the boards and their lack of responsiveness to the specific needs of Black entrepreneurs. While Little Jamaica's rich history and cultural significance are rooted in its Black diasporic traditions, many residents and business owners feel that the BIA's initiatives do not reflect or prioritize these values. Instead, there is a perception that the BIA's efforts cater to external stakeholders or redevelopment interests rather than centering the voices of the neighborhood's long-standing residents and Black-owned businesses (Black Urbanism Toronto, 2020). This perceived misalignment only deepens the disconnect, creating tensions between those working on behalf of the neighborhood and those who call it home.

This disconnect between the BIA leadership and the local community has been problematic as they have neglected the importance of Black and Caribbean culture in their planning processes. This is evident in former York-Eglinton BIA coordinator Aalida Valiallah's claim that "it is not the BIA's mandate to preserve the area's 'Little Jamaica' culture" (Kong, 2023). However, this is a direct contrast to BIA's in the city's other cultural hubs like Chinatown who's BIA's purpose is to "preserve the Chinese heritage and culture, improve Chinatown's streetscape, health and safety, and to create exciting community events and projects to promote the area and draw visitors and locals to eat, shop, and explore the neighbourhood" (Chinatown Business Improvement Area, n.d). The Koreatown BIA shares this culture-first sentiment as their website showcases Korean restaurants, grocery stores, and shops filled with made-in Korea merchandise (Koreatown Business Improvement Area, n.d). This ongoing disconnect between

the BIAs and Little Jamaica's local community has not only marginalized Black-owned businesses but also weakened efforts to preserve the area's rich cultural identity (CP Planning, 2021). As the BIA models in other cultural neighborhoods like Chinatown, Greektown, Koreatown, Little Italy, and Little Portugal has shown, a focus on cultural heritage can be integral to economic development. The neglect of Little Jamaica's cultural roots only deepens the challenges facing the neighborhood (Gordon, 2018). The next section will explore how the construction of the Metrolinx LRT line has compounded these difficulties, further exacerbating economic and social harm in the area.

Metrolinx Eglinton Crosstown LRT

Metrolinx, founded in 2006, is a transportation agency in Ontario that manages public transportation projects in the province (Metrolinx, 2014). Metrolinx acts as the main procurement body for Ontario municipalities, handling the acquisition of transit vehicles, equipment, and services. It also oversees the operation of the GO Transit system, and runs the Union Pearson Express, a rail link connecting downtown Toronto with Pearson International Airport. Among this list of transit projects lies the Eglinton Crosstown LRT that they're working on with Crosslinx Transit Solutions, a design and construction consortium hired by the province to help complete the project (Switzman, 2015). The project is a light rail transit line that is currently under construction in Toronto that consists of 25 stations and stops along Eglinton Avenue from Kennedy Road to Mount Dennis Drive (Metrolinx, 2014), with a stretch of underground stations that rip right through the heart of Toronto's Little Jamaica neighborhood *(see figures 11, 12)*. Owned by Metrolinx and operated by the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC), the line will serve as the fifth route within the Toronto subway system (Metrolinx, 2014).

The original project cost was estimated at $9.1B, however according to documents obtained by CBC Toronto (2020) – project costs have increased to at least $12.8B.

The promises of better infrastructure for the community have turned the Metrolinx project into a glaring example of mismanagement. Years of delays have dragged on due to conflicts between the main players in this tragic comedy—Metrolinx, Crosslinx, and the provincial government—all of whom dodge accountability (Black Urbanism Toronto, 2020). The question of when the project will actually finish has become a running joke in the city, with even the head of the project clueless about an end date. But it's the communities along Eglinton Avenue that are really suffering. For the residents and small business owners of Little Jamaica, the LRT project isn't just about a transit delay—it's been a major force driving gentrification in the neighborhood (Black Urbanism Toronto, 2020). This following section provides a detailed timeline of the LRT project, along with major events highlight the challenges, delays, and controversies surrounding its construction.



Figure 11: Site of future Oakwood LRT station. Photographed by Marcus Pereira (2021)



Figure 12: Alternate view of the future site of Oakwood LRT Station. Photographed by Marcus Pereira (2021)

Metrolinx LRT Construction Timeline.

In 1994, under the leadership of the Premier Bob Rae's Ontario New Democratic Party, plans for the Eglinton West Subway were announced as part of a broader Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) expansion initiative (Nickle, 2021). This east-west transit route along Eglinton Avenue aimed to enhance Toronto's subway system and improve connectivity across the city. However, budgetary constraints and a shift in provincial leadership in 1995 saw Progressive Conservative Premier Mike Harris cancel the project, halting progress for over a decade (Kalinowski, 2010). In 2007, Toronto Mayor David Miller unveiled Transit City, a visionary light rail network proposing seven new LRT lines, including the Eglinton Crosstown LRT (Addie, 2013). Designed to ease congestion and reduce travel time in Toronto's midtown corridor, the Crosstown envisioned a hybrid route that would run underground between Laird Drive and Keele Street (Addie, 2013).

By 2009, the Liberal government under Premier Dalton McGuinty agreed to fund Transit City through Metrolinx, allocating $8.4 billion to launch the Eglinton Crosstown project (Nickle, 2021). In 2010, Metrolinx assumed full control, setting an ambitious opening date for 2019 (Rogers, 2013). Environmental assessments were completed by April of that year, clearing the way for construction (Munro, 2020). However, political turbulence continued to affect the project. In July, newly elected Toronto Mayor Rob Ford declared, "Transit City is dead," advocating instead for a subway system (Switzman, 2015; Kalinowski & Rider, 2010). Following negotiations between Metrolinx, the province, and the city, the Crosstown LRT was preserved, though other Transit City lines were deferred, solidifying the Crosstown as a priority project (Switzman, 2015).

Construction for the project officially began in November 2011 when Mayor Rob Ford and Premier McGuinty broke ground at Keelesdale Park, marking a critical step forward (Alcoba, 2011). However, political disagreements persisted, culminating in Toronto City Council overturning Ford's anti-LRT stance in 2012 and reviving the broader Transit City plan (CityNews, 2012). Infrastructure Ontario took over project management, hiring private contractors for the Crosstown's delivery (Nickle, 2021). By 2013, tunneling machines launched near Black Creek Drive, beginning the excavation of the 10-kilometer underground section, which caused significant traffic disruptions on Eglinton Avenue (CBC News, 2013). The following year, tunneling expanded eastward, and public consultations addressed concerns about construction impacts[3]. By April 2015, business owners along Eglinton Avenue West began experiencing significant financial strain, with some reporting sales dropping by as much as 35 percent (Pelley, 2015). The ongoing LRT construction created challenges such as heavy traffic congestion, fewer parking spaces, reduced pedestrian activity *(see figure 13)*, and dusty sidewalks, all of which deterred customers and disrupted daily operations (Pelley, 2015).

[3] This consultation sought feedback for eastern segments of the LRT line. Notably, Little Jamaica - another impacted community - was excluded from these engagement efforts.



Figure 13: Sidewalk at Eglinton and Oakwood, the heart of Little Jamaica. Construction waste has completely blocked off the storefronts and limited access for customers. Photographed by Marcus Pereira (2021)

In 2016, Metrolinx formally announced that the project's completion date would be delayed beyond the original 2019 target (Munro, 2020). Crosslinx Transit Solutions was awarded a $9.1 billion contract to design, build, and maintain the line for 30 years (Toronto Star, 2015). Yet, complications with station construction, particularly in dense urban areas, continued to push timelines. In September 2016, Bombardier Transportation missed its delivery deadline for prototype LRT vehicles, prompting Metrolinx to terminate their contract (CBC News, 2017). Legal disputes erupted, with Bombardier filing injunctions in 2017 and Crosslinx suing Metrolinx in 2018 over delays caused by utility relocations (Moore, 2018). These lawsuits highlighted a fraught relationship between contractors and the provincial transit agency, ultimately leading to settlements that included additional payments to maintain project timelines (Moore, 2018).

Construction entered its most disruptive phase in 2019, with significant work on the western surface section and mounting costs (Toronto Star, 2019). By 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated delays, with labor restrictions and supply chain disruptions hindering progress. In March 2020, the provincial government, under Doug Ford's Conservative leadership, pledged $3 million in financial assistance to support local businesses struggling due to the impact of Crosstown construction (Rider, 2020). However, with thousands of businesses affected, this funding amounted to little more than a symbolic gesture—far from adequate to address the financial strain and long-term disruptions these merchants faced.

During the pandemic, community groups like Reclaim Rebuild Eg West and Black Urbanism Toronto emerged to advocate for Little Jamaica, a neighborhood deeply impacted by prolonged construction. Reports such as Black Urbanism Toronto's *A Black Business Conversation* (2020) highlighted the historical significance of the area while calling for measures to protect Black-owned businesses and residents from displacement. On August 29th, local youth community group *Reclaim Rebuild Eg West* staged a protest that blocked Eglinton Avenue West between Marlee Avenue and Oakwood Avenue, expressing their opposition to Metrolinx's mismanagement of the LRT construction and its adverse effects on the Little Jamaica community *(see figures 14, 15, 16, 17).* The demonstrators called for rental assistance and a temporary moratorium on evictions throughout the construction period, as well the official rebranding of the neighborhood from "International Market" to "Little Jamaica".[4] The protest ended in police

[4] A full list of Reclaim Rebuild Eg West's protest demands can be found on Instagram at: https://www.instagram.com/p/CEQDzq7gc7b/?hl=en&img_index=4

harassment[5], intimidation[6], and violence[7] against protesters[8]. December 14, New Democratic Party Member of Provincial Parliament, Jill Andrews filed a motion[9] to support businesses along Eglinton West that have been impacted by LRT construction and COVID-19. The motion called for the government, and Metrolinx to provide up to $30,000 in compensation, mandated transparent and timely communications between Metrolinx, the Ministry of Transportation, and the Little Jamaica community, and commercial rent relief for the duration of the pandemic, along with a moratorium on commercial evictions (Kurek, 2020).



Figure 14: Promotion pamphlet for Bana on the Block. Designed by Marcus Pereira (2020)

[5] A witness video of the police presence – approximately 50 police officers responding to one man: https://x.com/RibeGom/status/1299864738789240833
[6] CBC News report from the day of the protest: https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/officers-injured-during-demonstration-incident-siu-investigating-1.5705405
[7] A witness video of Toronto Police officers arresting a community member after tasing him multiple times: https://x.com/youlovekaina/status/1299925221621850113
[8] Reclaim Rebuild Eg West's official witness statement from that night can be found on Instagram at: https://www.instagram.com/p/CEiGLwIg1A-/?hl=en&img_index=8

[9] Official announcement of Jill Andrew's proposed motion: https://www.ontariondp.ca/news/mpp-outlines-motion-save-little-jamaica



Figure 15: Reclaim Rebuild Eg West's Bana on the Block Rally, August 29,2020. Photographed by Marcus Pereira (2020)



Figure 16: Reclaim Rebuild Eg West co-founder Jem Baptise holding a sign at Bana on the Block. Photographed by Marcus Pereira (2020)



Figure 17 Protester from Bana on the Block. Photographed by Marcus Pereira (2020)

Throughout 2021 and 2022, disputes between Metrolinx and Crosslinx escalated, with lawsuits over pandemic-related delays leading to settlements that increased project costs by hundreds of millions (Cook, 2023). Activism persisted, with groups like Reclaim Rebuild Eg West organizing rallies to circulate money within Little Jamaica and advocate for policy changes[10]. By late 2022, Metrolinx announced further delays, citing issues with aging infrastructure at Yonge-Eglinton station and software defects in train control systems (CBC News, 2022). The Little Jamaica Community Land Trust, incorporated in November 2022, was established to safeguard the neighborhood's cultural heritage amid ongoing redevelopment and gentrification. Spearheaded by Black Urbanism Toronto, this Black-led and Black-serving initiative was designed to secure land for Black businesses, residents, and cultural institutions—ensuring they remain at the heart of the community. In 2023, Metrolinx acknowledged significant testing and commissioning challenges, refusing to commit to an opening date (Toronto Star, 2023). The projected completion of 14 of 15 stations reflected progress but also the growing complexity of the project. Toronto City Council passed a motion[11] in October 2024 to investigate the causes of persistent delays and cost overruns, signaling continued political scrutiny of the project. As of 2025, construction is nearing its final stages, but unresolved technical issues, including signaling defects, have delayed the opening to at least late 2025 (Takagi, 2024). Today Little Jamaica remains at the heart of community-led efforts to preserve its identity, amidst this decade-long transit development.

[10] Reclaim Rebuild Eg West's 2021 Rally "Bana on the Block Pt. 2" took place on August 28th in Little Jamaica. The event was created to support the Black owned businesses in Little Jamaica that were struggling due to pandemic and construction related impacts. A flyer for the rally can be found on Instagram at: https://www.instagram.com/p/CS2p6DugOXj/?hl=en

[11] MM22.20 - Requesting Metrolinx to Provide Transparency and Accountability on the Eglinton Crosstown - by Councillor Josh Matlow, seconded by Councillor Mike Colle. Full motion can be found at the following link: https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2024.MM22.20

Unfortunately, the impacts of Metrolinx's construction project are not only impacting whether or not businesses can afford to stay in the area – it's also impacting the cost of living in the neighborhood and pricing many long-time residents out of Little Jamaica (Black Urbanism Toronto, 2020). Toronto's housing market, declared the second most overvalued in the world in 2019 (McClelland, 2019), is frequently cited as a driving force behind the city's gentrification problem. However, characterizing the gentrification occurring in Toronto merely as a housing crisis misrepresents the complexity of the issue. In his book *The Tenant Class*, Tranjan (2023) states, "There is no housing crisis... the owning class gets rich off the back of working people. Laws allow it. Landlords and tenant boards enforce it" (p. 105). Tranjan's argument highlights how gentrification is not simply about housing supply and demand but is instead embedded in broader systems of economic and racial exploitation. The displacement occurring in Little Jamaica is not an isolated consequence of rising rents; rather, it reflects a long history of policies that prioritize profit over the well-being of racialized communities. Gentrification is a racialized process of class change (Rucks-Ahidiana, 2022), driven by systemic inequalities. Rucks-Ahidiana (2022) argues that race must be central to defining, theorizing, and explaining the phenomenon of gentrification, as it occurs in an extremely racialized context. Historically, government officials, police, real estate agents, developers, and bankers have enacted policies that reinforced segregation and economic exclusion, such as redlining (Harris & Forrester, 2003; Reece, 2020) and discriminatory zoning laws. These measures restricted access to housing and resources for marginalized groups, shaping patterns of racialized displacement that persist today, resulting in the production and normalization of racialized neighborhoods (Howell & Kover-Glenn, 2018), like Little Jamaica.

