

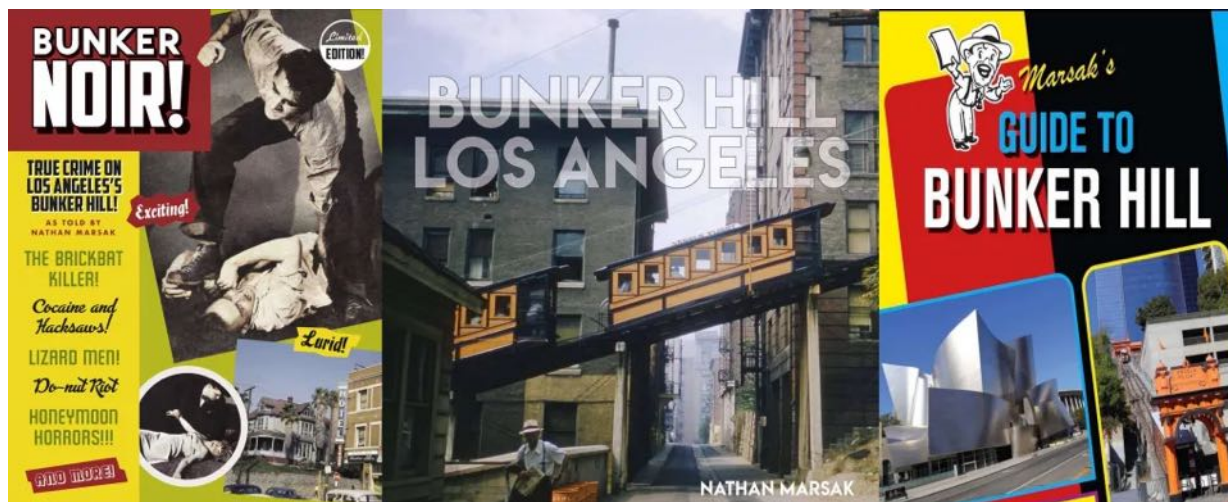
Communication from Public

Name:

Date Submitted: 06/06/2023 06:07 PM

Council File No: 23-0468

Comments for Public Posting: Submitting blog post for the record



Bunker Hill, Los Angeles

Cooper Donuts...AGAIN

So, there's much movement afoot regarding Cooper Donuts, and as I have covered that topic at length (**this** then **this** then **this**), it seems only fitting we dive back in, with these two things:

1. The City of Los Angeles is voting tomorrow to name Second and Main "Cooper Donut/Nancy Valverde Square," and 2. there was **a piece in the New York Times yesterday** about the whole business. Let's look at both!

The idea of naming the square dates back to December 2021. That's when it was **only supposed to be Cooper Donuts Square**. The contention being, that the Cooper Donuts at 215 South Main was the location of the famed 1959 uprising, the “first known instance” of “significant rebellion”.

However, as I have pointed out before, that is absolutely impossible, for two very good and simple reasons. You will recall, there is but a single, lone account of the riot—the one from John Rechy. Rechy stated, in no uncertain terms, that it happened in the spring of 1958...or spring of 1959. But as City building records conclusively prove (borne out by phone books and City directories), there was no Cooper Do-nuts at 215 South Main during *either* of those times. And, reason number two, Rechy's lone account (and thus that which constitutes the whole of canon on the matter) of the riot clearly states it happened in the 500 block of Main.

What's galling is that now people are falsifying history to an even greater extent. For example, Wikipedia. Someone went in to **the Cooper Riot page** and changed it to be about 215 South Main.

== Riots ==	== Riots ==
<p>Cooper Do-nuts was a café on [[Main Street (Los Angeles) Main Street]] in downtown Los Angeles' [[Skid Row, Los Angeles Skid Row]] neighborhood. Located between two gay bars – Harold's and The Waldorf – and open all night, it was a popular hangout for gay people, and welcomed them.<ref name="History">{{cite book last1=Faderman first1=Lillian</p>	<p>Cooper Do-nuts was a café at 215 South [[Main Street (Los Angeles) Main Street]] in downtown Los Angeles' [[Skid Row, Los Angeles Skid Row]] neighborhood. Located between two gay bars – Harold's and The Waldorf – and open all night, it was a popular hangout for gay people, and welcomed them.<ref name="History">{{cite book last1=Faderman first1=Lillian</p>
<p>in downtown Los Angeles' [[Skid Row, Los Angeles Skid Row]] neighborhood. Located between two gay bars – Harold's and The Waldorf – and open all night, it was a popular hangout for gay people, and welcomed them