CP Planning's report, Black Futures on Eglinton (2021), uncovers concerning statistics about the demographic changes in Little Jamaica. By 2016, Black residents made up 11% of the neighborhood's population, a concentration three times higher than the city's average (CP Planning, 2021). However, the same report indicates a 13% decline in the Black population, underscoring the severe impact of gentrification and racial displacement (CP Planning, 2021). [12] This displacement extends beyond residents—Black-owned businesses have been equally affected. According to Black Urbanism Toronto's report, *A Black Business Conversation* (2020), the combination of prolonged construction disruptions, including waste accumulation and equipment obstructing storefronts for nearly a decade *(see figure 13)*, along with escalating commercial rents, has created overwhelming challenges for local businesses. As a result, approximately 140 Black-owned businesses along the 3-kilometer stretch of Little Jamaica have been forced to close (Macdonell, 2020).

Under the guise of community development for residents along Eglinton Avenue West, Metrolinx and the Government promised progress but have instead perpetuated the ongoing displacement of Black residents and businesses. What was framed as a transit initiative to benefit the community has resulted in economic hardship, cultural erasure, and further marginalization for local residents and businesses (Black Urbanism Toronto, 2020). The project continues a historical cycle of displacement, where infrastructure development serves the interests of capital, not the community it claims to uplift (Mohamed, 2021; Sabeta 2024). Together, these challenges have created increasingly unlivable conditions for many of Little Jamaica's long-term residents.

[12] Cheryl Case from CP Planning, in an interview with CBC News said that Little Jamaica is losing its Black population at rates higher than any other ethnic group because they're more likely to face systemic racism at work and earn lower incomes. (CBC News, 2021)

Yet, despite these overwhelming forces working to dismantle the fabric of Little Jamaica, the community is not passive in the face of these challenges. Through grassroots organizing and cultural preservation efforts, residents and activists are reclaiming their voices, pushing back against displacement, and demanding a future where their history and presence are valued. The next section will explore Little Jamaica's deep history of Black resistance against gentrification, cultural erasure, and police brutality.

Resistance is Our Heritage

Little Jamaica and its residents have been under threat to the violence's of racial discrimination, police violence, and gentrification, since its formation. Robin D.G Kelley (2018) reminds us that resistance is our heritage… resistance is our healing. The history and heritage of Blackness is not one that accepts erasure, but instead it's about the ways we fight back against every form of oppression that tries to hold us down. Resistance is a tradition we inherit, and it's how we keep ourselves and our communities alive. Resistance is, quite literally, our heritage. From revolting against the shackles of slavery in the Caribbean, to defying the economic hardships that forced our ancestors to carve out new means of survival, the spirit of resistance has always been in our blood. We crossed oceans, migrating for better lives, only to confront the harsh realities of racism in the United Kingdom, United States of America, Canada, and elsewhere—places that wanted our labor but never our presence. In response, we built our own communities—neighborhoods that became spaces that welcomed us when society turned us away. We resisted police brutality, racial profiling, and systemic violence – and still do, to this day. Now, in the face of a new threat—gentrification—we continue to fight for our right to exist, to preserve the area we built from the ground up, and to claim our future in spaces we have long called home.

Resistance in Little Jamaica

As Little Jamaica took shape in the late 1970s, it became known not only as a Caribbean neighborhood but also as a predominantly Black neighborhood. This identity as a Black community made it a frequent target of racial discrimination, harassment, and over-policing by the Toronto Police Service (Stasiulis, 1989). Among Toronto's Black residents, there was widespread anxiety and a deep mistrust of police practices and policies (Henry, 1994). As racist incidents and confrontations with law enforcement became more frequent, they spurred a sense of solidarity within the Black community (Stasiulis, 1989). Recognizing themselves as targets of systemic racism, community members united in resistance, understanding that collective action was essential for their survival.

Little Jamaica has a rich heritage of Black-led resistance, most notably exemplified by the Black Action Defence Committee (BADC), established in the late 1980s. Founded by Jamaican-born civil rights activist Dudley Laws, Trinidadian-born lawyer Charles “Charlie” Roach, Jamaican-born activist Sherona Hall, and Trinidadian-born teacher Lennox Farrell (Jackson & Penrose, 1994), the BADC played a pivotal role in advocating for justice and equity. These educators, lawyers, and activists used their base in Little Jamaica to support community members through a range of services, including immigration assistance, legal representation, and organizing campaigns to combat police brutality and systemic racism.

Racial tensions were high in Toronto’s Black communities after a series of police shootings of Black men during the 1970s and 1980s. Andrew “Buddy” Evans, Albert Johnson, Michael Sargeant, and Leander Savoury, were all shot and killed by Toronto Police officers (Jackson & Penrose, 1994). After these shootings, Canadian media became saturated with coverage, often amplifying the police’s narrative while reporting on the Black community’s

response (Maychak, 1992; Benjamin, 2002). Media outlets frequently framed the killings as acts of self-defence, portraying the victims as aggressors and the officers as sympathetic figures forced to act (Benjamin, 2002). This biased rhetoric fueled racial tensions, as both sides clashed over whether race was a factor in the ongoing violence.

One of the most infamous incidents occurred in 1988, when Jamaican immigrant Lester Donaldson was shot and killed by police officer David Deviney in his apartment in the Vaughan-Oakwood neighborhood, an extension of Little Jamaica (Benjamin, 2002). Although police claimed they were responding to reports of a man holding hostages, Donaldson was alone in his room at the time of the murder. Officer David Deviney was charged with manslaughter but later acquitted[13]. This outcome, along with the cold-blooded murder itself, sparked outrage within Toronto's Black and Caribbean community and among human rights activists. The widespread anger and demand for justice ultimately led to the formation of the Black Action Defence Committee (BADC).

The BADC's primary mission was to hold the Toronto Police Service accountable for its racist violence and corruption (Jackson & Penrose, 1994). They organized large public protests, drawing thousands in support of two key demands: the elimination of racist practices like "carding" and the establishment of an independent oversight body to investigate police misconduct, instead of allowing the police to investigate themselves (Jackson & Penrose, 1994).

On the night of December 8, 1988, 17-year-old Michael Wade Lawson was shot and killed in the back of his head by two white Peel Regional Police officers, Anthony Melargni and Darren Longpre, whom were both later acquitted on charges of manslaughter, aggravated assault, and unlawful discharge of a deadly weapon (Merith, 2024). Months of organizing and pressure

[13] Inquest summary report for the Lester Donaldson shooting case: https://www.falconers.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Donaldson-UARR-Report-and-Summary.pdf

from the BADC, along with other human rights groups in the Greater Toronto Area, compelled Liberal MPP David Peterson to initiate an inquiry into racism and policing in Ontario. This inquiry ultimately led to the creation of the Special Investigations Unit (SIU), a civilian oversight body tasked with investigating incidents involving police that result in death or serious injury (Puddister & McNabb, 2024).

On April 29, 1992, after the four white police officers who were videotaped beating Rodney King[14] in Los Angeles had been acquitted, the Black Action Defence Committee began organizing a Yonge Street Protest scheduled for May 4th to show solidarity and support. However, following the fatal shooting of 22-year-old Black man Raymond Lawrence by white undercover police officer Robert Rice in Toronto on May 2, the fourteenth Black victim of a police shooting in the city since 1978 (Jackson, 1994), the rally, initially intended as a small demonstration in front of the U.S. consulate, escalated into a riot and a rebellion against police violence. In response to the unrest, Ontario Premier Bob Rae requested an investigation by Stephen Lewis into the underlying causes of the riot. After consulting with various racialized communities across the province, the resulting report, titled Report of the Advisor on Race Relations to the Premier of Ontario (1992), concluded that the root causes of the riot included frustrations over anti-Black racism, police mistreatment, discrimination in employment and housing, and a school system dominated by Eurocentric curricula (Alexander & Glaze, 1996).[15]

While combating racist police violence was central to the Black Action Defence Committee (BADC), they also led significant youth community initiatives, such as the Freedom

[14] The Rodney King case and the Los Angeles riots that followed played a crucial role in highlighting police brutality and racial profiling on a worldwide scale. These events not only led to discussions about systemic racism and justice but also contributed to reforms in law enforcement practices.
[15] The full report can be found at the following link: https://www.siu.on.ca/pdfs/report_of_the_advisor_on_race_relations_to_the_premier_of_ontario_bob_rae.pdf

Cipher. This program aimed to provide Black youth with employment and educational opportunities, develop gang-exit strategies, and offer support to help them grow into academically engaged individuals capable of organizing the future Black Liberation movement in Canada (Posner, 2011). As founder Dudley Laws emphasized, “A community must be organized if that community hopes to achieve and sustain progress, justice, and respect. The need for community-based organizations, national and international groups of cultural and political action cannot be overstated” (as cited in Posner, 2011). The Black Action Defence Committee (BADC) laid the groundwork for a new generation of activists and community organizations in Little Jamaica. Inspired by the BADC's legacy of resistance, groups like Reclaim Rebuild Eg West, Black Urbanism Toronto, CP Planning, and the Keele-Eglinton Residents Association have emerged as torchbearers of advocacy and change.

With the line yet to open, and the neighborhood changing in ways that no one foresaw, in the end Little Jamaica is still here, hanging on by a threat fighting to project its heritage and identity, but the question remains, what kind of Little Jamaica will be left when the dust settles and the project is complete. Will the people and businesses who survived the decade-plus destruction of the community be around for the project that was promised to them? The next section will explore the theoretical framework that guides this thesis, providing context for understanding the neighborhood’s resistance and resilience.

Chapter 2: Theory Concepts

> *[We] have no foolproof holistic theory of or methodology for the study of gentrification, and it would be presumptuous to think we ever will*
> —Clark, 1992: 358

While many folks struggle to come up with a consistent definition of gentrification, I would argue that gentrification is, at its core, an experience—a psychological one deeply felt by those who live through it. Growing up in Little Jamaica amidst gentrification, I have come to understand gentrification as more than an abstract concept or set of economic processes. It is a transformation that reshapes the physical, social, and cultural fabric of a neighborhood, altering how residents live, work, and interact within the space. For many, these changes are experienced as a sense of loss. This loss manifests in multiple ways: the erasure of culture, the disruption of social ties and community cohesion, the displacement from familiar physical spaces, and the fading of shared memories and hope. For me this meant seeing many friends and family moving from the neighborhood and watching my favorite restaurants and stores shut their doors permanently.

Luckily, my family has been able to stay put, but Sarah Schulman's concept, gentrification of the mind captures one of the hardest parts of this process: the psychological displacement that occurs when long-time residents no longer feel a sense of belonging in their own neighborhoods. As neighborhoods transform, the implicit message to long-term residents is that their history, contributions, and very presence no longer matter. This is exactly how I feel. Many of the newcomers moving into this neighborhood have no understanding of its history, its struggles, its triumphs, its love stories, or the sacrifices that built it. They walk these streets without knowing the sweat and tears that went into creating the culture they now consume.

It feels like a double loss: not only are we losing our physical spaces, but we're also losing the intangible elements that make a neighborhood a home—its collective memory, its shared experiences, and the sense of belonging that comes from seeing yourself reflected in the people and places around you. Still, even as displacement continues, I hold onto hope that our stories will not be erased entirely. We resist in the ways we can—by sharing our history, preserving our traditions, and fighting for our right to remain. This neighborhood is more than a location; it's a living testament to the resilience and creativity of a community that has endured so much. And while the forces of gentrification are powerful, so too is the spirit of those who refuse to let their history be forgotten.

This chapter establishes a theoretical framework for defining key concepts – gentrification, displacement, and racial capitalism – while directly linking them to the specific context of Little Jamaica.

Ruth Glass' Gentrification (1964)

Gentrification is a complex and often contested process of urban transformation, marked by the influx of middle- or upper-class residents into historically working-class or marginalized neighborhoods (Shaw, 2008). Sociologist Ruth Glass coined the term in 1964 to describe the changes she observed in Inner London, where middle-class residents "invaded" working-class communities, leading to the displacement of long-term residents and the alteration of the neighborhood's social fabric. Glass defined gentrification as a process that enhances the value and social status of neighborhoods, making them appealing to wealthier populations while displacing existing, often lower-income, residents (Glass, 1964). While Glass' definition remains foundational, over time, the concept has expanded to encompass broader social, economic, cultural, environmental, and racial implications, reflecting its multifaceted impact on cities and communities worldwide (Curran & Hamilton, 2018).

Gentrification as Displacement

Displacement is not just a consequence of gentrification; it is its defining feature (Kern, 2022). Without displacement, gentrification would simply be urban change—one of many shifts in the life cycle of a city. However, what distinguishes gentrification is that it actively reshapes neighborhoods in ways that exclude and displace long-standing residents, often people of color and working-class communities (Henig, 1980; LeGates & Hartman, 1982). Gentrification does not simply "improve" a neighborhood—it reallocates resources, cultural spaces, and opportunities to wealthier newcomers at the expense of those already there (Atkinson, 2015).

Displacement manifests in multiple forms: direct displacement, exclusionary displacement, and cultural displacement. Direct displacement occurs when rising housing costs,

property taxes, or living expenses make it impossible for long-term residents to remain in their homes (Zuk et al., 2018). As middle-class individuals move into urban centers, housing prices rise, and rental units are converted into owner-occupied properties, pricing out lower-income residents (Freeman, 2006). Often, this displacement occurs through evictions, non-renewed leases, or landlord strategies to push tenants out for higher-paying renters, forcing many into precarious living conditions and severing social networks (Murdie & Teixeira, 2011). Some scholars have critiqued the assumption that displacement is always immediately visible, arguing that it can occur gradually through exclusionary policies, such as restrictive zoning laws[16], or the privatization of public spaces that subtly force residents out (Butler et al., 2013).

Exclusionary displacement refers to the process by which long-term residents remain physically present in their neighborhoods but are functionally excluded from the benefits of gentrification (Levy et al., 2007). This form of displacement is often subtle, but no less damaging, as the businesses, public spaces, and community services that once catered to existing residents are replaced with those serving the tastes and economic capacities of wealthier newcomers (Freeman & Braconi, 2004). Rising costs for goods and services, changes in public space management—such as increased policing or the privatization of communal areas—and shifting neighborhood norms make long-time residents feel unwelcome or alienated (Levy et al., 2007). These changes often serve as a precursor to direct displacement, as the environment

[16] Residents of Little Jamaica were excluded from the City of Toronto's Motion PH28.1: Inclusionary Zoning Official Plan, which mandates that developers include a percentage of affordable units in new condominium buildings. City staff justified the exclusion by stating that demand for housing in the neighborhood was not high enough. However, Councillor Josh Matlow, whose ward includes part of Little Jamaica, criticized the decision as "ridiculous," citing the recent surge in development proposals spurred by the Eglinton Crosstown LRT. See CBC News (2021) for more details: https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/critics-slam-ridiculous-decision-to-exclude-little-jamaica-from-mandatory-affordable-housing-plan-1.6219721

becomes increasingly hostile or unlivable for those unable to adapt to the new socio-economic conditions (Butler et al., 2013).

Cultural displacement occurs when the identity and character of a neighborhood are fundamentally altered, erasing the histories, traditions, and sense of belonging that long-standing residents have built over generations (Tuttle, 2022). This form of displacement often precedes economic displacement, as the arrival of new cultural norms and consumer preferences signals to developers and investors that the neighborhood is ready for reinvestment (Kern, 2022). Scholars like Ley (1980) and Jager (1986) have noted that cultural shifts—such as changes in public space usage, shifts in business ownership, or the emergence of a new dominant aesthetic—often mark the early stages of gentrification. Kern (2022) emphasizes the racialized nature of cultural displacement, illustrating how systemic racism plays a crucial role in determining who gets to remain part of a neighborhood's cultural and social fabric. In Little Jamaica, Black-owned businesses and community spaces are being replaced with establishments catering to affluent newcomers, diminishing the neighborhood's Afro-Caribbean identity (CP Planning, 2021). Ironically, while aspects of Caribbean culture—such as food, music, and aesthetics—are celebrated and commodified, the people who created and sustained this culture are being pushed out.

Reframing Gentrification

Traditional economic perspectives on gentrification often frame it as a natural outcome of supply and demand, driven by the desirability of certain neighborhoods (Redfern 1997). This lens highlights the financial incentives for developers and the ripple effects of urban redevelopment on municipal revenues and services. However, this framing obscures the

systematic disinvestment that creates the conditions for gentrification in the first place. Neil Smith's (1979) rent gap theory illustrates that gentrification is not an organic process but a deliberate strategy of capital accumulation. Developers and investors capitalize on the disparity between current and potential property values, profiting at the expense of the communities they displace (Smith, 1979).

Over the years, attempts to reframe gentrification have often dressed it in the language of revitalization, presenting it as an unquestionably positive force for urban renewal. Terms like "fix up," "revitalize," and "regenerate," as used by Clay (2010), Sýkora (2004), and Rose (2004), reinforce the idea that gentrification is a natural and necessary process that rescues neighborhoods perceived as neglected or declining. This framing positions gentrification as a heroic intervention that restores vitality and improves quality of life, aligning with capitalist logics that prioritize progress and development. However, as Kern (2022) notes, this process doesn't just obscure displacement—it reimagines it as progress. The emphasis on revitalization frames pre-gentrified neighborhoods as inherently lacking value or significance (Blasius et al., 2016). In Little Jamaica, this narrative downplays decades of community-building, cultural richness, and Black entrepreneurship. It suggests that the neighborhood's worth can only be measured by the arrival of outside investment and middle-class tastes. This logic underpins the broader dynamics of gentrification, where the very culture that makes a neighborhood appealing is commodified, marketed, and ultimately stripped away (Tuttle, 2022).

However, gentrification is not solely an economic process—it is also profoundly cultural. Researchers such as Ley (1980) and Jager (1986) have demonstrated that cultural shifts frequently precede economic displacement, serving as early signs of neighborhood change. Kern (2022) describes how newcomers subtly reshape the cultural fabric of an area—through their

presence in public spaces, shifts in business patronage, and the introduction of new consumption patterns. These seemingly minor changes signal to developers and investors that the neighborhood is ripe for redevelopment. The process begins with cultural displacement: long-standing businesses struggle to compete with new establishments catering to gentrifiers, while public spaces become less welcoming to original residents (Blasius et al., 2016). Over time, these cultural shifts redefine the neighborhood's identity, making it increasingly inaccessible to those who built it (Tuttle, 2022). In Little Jamaica, this cultural erasure is particularly painful, as the neighborhood's Black cultural legacy is not only integral to its identity but also a significant part of its appeal to outsiders (Black Urbanism Toronto, 2020). The irony lies in the fact that while the culture is celebrated, the people who created and sustained it are being pushed out.

Proponents of gentrification often tout its supposed benefits—rising property values, reduced crime rates, and improved local amenities (Atkinson, 2015). But these metrics fail to consider who benefits from these changes and at what cost. Rising property values may increase municipal revenues, but they also price out long-term residents (Atkinson, 2015). Lower crime rates are often achieved through increased surveillance and over-policing, which disproportionately target racialized and low-income communities (Papachristos et al., 2011). Even the improvements in infrastructure and public spaces are rarely experienced by those who are displaced before they can reap the rewards (Kern, 2022).

Ultimately, the interplay between cultural and economic gentrification is crucial to understanding the full scope of the phenomenon. Cultural transformation softens the ground for economic redevelopment, and economic shifts, in turn, reinforce cultural erasure. But to fully capture the dynamics of gentrification in Little Jamaica, it's crucial to move beyond simplistic narratives of progress and revitalization that overlook the racialized dimensions of gentrification.

Gentrification is not simply a market-driven process or an aesthetic shift—it is a form of racial capitalism that exploits the very communities it erases, commodifying their culture while displacing their people (Rucks-Ahidiana, 2022). This is not progress—it is erasure disguised as renewal.

Gentrification in the Field

Gentrification is a widely studied phenomenon across disciplines, with scholars analyzing its economic, social, cultural, and political dimensions (Marcuse, 2015). Within recreation and leisure studies and related fields, researchers have explored how gentrification reshapes public spaces, cultural production, and community life. Studies have examined the role of leisure in processes of displacement, the commercialization of cultural heritage, and the tensions between revitalization and cultural erasure (Mullenbach & Baker, 2020; Alexander & Berbary, 2021; Rich & Sharpe, 2024). While urban planning and geography have long dominated discussions of gentrification, leisure studies offer a critical lens for understanding how everyday practices, spaces of play, and cultural expression are entangled in these transformations (Alexander & Berbary, 2021). This section situates my research within these scholarly conversations, engaging with existing literature on gentrification, community, and leisure to highlight how scholars have conceptualized and responded to these changes—both within Little Jamaica and beyond.

Gentrification Research in Recreation & Leisure Studies

The relationship between gentrification and leisure has historically been underexplored within recreation and leisure studies. However, as urban redevelopment accelerates and displaces marginalized communities, scholars are increasingly recognizing the critical intersections between leisure, public space, and socio-economic change (Mullenbach & Baker 2020). Gentrification not only restructures housing markets but also reshapes access to recreational

spaces, leisure infrastructure, and the cultural dynamics of leisure participation (Jayne, 2005; Silk & Andrews, 2012). While some perspectives frame gentrification as a mechanism for improving leisure spaces through increased investment and infrastructural enhancement, others emphasize the exclusionary effects on historically marginalized populations, whose cultural and recreational practices and spaces become displaced or erased (Alexander & Berbary, 2021).

A growing body of research highlights how leisure spaces—public parks, recreational facilities, and local businesses centered around leisure—are implicated in broader gentrification processes. Mullenbach and Baker (2020) argue that gentrification extends beyond residential and commercial displacement to influence social, economic, and political processes that govern leisure access and experiences. They touch on the concept of "environmental gentrification," wherein the creation or renovation of green spaces such as parks, waterfronts, or trails attracts wealthier residents, thereby intensifying displacement pressures on lower-income communities (Checker, 2011). This phenomenon illustrates how well-intentioned urban greening initiatives can inadvertently become tools of exclusion, reinforcing socio-economic divides in leisure access.

This dynamic is further illustrated in research on Toronto's Trinity Bellwoods Park, where pandemic-era park policies reflected broader gentrification processes. Rich and Sharpe (2024) argue that the implementation of park circles under the guise of public health measures functioned as an extension of neoliberal urban policy, reinforcing exclusionary leisure practices and securing the park as a space for "hipster leisure" (p. 146). Rather than serving as a neutral public health intervention, these measures aligned with existing patterns of racial and class-based exclusion in Toronto's west end, where gentrification has transformed neighborhood

demographics and leisure cultures. The influx of wealthier, culturally dominant residents has reshaped public space, privileging hipster leisure practices while subtly displacing more traditional community sports and activities. The capacity of these new residents to influence park policy underscores how gentrification extends beyond economic displacement to control over the cultural production of space, determining whose leisure is prioritized and whose is rendered invisible. As such, the case of Trinity Bellwoods exemplifies how gentrification materializes through policy interventions that selectively regulate access to public leisure spaces (Rich & Sharpe, 2024).

The complicity of leisure scholarship in perpetuating gentrification narratives is another point of critique. Alexander & Berbary (2021)` challenge traditional leisure discourses that uncritically celebrate revitalization, renewal, and placemaking, arguing that such frameworks often obscure the role of leisure development in sustaining systemic racism and settler colonialism. Through their analysis of Goudies Lane, they illustrate how leisure-oriented urban redevelopment can function as a vehicle for gentrification and displacement. Their work underscores the need for a more critical, equity-driven approach to leisure studies—one that interrogates the power structures embedded in urban development and foregrounds the experiences of those most affected by gentrification.

Taken together, these studies reveal that gentrification is not solely an economic process but a cultural and spatial one that shapes who has the right to leisure and where that leisure can occur. As gentrification continues to reconfigure urban landscapes, leisure scholars must grapple with its implications, advocating for policies and practices that prioritize accessibility, cultural preservation, and the right to space for historically marginalized communities.

Gentrification Research in Little Jamaica

Gentrification research specific to Little Jamaica is still emerging, reflecting both the relatively recent intensification of displacement in the area and the broader gaps in academic attention to Black urban communities in Canada. Yet a growing body of work has begun to collectively map how transit development, gentrification, and cultural erasure intersect on Eglinton West—and how communities continue to resist.

Debbie Gordon (2018) and Jasmine Mohamed (2021) both foreground how gentrification in Little Jamaica is facilitated not only through policy but through the visual and spatial rebranding of the neighborhood itself. Gordon's (2018) analysis of signage, advertisements, and architectural aesthetics shows how design becomes a vehicle for erasure—positioning Black life as out of place while preparing the ground for new, wealthier audiences. Her critique pushes back on the notion of planning as apolitical, revealing instead how the city's visual language participates in rewriting the area's identity in racialized terms. Mohamed (2021) builds on this by turning to the Metrolinx Eglinton LRT, a project marketed as equitable infrastructure but experienced by many as a catalyst for gentrification and displacement. She argues that the LRT not only accelerates socio-economic inequality, but exploits the aesthetic and culture of Afro-Caribbean folks to drive up land value (Mohamed, 2021). In this context, Black communities are not just displaced but also used to create value while being pushed out from its benefits.

Avery Sabeta's (2024) work brings a clearer understanding of how erasure and extraction play out in Little Jamaica. Building on Katherine McKittrick's (2002) work on Black geographies, Sabeta argues that the City's refusal to grant heritage status to Little Jamaica isn't just a policy failure—it's an intentional denial of Black spatial memory. At the same time, efforts

to rebrand the area as a cultural destination for tourists show a frustrating contradiction: Blackness is welcomed as an aesthetic, but not as a lived presence. Culture is treated as something to be consumed, not protected. Sabeta reveals how official planning narratives put economic development ahead of community well-being, describing this as a spatial politics of anti-Black neglect. In doing so, she connects what's happening in Little Jamaica to a larger pattern where Black communities are pushed out of the city's future—even while their culture is used to shape its public image.

Alongside these structural critiques, Elizabeth Wong (2023) turns our attention to the everyday practices through which residents resist erasure. Her work focuses on Caribbean food spaces—not simply as businesses, but as cultural institutions, places where memory, belonging, and care are enacted on a daily basis. Through interviews with community members, Wong shows how food functions as a form of rooted resistance, a way of holding onto identity in the face of encroaching loss. These restaurants and bakeries do more than serve meals—they preserve stories, sustain relationships, and anchor people to place. Wong (2023) reframes food not as a commodity but as a practice of survival, arguing that cultural continuity is maintained not through formal recognition but through daily, often invisible, acts of presence. In this way, her work complements and deepens the broader critiques by reminding us that resistance to gentrification is not only political or legal, but deeply embodied and relational.

Together, these scholars offer a textured and multidimensional understanding of how gentrification unfolds in Little Jamaica—not just as a matter of rising rents or shifting demographics, but as a racialized struggle over space, memory, and belonging. Planning tools, infrastructure projects, and cultural policies converge to manage and marginalize Black life,

repackaging the neighborhood's identity while displacing the very people who shaped it. Yet within and against these forces, residents continue to assert their right to remain—through protest, through cultural expression, and through the simple, powerful act of showing up. What this body of work makes clear is that the fight against gentrification is also a fight for the preservation of community, and for futures grounded in justice rather than extraction.

Rethinking Gentrification Through Racial Capitalism

Gentrification has traditionally been framed as a class-based process, one in which rising property values and economic investment displace low-income residents in favor of middle- and upper-income newcomers (Glass, 1960; Smith, 1996). While this framework offers valuable insights, it falls short in fully capturing the nuances of gentrification in neighborhoods like Little Jamaica, where race is not incidental but central to the process. Gentrification in Little Jamaica cannot be understood apart from racial capitalism—a system in which race fundamentally structures economic relations, dictating who accumulates wealth and who is dispossessed (Kelley, 2017; Melamed, 2015; Robinson, 2000).

Gentrification does not merely involve an economic shift from low-income to middle-income residents. Rather, it is a racialized process in which capital accumulation occurs through the strategic valuation, devaluation, and revaluation of neighborhoods (Dantzler, 2021; Dantzler & Reynolds, 2020; Howell & Korver-Glenn, 2021). Investors, developers, and policymakers assess neighborhoods based not only on their economic potential but also on race-based perceptions of value (Fields & Raymond, 2021; Dantzler, 2024). These perceptions determine where financial capital flows, shaping urban development in ways that disproportionately benefit wealthier, often white, newcomers while displacing Black and racialized communities (Howell

& Korver-Glenn, 2021; Rucks-Ahidiana, 2022). This racialized valuation is evident in how Black neighborhoods are systematically underfunded and neglected, only to be later rebranded as "up-and-coming" once they become profitable sites for redevelopment (Fields & Raymond, 2021).

Cedric Robinson's foundational work *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (1983) critiques classical Marxism for failing to account for the centrality of race in capitalist development. Robinson argues that capitalism has always been racialized, with economic hierarchies emerging alongside and through racial subjugation. This insight is critical for understanding gentrification in Little Jamaica, where the displacement of Black residents is not simply an economic shift but the latest iteration of a long history of racialized displacement and dispossession (Black Urbanism Toronto, 2020). The racial hierarchies that have historically determined human rights, land ownership, labor access, and financial security continue to inform contemporary urban redevelopment, shaping who is deemed valuable in the housing market and who is not (Virdee, 2019; Rucks-Ahidiana, 2022).

Racial Capitalism and the Formation of Little Jamaica

The legacy of racial capitalism is evident in both the migration of Caribbean people to Canada and their settlement in Little Jamaica. The neighborhood was not merely the result of geographic convenience but a necessary response to systemic racial exclusion (Henry, 1994; CP Planning, 2021). Many Caribbean migrants arrived in Canada through restrictive labor programs such as the West Indian Domestic Scheme, which granted women entry into the country under exploitative conditions (Henry, 1968). Once in Canada, Black migrants faced exclusion from financial institutions that severely limited their ability to secure mortgages or business loans

(Henry, 1994). As a result, rather than owning property, many Caribbean business owners and residents in Little Jamaica operated as tenants, making them particularly vulnerable to later displacement (Black Urbanism Toronto, 2020).

This process of exclusion was not incidental but an intentional feature of Canada's racialized economic structures (Teelucksingh, 2006). Housing discrimination, employment barriers, and systemic disinvestment confined Black residents to specific parts of the city (Teelucksingh, 2006; Gordon, 2018). Yet despite these constraints, Little Jamaica emerged as a thriving cultural and economic hub, with Caribbean businesses, music, and social institutions forming a strong communal infrastructure (Henry, 1994). This success, however, would later become a double-edged sword, as the very culture that Black residents built in response to exclusion would be commodified and used to justify their removal (Sabeta, 2024).

Resistance as a Challenge to Racial Capitalism

The gentrification in Little Jamaica exemplifies how racial capitalism operates as a system of ongoing exploitation and exclusion. The hierarchies of worth embedded in racial capitalism dictate not only where marginalized communities can afford to live, but also the social and economic networks they can sustain and their capacity to resist systemic pressures (Dantzler, 2024). The rising cost of living and the intensification of economic pressures in Little Jamaica are not random by-products of urban change but are deliberately engineered through policies and practices designed to extract profit at the expense of Black communities (Howell & Korver-Glenn, 2018; Rucks-Ahidiana, 2022). These conditions create profound barriers to resistance: with limited financial resources and an increasing focus on survival, many residents find it difficult to organize against displacement. This economic precarity is not incidental; it is a core

function of racial capitalism, which thrives on conditions that suppress collective resistance (Robinson, 1983). The cycle of devaluation, neglect, and subsequent revaluation of neighborhoods like Little Jamaica ensures that it will remain structurally vulnerable, unable to accumulate generational wealth or secure long-term stability. The racialized dispossession and displacement occurring in Little Jamaica is thus not only a local phenomenon but part of a broader global pattern in which Black communities are systematically displaced from urban centers in the service of profit (Wilson, 2007; Rucks-Ahidiana, 2022).

Understanding gentrification as a manifestation of racial capitalism reframes local resistance, positioning it not just as a localized fight for neighborhood preservation but as part of a larger battle against racialized economic exploitation. Resistance in Little Jamaica is not simply about retaining homes and businesses; it is about asserting the right to exist, to build community, and to refuse erasure in a system that views Black life as disposable (Hassen, 2021). This resistance takes multiple forms. Community groups, tenant organizers, and local activists are at the forefront, advocating for equitable policies, exposing exploitative development practices, and creating networks of solidarity and mutual aid. These efforts range from grassroots fundraising initiatives that redistribute resources to Black business owners and renters to direct actions that challenge corruption perpetuated by real estate and transit developers. By mobilizing both on-the-ground organizing and policy advocacy, residents of Little Jamaica are actively contesting the structures of racial capitalism that seek to displace them.

However, these acts of resistance extend beyond immediate survival tactics. They also reflect a deeper struggle over the meaning of urban space and who has the right to shape its future. The gentrification of Little Jamaica, like other racialized processes of displacement, is not

just about economic restructuring—it is also about cultural erasure (Black Urbanism Toronto, 2020). When developers and investors commodify Caribbean culture while excluding the very people who created it, they reinforce the racial capitalist logic that extracts value from Blackness while denying Black communities the ability to benefit from their own cultural and economic contributions. In resisting gentrification, Little Jamaica is confronting not only the immediate threat of displacement but also the broader dynamics of racial capitalism that have long determined who belongs in the city and who does not. This struggle aligns with global movements against racialized dispossession, from the fight for Indigenous land sovereignty in North America to resistance against settler colonial expansion in Palestine and Indigenous land reclamation efforts worldwide. By situating these local efforts within a global context, the struggle for Little Jamaica becomes part of a larger movement to reclaim space and culture in the face of systemic oppression. Resistance, in this sense, is not just about preserving a neighborhood—it is about challenging the very structures that seek to erase it (Kern, 2022).

Chapter Three: Methodology

Research Design

This chapter provides a detailed overview of the methodological framework and methods employed in this research. Black Archival Practice was chosen to guide the documentation and preservation of anti-gentrification resistance efforts in Little Jamaica. This approach allows for a rich exploration of the cultural practices, lived experiences, and community-based strategies that have emerged in response to the forces of gentrification, displacement, and cultural erasure in the neighborhood. Through Black Archival Practice, I aim to highlight and preserve the people, organizations, spaces, and events that shape the cultural fabric of Little Jamaica and form the backbone of its resistance. Therefore, the purpose of this archival work is to recover overlooked histories and experiences within the neighborhood, and to foreground them as acts of cultural preservation and political resistance. By centering these narratives, this study seeks to rewrite dominant accounts of gentrification to accurately reflect the ways Black residents experience, contest, and actively resist the transformation of their community.

Black Archival Practice

Black Archival Practice is both a framework and a methodology rooted in the intentional collection, organization, and interpretation of materials that document Black life—materials created by, for, or about Black people (Okechukwu, 2022). More than a process of preservation, it is a practice of storytelling, artistic expression, and memory-making that affirms the complexity and richness of Black existence. While it emerges from the broader tradition of archival work, Black Archival Practice distinguishes itself by actively challenging the limitations of conventional archives, which often marginalize or omit Black histories (Collier & Sutherland, 2022).

Traditional archives are not neutral spaces. They have historically upheld Eurocentric, white, colonial, and patriarchal values—often silencing or erasing Black narratives (Okechukwu, 2022). Archives are shaped by the same power structures that govern society, influencing what is preserved, who is remembered, and how stories are told (Prosper, 2024). As institutions, they play a central role in shaping the historical record, impacting everything from public policy to academic scholarship to community memory (Bastian & Alexander, 2009). The significance of Black Archival Practice cannot be overstated. In the absence of intentional efforts by Black communities to document our own stories, histories risk distortion, misrepresentation, or complete erasure (Okechukwu, 2022). This practice is not just about safeguarding the past—it is about reclaiming narrative authority, asserting presence, and imagining liberated futures. Within the context of this research, Black Archival Practice is mobilized as a methodology of refusal and remembrance. It enables a reframing of gentrification in Little Jamaica not only as a process of urban change, but as a violent mechanism of cultural erasure—one that systematically undermines the presence, contributions, and history of the Afro-Caribbean community in Toronto. In response, this thesis operates as a living, counter-archive that collects, curates, and centers the spaces, organizations, people, and everyday acts that constitute resistance in Little Jamaica.

The rationale for using Black Archival Practice in this research lies in its deep alignment with the goals of this project: to document, honor, and protect the cultural and political life of Little Jamaica amid the violent pressures of gentrification and cultural erasure. This methodology makes space for forms of knowledge often excluded from institutional archives—oral histories, neighborhood rituals, community organizing, and Black artistic expression—and treats them as central to the historical record (Collier & Sutherland, 2022). By engaging the

community's own practices of memory-keeping and resistance, Black Archival Practice offers a more faithful, relational approach to research—one grounded in care, accountability, and the refusal to extract (Smith, 2022; Prosper, 2024).

As someone who has lived, organized, and grown within Little Jamaica for 24 years, I approached this work not as an outsider looking in, but as a participant and witness. My proximity to the community I am researching allowed me to engage the archival process with great responsibility. Black Archival Practice demands that the archive be built with, not just about, the community—shaped through trust (Smith, 2022). In this context, the thesis itself becomes a counter-archive: a living collection of people, spaces, practices, and politics that resist erasure and assert the ongoing presence of Black life in Toronto.

Rather than simply analyzing gentrification, this methodology allowed me to document how people endure it, resist it, and refuse to be erased by it. It foregrounds the textures of everyday life—acts of care, joy, grief, and defiance—and affirms their place in the archive as evidence of survival and struggle. In this way, Black Archival Practice is not just a tool for preservation, but a counter-narrative for intervention: it unsettles dominant histories, holds space for community truth-telling, and builds the foundation for liberated futures.

The research is structured around three key research questions (RQs)

- **RQ1** – How have Little Jamaica residents responded to economic shifts associated with gentrification, and what forms of resistance have emerged in relation to these changes over time?
- **RQ2** – How do resistance efforts in Little Jamaica reflect and reinforce Black cultural identity, belonging, and claims to place?

- **RQ3**- In what ways are residents, organizers, and community groups collectively resisting gentrification, and how have these strategies shifted over time in response to state, market, and development pressures?

Each of these research questions guided both the data collection and the thematic analysis of this study. Grounded in a qualitative research design, this project drew primarily on the collection and analysis of ephemera—flyers, posters, petitions, Instagram posts, community event announcements, public statements, and planning documents—to trace how resistance to gentrification in Little Jamaica has taken shape over time. Rather than relying on interviews or surveys, this methodology privileges the material and digital traces of organizing, protest, celebration, and mourning that have defined the neighborhood's recent history.

These research questions seek to uncover how gentrification's economic impacts—such as the closure of Black-owned businesses, rising commercial rents, and long-term disinvestment—have been resisted by residents, business owners, and community groups. They also examine how this resistance is inseparable from questions of cultural identity, belonging, and neighborhood memory, especially as community members engage in creative and political acts of place-keeping to assert their right to remain. The timeline of collected ephemera provides a foundation for understanding how specific moments of resistance—public forums, murals, GoFundMe campaigns, protest marches, media coverage—respond to broader structural shifts in the city's development landscape.

Centering community-produced materials and public-facing artifacts allows this research to illuminate the embodied, spatial, and symbolic dimensions of resistance in Little Jamaica. It pays close attention to how residents use everyday tools and cultural production to contest displacement, articulate identity, and envision alternatives. Ultimately, this study offers a layered

and historically grounded account of how gentrification is being challenged through both collective and localized action, underscoring the efforts of cultural survival in a rapidly transforming urban space.

Methods

This research adopts a qualitative methodology grounded in the belief that the complexities of gentrification, racialized displacement, cultural erasure, and community resistance cannot be meaningfully understood through quantitative data alone. Instead of privileging statistical generalizability or testable hypotheses, this approach centers the depth and nuance of lived experience. It foregrounds the stories, memories, and meaning-making practices of individuals and communities navigating gentrification, with attention to the broader social, cultural, and historical forces that shape their lives. In doing so, this research seeks not only to document what is happening in Little Jamaica, but to understand how it is felt, resisted, and remembered.

This research centers on ephemera collection as its primary method—defined by Raine (2019) as "minor printed items that were not meant to survive" (p. 633). Rather than viewing these materials as static or peripheral, this methodology approaches ephemera—both physical and digital—as official records of community resistance. In the context of Little Jamaica, these items capture everyday life under gentrification, highlighting acts of resistance, remembrance, mourning, and joy. I chose 2009 as the starting point for this ephemera collection, as it marked the beginning of LRT construction in the neighborhood. By gathering ephemera from 2009 onward, this research traced both the evolving media narratives and the community's enduring responses to displacement pressures and cultural erasure. The ephemera collected included flyers, protest signs, mutual aid notices, event programs, and community newsletters—materials

that may have only circulated briefly but hold deep significance for cultural memory, grassroots mobilization, and political expression.

In addition to physical materials, digital ephemera played a central role in this archive. Social media platforms—particularly Instagram and Twitter (now X)—have become critical tools for organizing, storytelling, and cultural expression in Little Jamaica, especially among Black youth and grassroots organizations. Instagram is widely used in the neighborhood to publicize events, promote local businesses, and share visual media that communicates both celebration and protest. Its format—centered around images, stories, and short videos makes it especially effective for capturing how culture and resistance is performed and remembered in a context of gentrification. It also functions as a virtual bulletin board for the community, where one can trace the development of resistance efforts, mutual aid campaigns, and creative interventions over time. Twitter, on the other hand, is primarily used for real-time commentary, news sharing, and political engagement. Its hashtag-based structure enables the tracking of public discourse across a range of actors, including residents, journalists, organizers, politicians, and urban planners. Through these platforms, I collected user-generated posts, event promotions, protest documentation, and public commentary from 2009 to 2025 that reveal how resistance and cultural memory are being shaped online. These digital traces serve as informal but powerful archives of lived experience, offering insight into narratives and voices often excluded from institutional records.

In tandem with social media, I also collected digital ephemera from mainstream media coverage. News articles from outlets such as CBC News, CTV News, CityNews, CP24, and the Toronto Star were examined for coverage related to Little Jamaica's resistance efforts, cultural

preservation activities, and the ongoing impacts of the Metrolinx Eglinton Crosstown LRT project. Together these articles offered another dimension to the archive—capturing how events in Little Jamaica were framed, represented, and contested in the public sphere. They also helped contextualize how institutional narratives either align with or diverge from community accounts. Together, the inclusion of social media and news media expands the scope of the archive, allowing for a multi-layered understanding of the neighborhood's resistance to gentrification and its ongoing efforts to preserve cultural identity in the face of displacement and erasure.

Given the wide range of events, initiatives, and everyday acts of care that take place in Little Jamaica, this archive was shaped through a process of deliberate and thoughtful curation. Rather than attempting to document everything, I was intentionally selective, focusing on ephemera that speak directly to two interconnected themes: gentrification resistance and cultural preservation. This decision was grounded in the political commitments of this project—to amplify community-based resistance, affirm Black Caribbean cultural life, and document how residents assert agency in the face of systemic erasure. I define gentrification resistance as any action, gathering, or communication—whether virtual or in-person—that mobilizes, educates, or engages community members around the intersecting pressures of displacement, redevelopment, and neighborhood change. This includes protest posters, community planning flyers, social media graphics calling attention to evictions, mutual aid efforts, or public teach-ins that name and contest gentrification.

Cultural preservation, on the other hand, refers to the intentional celebration, transmission, and safeguarding of Caribbean cultural identity and historical memory in Little Jamaica. This includes events such as walking tours, storytelling nights, public art installations,

and workshops that educate both residents and visitors about the neighborhood's Black and Caribbean heritage. These two categories are not mutually exclusive—many events and initiatives embody both resistance and cultural affirmation, reflecting the interconnected nature of struggle and survival.

The ephemera documenting these efforts was collected through archival research, digital gathering, and community-contributed materials. This included photographs, flyers, posters, event programs, and newsletters—materials shared publicly online or preserved by community organizations. In addition, curated collections of social media posts—primarily from Instagram and Twitter—were used to capture key moments of organizing, storytelling, and cultural expression. These digital artifacts, including screenshots, captions, and threads, served both as data and as archival material in their own right. Together, these sources traced how residents responded to gentrification while simultaneously affirming their presence, memory, and identity while building collective futures in the face of erasure.

The ephemera collection was shaped by a targeted search of specific organizations and community accounts central to Little Jamaica's resistance landscape. The core organizations I focused on include Reclaim Rebuild Eg West, Black Urbanism Toronto, and CP Planning. Reclaim Rebuild Eg West (RREW) is a Toronto-based, youth-led advocacy group dedicated to preserving the vibrant cultural heritage of Little Jamaica. Founded in 2020, RREW emerged in direct response to the intersecting crises facing the neighborhood—namely, the gentrification and displacement of Black residents and businesses fueled by Metrolinx construction, racialized policing by the Toronto Police Service, and sustained governmental neglect across municipal, provincial, and federal levels. Since its formation, RREW has employed a range of imaginative

and impactful resistance strategies—from protest actions and political education discussions to community aid initiatives, healing spaces, and cultural celebrations. These interventions center radical care and joy as forms of resistance while working to build long-term power among Black residents. RREW has also played a key role in fundraising for mutual aid and tenant support, amplifying local voices, and mobilizing residents toward policy change. The group's work is significant and had to be included in this research as a key part of understanding community youth-led resistance in Little Jamaica. Black Urbanism Toronto (BUTO) is another crucial voice in the area's anti-gentrification landscape. Their work centers on the preservation of Black cultural spaces, the defense of Black-owned businesses, and the education of community members around spatial justice and urban development. Through research reports, community consultations, visual storytelling, and advocacy campaigns, BUTO has consistently drawn attention to the systemic erasure of Black life in urban planning processes. Their interventions blend critical policy analysis with cultural reclamation, making them a vital source of both strategic and narrative documentation. CP Planning, a participatory urban planning and research firm, has also contributed significantly to resistance efforts in Little Jamaica. Collaborating closely with residents and community groups, CP Planning has led projects such as community mapping and the documentation of Black-owned businesses at risk of closure. Their work helps visualize the stakes of gentrification while offering tools for collective action. The firm's reports and engagement materials are particularly valuable for this study, bridging academic insight with grassroots knowledge production and offering a clear picture of the development pressures facing the neighborhood.

These groups were chosen for their deep roots in the community and their active roles in challenging the narratives promoted by developers, government officials, Business Improvement

Areas (BIAs), and other agents of gentrification. This research intentionally excludes materials from organizations that promote top-down development approaches—such as BIAs or developer-led revitalization campaigns, because their aims often align with commercial interests that contribute to gentrification. While such materials provide useful context, the focus here remains on those producing counter-narratives, preserving cultural memory, and enacting resistance through practices of community care. In centering grassroots organizations and community-generated materials, this project affirms the value of local knowledge, honors the ongoing resistance of Black residents in Little Jamaica, and contributes to archiving a living history that is too often marginalized or erased.

Representation

This research is deeply rooted in and accountable to the Little Jamaica community—its residents, business owners, community leaders, elders, and youth. These are the people living the realities this work documents and who continue to resist the forces of gentrification and cultural erasure. As such, they are not only the subjects of this research but its primary audience. My priority has been to ensure that this work is accessible, usable, and reflective of the community it represents.

I have chosen to archive my findings through a digital timeline *(see figure 18,),* built using Tiki-Toki, an open-format, freely accessible platform that enables dynamic, multimedia storytelling. This timeline serves as both a research output and a community tool—one that visually and interactively maps the ongoing history of Little Jamaica's resistance to gentrification. The format allows for chronological clarity while embedding audio-visual

ephemera—photos, videos, flyers, social media posts, and other materials—that bring each moment into fuller view.

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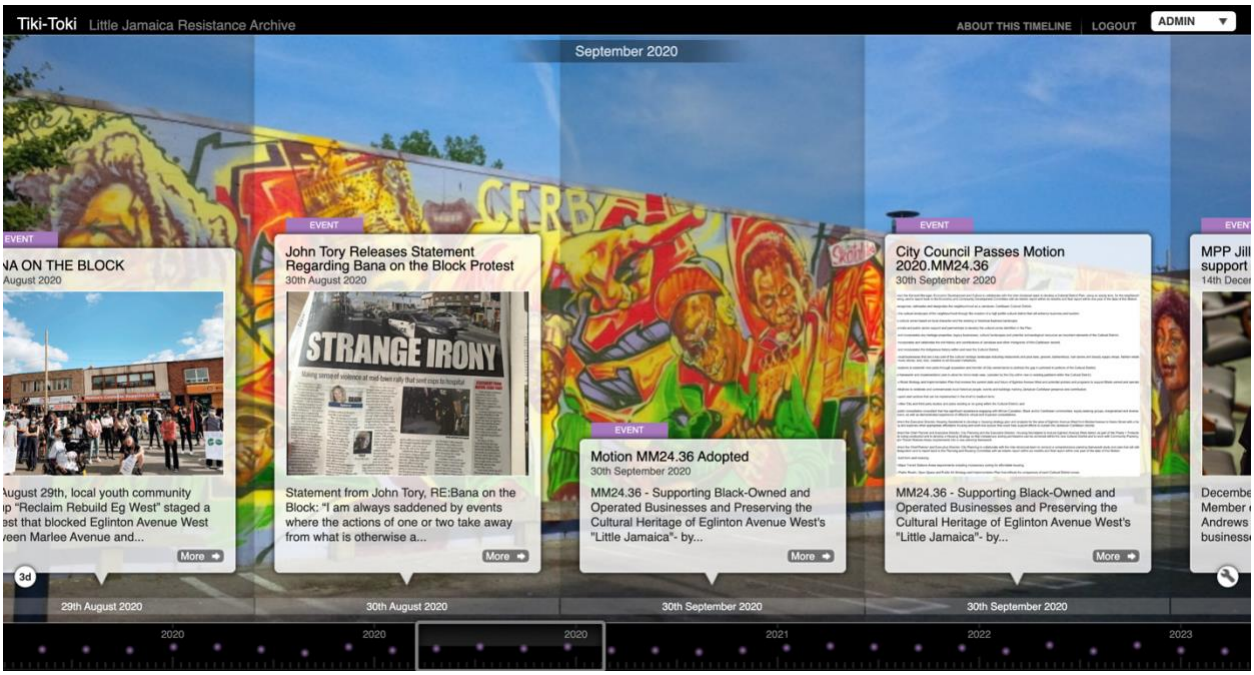


Figure 18: Little Jamaica Resistance Archive Timeline

The process of constructing the timeline is itself methodological. It reflects a commitment to Black Archival Practice by prioritizing community-authored materials and centering grassroots narratives that are often excluded from official records. The ephemera that populate this timeline were curated through a targeted search of organizations and community accounts central to Little Jamaica's resistance landscape, including Reclaim Rebuild Eg West, Black Urbanism Toronto, and CP Planning. These materials were selected not only for what they document but for how they document: as expressions of care, refusal, memory, and place-making

by those who live within the neighborhood[17]. By excluding top-down development materials such as BIA reports or developer-led revitalization campaigns—except when used as context or counterpoint—the timeline resists the dominant logics of gentrification and affirms the legitimacy of community knowledge. Each entry on the timeline reflects procedural choices about what to include, how to contextualize it, and what story it helps to tell—foregrounding the role of curation as both a research and political act.

The timeline begins with a background on Little Jamaica and a statement of intent outlining what I hope viewers will take away from the project. It includes a brief overview of my methodology and an introduction to the principles of Black Archival Practice, grounding the project in a tradition of preserving Black life, culture, and resistance in ways that challenge erasure and distortion. This framing situates the timeline not merely as a record, but as an act of cultural memory and political care. At its core, the timeline is a living archive that begins with the announcement of the Metrolinx LRT project—widely recognized as a catalyst for displacement and gentrification in the area. From there, it traces key moments in the construction process, while documenting parallel and intersecting acts of community resistance: protests, healing circles, public meetings, educational events, digital campaigns, and artistic interventions. These moments are brought to life with collected ephemera that make the intangible visible, and the everyday acts of resistance legible.

Importantly, this timeline is not static. It is designed as a living and evolving archive—something the community can return to, contribute to, and draw from. It insists that resistance is

[17] The creation of this timeline was informed by my own lived experience as a community member in Little Jamaica. The decisions around what to include were shaped not only by my personal memory, but also through ongoing conversations with family, neighbours, and elders who lived through and helped shape these moments. This archive is therefore both personal and collective, grounded in the rhythms of everyday life in the neighborhood.

not only historical but ongoing; not only reactive but generative. It is happening now, in real time, and deserves to be documented with the same care as any official record. By integrating research findings with community-collected ephemera in an accessible, open-source format, this project affirms the knowledge, memory, and cultural labor of Black communities. It aims to serve not only as a scholarly intervention but as a tool of and for the people—evidence that resistance is not only our heritage, but our present and our future.

Transferability

This study does not seek generalizability in the traditional sense but will prioritize transferability by providing a deep, contextualized analysis of Little Jamaica's resistance. This research will ensure that its findings can inform advocacy efforts in other gentrifying neighborhoods with strong cultural identities. Rather than extracting universal principles, the goal is to contribute to a growing body of knowledge on community resistance within racialized urban landscapes.

Chapter Four: Analysis

In this chapter, I analyze a timeline of gentrification and resistance in Little Jamaica, drawing from events between 2009 and 2025. This analysis is organized into three thematic phases: (1) Displacement & Disruption, (2) Organization & Mobilization, and (3) Institutionalization & Legacy. This timeline is not a neutral recounting of events; rather, it is a curated archive grounded in Black Archival Practice – a methodology that values lived memory, ephemera, and community testimony as legitimate and vital forms of knowledge. The curation of this archive is rooted in my lived experience as a lifelong resident, activist, and founding member of Reclaim Rebuild Eg West. It reflects my deep understanding of the daily and structural violences that have impacted the neighborhood, its residents, and businesses.

The theoretical grounding of this chapter is racial capitalism — a framework developed most notably by Cedric J. Robinson (1983), who argued that capitalism has always been racial, emerging from European feudalism and predicated on the differentiation and devaluation of racialized life. Racial capitalism is not merely about exclusion, but about how Blackness is continuously exploited and commodified for profit while simultaneously rendered disposable. In Little Jamaica, this is evident in how Black space is simultaneously criminalized and commodified: overly surveilled, neglected by public policy, and yet rebranded and marketed by developers as a site of cultural vibrancy. Together, racial capitalism and Black archival practice guide this chapter's approach. They push against dominant narratives of gentrification as a neutral or inevitable process and instead center a history of struggle — one that is grounded in Black experience, memory, and resistance. The timeline that follows is an analytic intervention grounded in my dual role as scholar and community member — a position that offers a unique vantage point. The purpose here is not to speak for the community, but to document and interpret

a resistance that refuses to die — a resistance that asserts: We were here. We are still here. We will always be here.

Theme 1: Displacement and Disruption

The first phase of this timeline captures a period of intensifying displacement and disruption. During this time, the Metrolinx LRT construction project, coupled with rising rents and a lack of protective urban planning policies, led to the erasure of many longstanding Black businesses and residents, and fundamentally altered the social, cultural and economic fabric of Little Jamaica. Though city officials and Metrolinx often framed the Eglinton Crosstown LRT as a symbol of progress and necessary development, for many in Little Jamaica, it became a source of deep disruption. Entire blocks along Eglinton Avenue West became completely inaccessible, with sidewalks torn up, storefronts blocked, and street parking along the main strip eliminated for years. Construction in the core of Little Jamaica—particularly between Dufferin Street and Marlee Avenue—was especially intense. Many small businesses, heavily reliant on foot traffic, were effectively set up to fail.

Despite repeated pleas for support, both the City and Metrolinx refused to offer meaningful assistance. “We have construction projects all over the city,” said then-councillor and TTC chair Josh Colle. “We as a city don’t offer compensation on any major projects and never really have.” Meanwhile, Metrolinx spokesperson Jamie Robinson claimed the agency was exploring alternative ways to ease the burden, but for many business owners, those promises felt hollow in the face of mounting losses. By 2017, Nick Alampi, the chair of the York-Eglinton BIA - which serves the Little Jamaica neighborhood- noted that about 50 businesses in the neighborhood have closed their doors since the start of construction. The number of businesses

that closed down in the neighborhood signaled more than just an economic downturn; they were moments of rupture that deeply affected the community and their sense of belonging. These closures were not isolated incidents but part of a broader trend of displacement that disproportionately impacted Black-owned businesses. Without support from the city or transit authorities, and with no meaningful mitigation plans, the community was left with no choice but to fight for themselves. One business owner, Jason Macdonald of Casual Hair Salon at 1572 Eglinton Avenue West, explained: *"I think they should compensate us, it would be a good gesture… there's a barricade in front of my store … We depend on foot traffic and right now that's been eliminated."* [18]

Residents were also severely impacted by the construction process. The prolonged construction made daily life increasingly difficult—commutes became longer and more unpredictable, sidewalks were blocked or rerouted, and access to essential services was routinely obstructed. Yet the most profound impacts extended beyond inconvenience. As the LRT project was used to justify rising property values, many landlords seized the opportunity to raise rents or push out long-standing tenants altogether. Evictions became more common, and residents—many of whom had lived in Little Jamaica for decades—found themselves priced out of their own neighborhood. What had once been a stable, tightly knit community began to unravel.

None of this was accidental. The loss of businesses, the eviction of tenants, and the destabilization of community life were not merely oversights or unfortunate side effects of development—they were part of a deliberate process. Under the guise of "revitalization" and "modernization," the City and Metrolinx advanced a vision of progress that excluded the very

[18] Full article can be found at: https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/lrt-business-eglinton-toronto-transit-metrolinx-1.4258195

people who built and sustained Little Jamaica. Framed as infrastructural improvement, the LRT project accelerated gentrification, cultural erasure and displacement, clearing the way for a reimagined neighborhood without its Black residents at the center of its plans.

Yet even amid the disruption, the quiet beginnings of resistance were already taking shape. In conversations held across barbershops, sidewalks, and small businesses, residents, workers, and local organizers began naming what was truly happening—not progress, but displacement. Through these exchanges and shared experiences, community members developed a deeper understanding of the forces reshaping their neighborhood. As former Mayoral candidate Chloe Brown tweeted:

"Can't help but feel this is a conspiracy to destroy Little Jamaica. It's been a long eviction process that uses delays and dysfunction to drive current residential and commercial tenants out of the neighbourhood so that larger Real Estate developers can take the land" - @Chloebrown4TO via Twitter

Though not yet expressed through formal coalitions, the community's refusal to be erased emerged in these everyday acts of care, connection, and conversation. This phase—Displacement & Disruption—captures a time of trouble, but also of awakening. It reveals a community forced to confront the reality that what was happening was not a passive or natural decline, but an active, orchestrated process of displacement and dispossession. Little Jamaica began to reclaim the terms of its own survival—setting the stage for the organized resistance that would rise in the years to come.

Theme 2: Organization & Mobilization

Following nearly a decade of displacement and disruption, 2020 marked a critical turning point in Little Jamaica — a shift from community fatigue and reactive frustration toward intentional organizing and strategic mobilization. This phase was defined by the emergence of grassroots infrastructure and community organizations capable of articulating political demands, redistributing resources, and holding the city, Metrolinx and developers accountable. Organization and mobilization became the means through which residents began to reclaim the neighborhood.

Research and advocacy emerged as key forms of resistance during this period, allowing community members to define the narrative and document the real-time impacts of gentrification, displacement, and transit construction. One of the earliest and most significant efforts came from Black Urbanism TO (BUTO), which launched several research initiatives beginning in 2020. Their Black Business Conversation report unveiled community insights into the socio-economic challenges faced by Black business owners, showcasing the disproportionate pressures of the Metrolinx LRT construction and municipal planning decisions. In that same year, BUTO also partnered with the University of Toronto to publish *Place Keeping in Little Jamaica: Commercial Displacement Prevention Strategies*. This report explored how communities might maintain control over their cultural spaces in the face of development, offering policy recommendations centered on community-led solutions. The report explicitly framed planning as a racial justice issue, challenging the logics of top-down urban growth and demanding an alternative model rooted in Black place-keeping and cultural stewardship.

BUTO hosted Black Resident and Business Consultations from February 10–12, 2020, which brought together Black stakeholders from across Eglinton West to collectively assess the impacts of gentrification and propose paths forward. These consultations directly informed later advocacy projects and laid the groundwork for the launch of BUTO's Pathways to Ownership program—a project that envisioned a model of Black-led land and business ownership as a long-term resistance strategy to displacement. Complementing this work was the *Future of Housing in Little Jamaica and York South-Weston* report, which amplified Black residents' perspectives on the affordable housing crisis and the direct impacts of transit-led gentrification. The report documented resident testimonies and offered housing policy alternatives rooted in lived experience and community accountability.

In 2021, CP Planning released the Black Futures on Eglinton report, a cultural mapping study co-developed with local leaders. It engaged residents through storytelling, participatory mapping, and visioning exercises to articulate shared community values and future goals. The report identified themes such as “Presence in Land and Space” and “Community Leadership,” pushing back against erasure by visualizing Little Jamaica as a space of ongoing Black life, memory, and futurity. It served as a counter to anti-Black planning practices by centering Black imagination and resistance within official city-making discourses.

As institutional attention toward Little Jamaica slowly began to grow, it was grassroots organizers who continued to lead with clarity and care. Reclaim Rebuild Eg West (RREW), for example, hosted a community discussion focused on the mental health impacts of gentrification—an aspect of gentrification rarely acknowledged in formal planning spaces. The event created room to name the emotional toll of cultural erasure, forced displacement, and

systemic neglect. Rather than treating mental health as an individual issue, it was framed as a structural and communal one—rooted in the violence of gentrification itself. This gathering became a space of collective witnessing, healing, and refusal. It affirmed that care work—especially emotional and cultural care—is not separate from resistance, but central to it. Alongside other community-led reports, events, and campaigns, it contributed to a growing body of grassroots knowledge that reshaped how Little Jamaica was seen by the public, the media, and city institutions. These efforts challenged the idea that the neighborhood was in decline, insisting instead that it was under threat—and worth defending.

In the wake of this pressure, the City of Toronto began to respond, though often in ways that felt reactive rather than rooted in genuine community leadership. On March 4, 2021, the City hosted a virtual public consultation on the future of Little Jamaica. Residents used the platform to speak out against the ongoing erasure of Caribbean culture and to demand preservation strategies anchored in lived experience. While the consultation itself was largely symbolic, it signaled the mounting pressure that community organizers had been building through their coordinated advocacy, research, and mobilization.

As face-to-face organizing became more difficult during the COVID-19 pandemic, community organizers, particularly youth, turned to digital platforms to amplify their message. Reclaim Rebuild Eg West (RREW) led this shift by producing a series of digital infographics that were widely shared across social media and used in advocacy efforts. On August 9, 2020**,** RREW released the “Toronto’s Little Jamaica” infographic. It presented a clear, visually compelling narrative of the neighborhood’s cultural history, ongoing displacement, and urgent need for community support. Then, on August 17, 2021, RREW followed up with “Metrolinx &

Gentrification in Little Jamaica," a digital breakdown of how the Metrolinx LRT construction project was accelerating Black displacement in the area. The comments under the post expressed the growing frustration and pain felt among residents:

"It's impossible to drive through there anymore, everybody running this city works around the clock for the past 20 years to destroy every bit of culture that this city was built on" - @Derekbpratt via Instagram.

"Breaks my heart when I go down there" - @Dahliasemone via Instagram

These infographics drew from the findings of the BUTO and CP Planning reports, bridging academic research and grassroots communication. These virtual storytelling efforts served several functions: they educated residents, attracted broader public attention, and helped strengthen a collective sense of identity and urgency. By documenting and interpreting the neighborhood's challenges in accessible formats, RREW's digital work made the issue legible to audiences who may not otherwise have engaged with formal reports. It also allowed community organizers to maintain momentum during lockdowns, building networks of solidarity and resistance across geographic boundaries.

The most visible form of mobilization during this phase was direct action, as community members took to the streets to demand immediate changes. The Bana on the Block protests, held in August 2020 and August 2021, were powerful demonstrations of collective frustration and cultural celebration. The first edition held On August 29th, local youth community group "Reclaim Rebuild Eg West" staged a protest that blocked off Eglinton Avenue West between Marlee Avenue and Oakwood Avenue, expressing their opposition to Metrolinx's mismanagement of the LRT construction and its adverse effects on the Little Jamaica

community. The demonstrators called for rental assistance and a temporary moratorium on evictions throughout the construction period, as well the official rebranding of the neighborhood from "International Market" to "Little Jamaica".[19] Various community members and activists spoke at the event, including MPP Jill Andrews, Romain Baker of Black Urbanism Toronto, and myself. Their remarks highlighted both the urgency of the moment and the ongoing neglect faced by Little Jamaica:

"We are at a critical point and the timing couldn't be better. For us to come together as a collective come together as a community and to speak.. because the city of Toronto is listening. City staff are listening, councillors are listening, BIA's are listening." – Romain Baker, Chair of Black Urbanism Toronto.

"At the brunt of Covid 19 we [The NDP] demanded rent relief, we demanded rent control, direct money- not no damn loan, direct money into the hands of these small businesses, Little Jamaica small businesses. and the Premier [Doug Ford] said no… Their time is up. – Jill Andrews

Unfortunately, the protest ended in police harassment[20], intimidation[21], and violence[22] against protesters[23].

[19] A full list of Reclaim Rebuild Eg West's protest demands can be found on Instagram at: https://www.instagram.com/p/CEQDzq7gc7b/?hl=en&img_index=4
[20] A witness video of the police presence – approximately 50 police officers responding to one man: https://x.com/RibeGom/status/1299864738789240833
[21] CBC News report from the day of the protest: https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/officers-injured-during-demonstration-incident-siu-investigating-1.5705405
[22] A witness video of Toronto Police officers arresting a community member after tasing him multiple times: https://x.com/youlovekaina/status/1299925221621850113
[23] Reclaim Rebuild Eg West's official witness statement from that night can be found on Instagram at: https://www.instagram.com/p/CEiGLwIg1A-/?hl=en&img_index=8

The second Bana on the Block action in 2021 reasserted the community's presence through a combined protest and block party. It uplifted Black-owned businesses along the Eglinton Strip while highlighting their struggles under gentrification and COVID-19. These events made clear that cultural survival required more than just policy—it required presence, noise, and risk.

Material support initiatives also emerged as critical components of this phase. On June 20, 2020**,** RREW launched the Black Business Grant**,** raising over $45,000 to support local Black businesses in danger of closing permanently. The following messages of support, left on the GoFundMe page, speak to the deeper meaning and urgency behind this mutual aid initiative—highlighting pride in the community, the vital role of small businesses, and the broader need to confront systemic racism in Canada:

"I'm proud of my community and want to see the Eglinton West area rejuvenated and supported". – Judith Adams via Go Fund Me

"Small, independently owned businesses should be treated are the lifelines of a community – Leyla Goka via Go Fund Me

"Canadians need to stop being smug about how we're 'not as bad as the States' & focus on the necessary work of acknowledging, challenging & dismantling racism in our own country" – Andrea Regimbal via Go Fund Me

The impact of the Black Business Grant program was felt deeply across Little Jamaica, as reflected in the heartfelt testimonies of local business owners who were able to keep their doors open during the peak of disruption in the neighborhood:

"To all the amazing people that have donated so far to the Black Busines Grant that these inspiring young people started – thank you. With the help and support of the Black Business Grant, my business, Fresh Cut Juice Bar, can stay open just a little while longer in this pandemic. I truly appreciate the assistance in this time of uncertainty. – Lusan, Owner of Fresh Cut Juice Bar

"Trejah Isle is grateful for the financial support by the way of the Black Business Grant for the Eglinton Ave West community. It is amazing to see what can be accomplished when we unite and work together for the benefit of our community. We are grateful that wee were able to receive assistance for our businesses at a time when it seems as if there is no hope. I would encourage anyone who cares for or is in support of our community to donate to this cause. I truly believe it is a great step towards ore work that can be done in our community that has contributed so much towards Toronto & Canadian culture. – Chozen, Owner of Trejah Isle Records.

Later, on January 6, 2021, the group launched the Eg West Tenant Relief Fund**,** which raised $15,355 to help cover rent for 18 Black and Indigenous tenants. Other organizations also contributed: in February 2021, the BBPA's Black Business Emergency Relief Grant (BBERG) released $150,000 in direct assistance to struggling small businesses. Meanwhile, residents continued to support one another through grassroots care. On August 24, 2023**,** Keele Eglinton Residents**,** in collaboration with Toronto Black Farmers, hosted a food drive providing healthy food baskets to residents. These forms of mutual aid directly responded to the intersecting crises of displacement, COVID-19, and economic marginalization.

In summary, this period of organization and mobilization represented a dramatic escalation in the sophistication and coordination of community resistance in Little Jamaica. Grounded in research, amplified through digital storytelling, and made real through direct action, Black residents and organizers refused to be passive observers of their own erasure. Instead, they created a living archive of resistance—one that not only documented loss but made space for possibility, healing, and long-term visioning. This phase proved that Little Jamaica was not just a neighborhood under threat, but a community in motion.

Theme 3: Institutionalization and Legacy

The period from 2023 to 2025 marks a critical phase in the resistance timeline—what I call the Institutionalization & Legacy phase. During this time, grassroots movements began to consolidate their demands into longer-term structures, policies, and narratives that aimed not only to respond to the harm of gentrification but to actively build toward a Black-led, self-determined future for Little Jamaica. These years reflect a decisive shift from reactive mobilization to proactive systems-building and cultural anchoring—efforts to ensure that Little Jamaica's Black presence, memory, and material roots are not only defended but affirmed as integral to the city's future.

By this phase, the city and province could no longer ignore the harms inflicted by years of construction delays, gentrification, and neglect. After over a decade of community pressure, formal policy responses started to take shape—however incomplete or delayed they may have been. One key moment came on September 30, 2020, when Toronto City Council passed *Motion MM24.36*, introduced by Councillor Josh Matlow and seconded by Councillor Michael Thompson. This motion explicitly recognized the cultural heritage of Little Jamaica and called

on the City to support Black-owned businesses along Eglinton West. While symbolic, this was the first formal acknowledgement of the area's cultural significance at the municipal level—and it opened the door for deeper advocacy. As @DanicaSamuel wrote on Twitter:

"So, as an alternative, the @cityoftoronto wants to make Little Jamaica Toronto's first 'cultural district.' Sounds pretty, right? However, as it stands, there's no definition or foundation (bylaws, policies) for that title. But they're working on that part. #LittleJamaicaTO"

This initial excitement of cultural recognition was met with both hope and skepticism. Online, community members highlighted the historical erasure of Black neighbourhoods across Canada. As @HualiMusic reflected:

"Speaks to a history of erasing and delegitimizing of black neighborhoods in Canada ie. Hogan's Alley in Van, Africville in Halifax, Mtl Nord & RdP... easier time bulldoze/neglect a neighbourhood if you don't identify it as culturally significant." – Via Twitter

Others pointed out the inconsistency in how the city names and preserves other racialized communities. As @CadenceWeapon noted:

"If you look at a map of Toronto, you'll see Little Italy, Chinatown, Little Portugal, Koreatown and Little Malta. But you won't see the words Little Jamaica, even though this section of Eglinton West has been colloquially known by that name since at least the 1960s". – Via Twitter

@Beequammie called out the City's contradictory priorities:

"Toronto spending millions to rename Dundas Street but being undecided on officially naming Little Jamaica a protected heritage district under the Ontario Heritage Act is par for the course, ain't it?" – Via Twitter

A few months later, on December 14, 2020, MPP Jill Andrew introduced a motion at Queen's Park calling for financial relief for businesses affected by the LRT construction and the pandemic. The motion demanded up to $30,000 in compensation per business, a moratorium on evictions, and transparent communication between Metrolinx, the province, and the community. Though the motion was ultimately not passed, it reflected a growing alignment between grassroots demands and political advocacy, as well as increased recognition of the depth of harm done. Jill Andrews put it bluntly in a tweet:

"[Ontario Premier] Ford has overspent billions of taxpayer $s on a project with no end while our small biz (esp Eglinton West/Little Jamaica) and countless residents in #tostpauls have paid the price. All this while Ford cooes about his fantasy dig project under 401 🤢 #onpoli" - @JILLSLASTWORD via Twitter

Even as the LRT remained unfinished, political accountability became a central demand. On October 9, 2024, City Council passed *Motion MM22.20*, again led by Matlow and seconded by Councillor Mike Colle. This motion called on the province to investigate the Eglinton Crosstown project's persistent delays and cost overruns, as well as the mismanagement of its public-private partnerships. Community organizers had been pointing to these issues for years—this motion brought those critiques into the formal record, demonstrating how local resistance translated into institutional scrutiny. As Matlow wrote in a tweet announcing the motion:

"Torontonians deserve transparency and accountability from the province and Metrolinx. And for these vital transit projects to get done on time, and on budget. My motion coming to council calls for a public inquiry into the Eglinton Crosstown fiasco." - @JoshMatlow via Twitter

However, this period wasn't just about policy—it was about building the infrastructure to protect Little Jamaica's future. On April 27, 2024, Black Urbanism Toronto launched the Little Jamaica Community Land Trust (CLT). As a Black-led and Black-serving land trust, it was formed to secure commercial and residential space for long-time residents, protect cultural landmarks, and protect the neighbourhood from speculative redevelopment. This was a significant turning point: for the first time, community members Little Jamaica had a land-based mechanism to anchor their presence in a rapidly changing urban landscape. This move toward community-controlled land was supported by broad-based organizing. An Instagram reel on Black Urbanism Toronto's page announcing the launch of the community land trust shared powerful reflections from community members:

"We don't want to be exiled from Little Jamaica… ownership will prevent that," said Jason Macdonald, owner of Casual Hair Salon. Anyika Mark, Community Engagement Manager at Black Urbanism Toronto, added, *"Community ownership is a necessary part of building this Black ecosystem."* For Masani, owner of Studio M, "Owning properties on Eglinton means keeping our history alive."

Later that year, BUTO, Studio M, and Reclaim Rebuild Eg West co-hosted a Community Gathering focused on mapping local developments and exploring how a coordinated community benefits strategy could tie new infrastructure to long-term community needs. The event also

served as an open dialogue about how the land trust could reflect and be accountable to community priorities. These conversations reflected a maturing phase of resistance—one where power was actively being reconfigured at the ground level. The momentum continued into 2025 with the launch of the Little Jamaica Community Development Plan office hours. In March, CP Planning hosted a series of community office hours focused on dialogue and collaboration with local leaders and grassroots movements. These sessions created space to collectively imagine and strategize around key priorities for Little Jamaica: supporting collaboration between local leaders, protecting access to vital community spaces, expanding investment in affordable housing, and fostering inclusive economic development rooted in community wealth-building.

While policy and land-based victories marked critical gains, cultural preservation remained an equally important priority. As gentrification threatened to overwrite not only physical space but also the neighbourhood's cultural identity, preserving Little Jamaica's stories became an act of resistance. Events like the Little Jamaica Heritage Walking Tour in July 2022 and the Jane's Walk history tour in May 2025, co-led by Black Urbanism Toronto, transformed public space into an archive in motion. These tours connected stories of the past and present through lived experience and collective narration.

The Launch of the Little Jamaica Heritage Zine Project in January 2025 by Reclaim Rebuild Eg West, marked a powerful step in preserving and circulating community memory through print. Designed as accessible tools for political education and grassroots organizing, the zines were freely distributed online and in person throughout the neighbourhood. Each issue focused on a different facet of Little Jamaica's story—from a breakdown of what gentrification is and how it has impacted the area, to a comprehensive timeline detailing the disruptive effects

of Metrolinx construction. Other editions explored the history of Caribbean migration to Toronto and the roots of Little Jamaica, as well as the story of the Black Action Defence Committee and its pivotal role in shaping Black resistance in the city.

At the launch of the zines, I spoke as both the founder of Reclaim Rebuild Eg West and the author behind these publications:

"These zines were made to educate and empower our community. It's crucial that we understand our history and honor those who came before us. They are a vital part of Little Jamaica's story, Toronto's history, and Black history. More than that, these zines act as bridges between generations—introducing younger residents to the struggles and successes that shaped our community, while affirming to elders that their lived experiences, memories, and legacies are recognized and deeply valued."

By placing local knowledge at the centre of the narrative, the Heritage Zine Project transforms community storytelling into a powerful tool for collective consciousness and resistance.

Together, the cultural work of this period extended the resistance beyond protest and laid the groundwork for legacy. Whether through walking tours, food drives, cultural planning sessions, community members actively shaped the narrative of how Little Jamaica would be remembered and imagined. These acts preserved memory and culture while planting seeds for the future. They ensured that the stories of Little Jamaica would not be told by outsiders, filtered through institutional lenses, or reduced to footnotes in redevelopment plans. This was the community writing itself into history—on its own terms, in its own voice.

Continuing the Story Through the Archive

The analysis in this chapter has traced the arc of gentrification and resistance in Little Jamaica across three thematic phases. What emerges is not just a history of loss, but a powerful record of collective action, memory-work, and resistance. From the early impacts of the LRT construction to the formation of grassroots coalitions and citywide advocacy campaigns, the community's response has been marked by resilience, creativity, and deep-rooted care for one another and for the neighborhood itself. The story of Little Jamaica is not linear, it is a story still unfolding.

The timeline I created can be accessed online at reclaimrebuildegwest.com. The timeline is both a companion to and extension of this chapter. It functions as a living, interactive archive—a visual and narrative tool that allows readers to explore key events, campaigns, reports, and moments of community resistance in greater detail. Each entry is grounded in sources including community testimonies, social media artifacts, planning documents, and event flyers. As such, it invites readers to move beyond abstract policy language or static historical accounts, and instead engage with gentrification and resistance as lived, ongoing experiences. I encourage readers, researchers, and community members alike to explore the timeline not only as a research tool, but as a resource for organizing, memory-keeping, and imagining liberatory futures. Let it be used to remember what happened, to understand what's still happening, and to ask what might happen next.

Chapter Five: Conclusions – Resistance, Reflection and Responsibility

What does it mean to live through erasure and still choose to fight back? That question has guided this thesis from the beginning. Resistance is Our Heritage has documented the ways Little Jamaica has survived against the odds—displacement, racism, neglect, gentrification, cultural erasure—and offered not just a timeline of events, but a living archive of survival. Through stories, archival events, and lived experiences, this research has traced how the community has resisted, organized, and reimagined its future, even when the systems around it treated its disappearance as inevitable.

Conclusion

This thesis starts by grounding Little Jamaica's current struggles in the larger history of Black and Caribbean displacement—connecting what's happening now to what's happened before in other Black communities. From there, I broke down how gentrification functions as a racialized process, using the lens of racial capitalism to show how Black communities are consistently targeted for removal and exploitation. Methodologically, I used Black archival practice to build out a timeline of resistance—drawing from ephemera, events, and news articles to show how people have fought back. The analysis focused on three phases of resistance: Displacement & Disruption, Organization & Mobilization, and Institutionalization & Legacy—each one capturing a different moment in how this community has responded over time. With this foundation established, the upcoming section tackles each research question to illuminate the complexities of resistance in Little Jamaica.

Research Question 1: How have Little Jamaica residents responded to economic shifts associated with gentrification, and what forms of resistance have emerged in relation to these changes over time?

Residents responded to economic shifts—especially those linked to the LRT construction and the broader speculative housing market—with both immediate and long-term strategies of resistance. These responses included protesting commercial displacement and the mismanagement of the Metrolinx LRT project, petitions for rent relief, and public testimonies calling out municipal neglect. Over time, actions evolved into formal community consultations, mutual aid campaigns, and formal reports that laid out policy alternatives. The resistance deepened in complexity and reach as economic pressures intensified, showing that while the tactics changed, the determination to stay and fight never wavered. The timeline documents a clear shift from reactive to proactive forms of resistance, often led by younger residents and community groups that emphasized economic self-determination, anti-displacement tools, and legacy-building.

Reaearch Question 2: How do resistance efforts in Little Jamaica reflect and reinforce Black cultural identity, belonging, and claims to place?

Resistance efforts in Little Jamaica have consistently drawn strength from Black cultural identity and the community's deep historical ties to the neighborhood. Residents have resisted gentrification not only by defending physical space, but by protecting the social networks, cultural practices, and community institutions that foster a sense of belonging. Actions such as preserving Black-owned businesses, celebrating Caribbean food, music, and language, and creating public art have functioned not just as acts of survival, but as declarations of presence and belonging. These expressions reinforce a shared narrative that Little Jamaica is more than a geographic location—it is a cultural home shaped by generations of Black life. As development pressures intensified, cultural resistance became increasingly intentional, used to assert local

memory, challenge erasure, and claim space. Rather than merely reflecting identity, these efforts have actively sustained and reproduced it, positioning culture as a form of political resistance deeply grounded in place.

Research Question 3: In what ways are residents, organizers, and community groups collectively resisting gentrification, and how have these strategies shifted over time in response to state, market, and development pressures?

As gentrification pressures intensified in Little Jamaica, collective resistance efforts became more creative, coordinated, and forward-thinking. Early resistance focused on making noise—through petitions, protests, and media attention—but over time, residents and community groups began organizing with a longer view. The reality of displacement became increasingly visible and personal, as more neighbors were forced out and long-standing businesses were lost. This growing urgency deepened the seriousness of resistance, prompting organizers to think beyond immediate survival toward building a lasting legacy that protects Black presence and culture in the neighborhood. Strategies evolved to include visioning sessions, community land trusts, tenant consultations, mutual aid networks, and cultural archiving projects. These efforts asserted not only the right to remain but the right to shape the future of Little Jamaica on residents' own terms. This shift reflects a deeper understanding that gentrification is not just an economic threat, but a political and cultural one—and that effective resistance must be flexible, multi-dimensional, and rooted in collective care and vision. Ultimately, this evolution marks a powerful transition in Little Jamaica's fight—from protecting what remains to actively creating the foundation for a thriving, self-determined community future.

Having outlined focused answers to each of the research questions, we can now step back and consider what these findings collectively reveal about the ongoing struggle in Little Jamaica. The community's resistance is not just a series of isolated actions, but part of a broader, evolving

movement deeply rooted in history, culture, and hope. What follows is a reflection on how these pieces fit together to reshape our understanding of gentrification and resistance in this unique context, and why this story matters—not only for Little Jamaica but for similarly impacted communities elsewhere.

What Have We Learned?

The resistance strategies in Little Jamaica emerged in response to economic displacement, transit-oriented development, and long-standing municipal neglect. As shown in the timeline, early markers of gentrification and displacement sparked public resistance in the form of petitions, protests, and oral testimonies. Over time, these evolved into more formalized actions such as public reports, policy advocacy, social media campaigns, cultural events, and grassroots coalitions. This shows that resistance has been sustained, and that it has transformed in direct response to shifting pressures from the city and market—particularly during key disruptions like the Metrolinx LRT construction. We've also learned that gentrification—especially in the case of Little Jamaica—is not accidental. It is the outcome of coordinated neglect, mismanagement, and targeted development strategies that have displaced Black residents and businesses in the name of progress. The residents, business owners, and organizers have done everything they can to preserve Little Jamaica. Through community organizing, cultural preservation, digital storytelling, advocacy reports, and direct action, Little Jamaica has fought back.

These findings also reinforce RQ2, highlighting how resistance is deeply rooted in Black cultural identity and community belonging. As the timeline illustrates, cultural events such as farmers markets, walking tours, and public memory campaigns - served not only as resistance tactics but also as claims to place—reaffirming that Black presence is integral to the character of

Eglinton West. These acts reflect a refusal to be erased and a reassertion of Little Jamaica as a site of heritage, not just history. Documenting and archiving this resistance matters. It proves that there has been a focused, sustained movement rooted in care, culture, and collective memory. This thesis has helped map that movement, grounding it in both contemporary action and the long historical continuum of Black displacement and resistance.

This work also shifts the narrative of gentrification and resistance in Little Jamaica. For years, the efforts of the neighborhood's residents have gone unnoticed in mainstream discourse. These stories rarely made the news, and unless you were part of the neighborhood—or paying very close attention—you probably didn't even know they were happening. Now, there is a complete and accessible timeline, a record, and an in-depth analysis that connects the dots and calls things what they are. It gives people something to reference, something to build on, something to feel seen in. This research will hopefully serve as both inspiration and strategy – a blueprint, a bridge, or a starting point for connection and collective organizing.

Why This Research Matters

This research matters because there are too many examples of gentrified Black neighborhoods being quietly erased under the guise of renewal and revitalization. It matters because the people who suffer most from displacement are often excluded from the conversations that decide their futures. It matters because cultural heritage is too often celebrated only after it's gone. But perhaps most importantly, it matters because Little Jamaica is still here, and this thesis refuses to act like it's gone already. By documenting resistance in its many forms—from rallies to reports, digital posts to cultural festivals—this thesis responds directly to RQ2, showing how Black residents and organizers have used memory, creativity, and collective

care as tools of survival. In doing so, they've refused the narrative of inevitable loss. These resistance efforts do more than preserve the past; they imagine and assert a future where Black presence is not only remembered but prioritized. As a researcher and resident, this work has been about more than observation. It has been an act of participation, of responsibility, of love. It has meant using every available tool—writing, archiving, organizing—to contribute to the fight against gentrification, and to help tell this story as a community member, with the care, context, and respect it deserves.

Next Steps

The answers aren't simple. For those of us still in Little Jamaica, the question is: how do we support what remains while also caring for those who've already been displaced? It also means asking, honestly, what more we can do. Previous generations—our parents, our elders—came to this country with nothing. They built this neighborhood from the ground up. They worked brutal jobs, navigated racist systems, and raised us in a community that felt like home. Now that many of us have education, jobs, networks, and platforms—it's our turn to use our time and resources to preserve the same community that raised us.

While the timeline makes clear that much has already been accomplished—from community consultations to political motions to cultural recognition—there is still significant work ahead. Political pressure must continue to demand justice and accountability. Stronger intergenerational collaboration is essential—we need to bridge the gaps between elders and youth so that everyone is aligned, moving in solidarity. We must also go beyond symbolic support for youth organizers by investing in them directly: with funding, infrastructure, and space to lead. These reflections circle back to RQ3, showing that the work of resistance is

ongoing, and that collective strategies must remain adaptable in the face of gentrification. Nowhere is this more urgent than in the case of the Metrolinx LRT project, a development whose consequences have yet to fully unfold. In the coming months and years, more revelations about corruption, mismanagement, and harm are likely to emerge. These injustices must not be swept under the rug. Displacement in Little Jamaica is not an unfortunate side effect—it is the predictable outcome of a development model driven by capital, not care.

To imagine meaningful next steps, we must also confront a deeper, often-avoided truth: one of the fundamental flaws in many gentrification resistance efforts is the failure to name gentrification for what it is—an extension of colonialism. Gentrification is not simply about markets or housing, it is a modern form of imperial land theft and forced displacement, continuing patterns that stretch back centuries (Kent-Stoll, 2020). Truly resisting gentrification requires centering decolonization. That means recognizing that we, as settlers, are living on stolen Indigenous land. As Kern (2022) reminds us, we must decenter Western worldviews and radically rethink our relationship to land and property. Our dominant frameworks rooted in white, colonial, and Eurocentric systems of knowledge don't just shape how gentrification happens; they shape how we interpret, discuss, and attempt to resist it (Rucks-Ahidiana, 2021). If we fail to challenge these foundations, resistance efforts risk perpetuating the same structures they seek to dismantle (Kern, 2022). In Little Jamaica, this means pushing beyond policy reform or cultural preservation alone. It requires us to imagine what land reclamation could look like—not just in terms of ownership, but in how we relate to place, memory, and responsibility. It means building deeper intergenerational ties and empowering our youth organizers to carry the work forward with care. It also means staying alert. The full story of the gentrification of Little

Jamaica is not complete. As more comes to light we must be organized and unwilling to let these wrongs be buried or forgotten.

Regardless of what happens in Little Jamaica moving forward, I want this research to stand as a record of this moment—of the tireless efforts by so many to reclaim a neighborhood that I grew up in and love deeply. This neighborhood is special. There's so much history, beauty, and meaning rooted here. This is archival work—for the elders who built this community, for those of us who were raised in it, and for the future generations who will carry it forward. When I think about the organizing that's taken place, I see it as history in the making. The people resisting gentrification, fighting for land, culture, and respect—they are history-makers. Through this research, I'm doing my part to honour that legacy, to help write Little Jamaica's resistance into the historical record, where it belongs.

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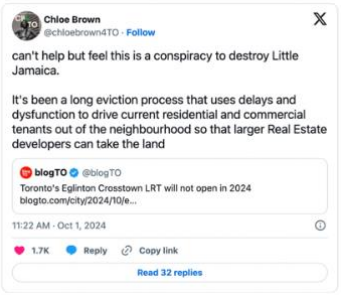
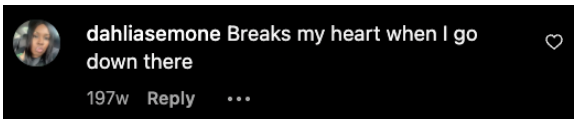
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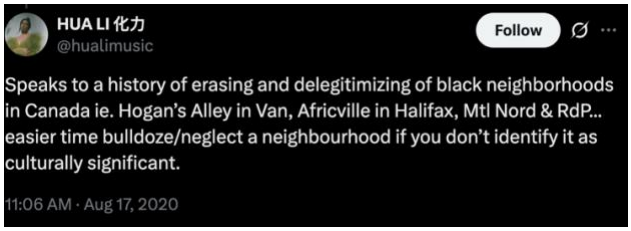
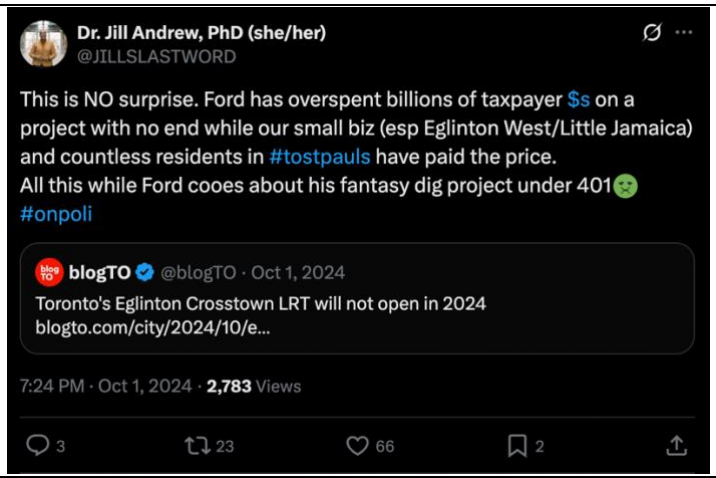
Appendix A: Quotes from Chapter 4 – Thematic Analysis of Resistance in Little Jamaica

Theme	Data Type	Quote	Source	Visual/Digital Artifact
Theme 1: Displacement and Disruption	Interview/ News article	"We have construction projects all over the city... We as a city don't offer compensation on any major projects and never really have."	Josh Colle, City Councillor – via CBC News	**Too many construction projects to offer compensation** Both the city and Metrolinx say financial compensation isn't an option. "We have construction projects all over the city," said Josh Colle, the area's councillor and the TTC chair. "We as a city don't offer compensation on any major projects and never really have." Metrolinx spokesperson Jamie Robinson says there are other ways the company wants to help ease the burden of barricades and disruptions due to construction. "We work very closely with local councillors, city staff and police to understand the impacts of our construction and to mitigate those wherever possible."
	Interview/ News article	"About 50 businesses in the neighborhood have closed their doors since the start of construction."	Nick Alampi, York-Eglinton BIA – via CBC News	**BIA estimates 50 businesses have closed** Nick Alampi, the chair of the York-Eglinton Business Improvement Area, says out of the 200 or so businesses registered with the BIA, about 50 have closed. "We need transit in this area. But we're struggling to attract people and [shopkeepers] are asking: 'Can we maintain the rent moving forward,'" said Alampi.
	Interview / News Article	"I think they should compensate us… There's a barricade in front of my store… We depend on foot traffic and right now that's been eliminated."	Jason Macdonald, Casual Hair Salon – via CBC News	Jason McDonald says he doesn't know if his store, Casual Beauty Salon, will make it four more years to see the positive effects of transit in the area. McDonald's store is right at the corner of the barricade, where the sidewalk ends. "I think they should compensate us, it would be a good gesture," said McDonald. "There's a barricade in front of my store ... We depend on foot traffic and right now that's been eliminated."  Jason McDonald cuts his client's hair. He says business has fallen nearly 50 per cent since construction began for the Eglinton Crosstown LRT. (Natalie Nanowski/CBC)

Theme	Data Type	Quote	Source	Visual/Digital Artifact
	Social media post	"Can't help but feel this is a conspiracy to destroy Little Jamaica… larger Real Estate developers can take the land."	Chloe Brown (@Chloebrown4TO) – via Twitter	
Theme 2: Organization and Mobilization	Instagram Comment	"It's impossible to drive through there anymore... destroy every bit of culture that this city was built on."	@Derekbpratt - via Reclaim Rebuild Eg West's "Metrolinx & Gentrification in Little Jamaica" digital infographic	
	Social media post	"Breaks my heart when I go down there."	@Dahliasemone – via Reclaim Rebuild Eg West's "Metrolinx & Gentrification in Little Jamaica" digital infographic	
	Rally Speech	"We are at a critical point… City staff are listening, councillors are listening…"	Romain Baker, BUTO – via @ReclaimRebuildEgWest Instagram Story	

Theme	Data Type	Quote	Source	Visual/Digital Artifact
	Rally speech	"At the brunt of COVID-19… direct money into the hands of these small businesses… Their time is up."	Jill Andrews, MPP – via @ReclaimRebuildEgWest Instagram Story	
	GoFundMe post	"I'm proud of my community and want to see the Eglinton West area rejuvenated and supported."	Judith Adams	**Judith Adams** $100 · 5 yrs I'm proud of my community and want to see the Eglinton West area rejuvenated and supported.
	GoFundMe post	"Small, independently owned businesses should be treated as the lifelines of a community."	Leyla Goka	**Leyla Goka** $20 · 5 yrs small, independently owned businesses should be treated are the lifelines of a community
	GoFundMe post	"Canadians need to stop being smug... acknowledge, challenge & dismantle racism..."	Andrea Regimbal	**Andrea Regimbal** $50 · 4 yrs Canadians need to stop being smug about how we're "not as bad as the States" & focus on the necessary work of acknowledging, challenging & dismantling racism in our own country

Theme	Data Type	Quote	Source	Visual/Digital Artifact
	Testimonial (grant)	"With the help and support of the Black Business Grant... I truly appreciate the assistance..."	Lusan, Fresh Cut Juice Bar – via @ReclaimRebuildEg West	
	Testimonial (grant)	"Trejah Isle is grateful for the financial support... I truly believe it is a great step..."	Chozen, Trejah Isle Records -via @ReclaimRebuildegWest	
Theme 3: Institutionalization and Legacy	Social media post	"The @cityoftoronto wants to make Little Jamaica Toronto's first 'cultural district'... there's no definition or foundation..."	Danica Samuel (@DanicaSamuel) via Twitter	

Theme	Data Type	Quote	Source	Visual/Digital Artifact
	Social media post	"Speaks to a history of erasing and delegitimizing Black neighborhoods in Canada..."	@HualiMusic via Twitter	
	Social media post	"If you look at a map of Toronto... But you won't see the words Little Jamaica..."	@CadenceWeapon via Twitter	
	Social media post	"Toronto spending millions to rename Dundas Street but... undecided on officially naming Little Jamaica..."	@Beequammie via Twitter	
	Social media post	"Ford has overspent billions... our small biz and countless residents... have paid the price."	Jill Andrews (@JILLSLASTWORD) via Twitter	

Theme	Data Type	Quote	Source	Visual/Digital Artifact
	Social media post	"Torontonians deserve transparency and accountability... My motion calls for a public inquiry..."	Josh Matlow (@JoshMatlow) via Twitter	
	Interview / Reel	"We don't want to be exiled from Little Jamaica… ownership will prevent that."	Jason Macdonald, Casual Hair Salon Via @BlackUrbanismTO Instagram Reel	
	Interview / Event clip	"Community ownership is a necessary part of building this Black ecosystem."	Anyika Mark, BUTO Via @BlackUrbanismTO Instagram Reel	
	Interview / Feature	"Owning properties on Eglinton means keeping our history alive."	Masani, Studio M Via @BlackUrbanismTO Instagram Reel	

Theme	Data Type	Quote	Source	Visual/Digital Artifact
	Testimonial	"These zines were made to educate and empower our community… vital part of Little Jamaica's story."	Marcus Pereira, RREW Via @ReclaimRebuildEgWest Instagram Story	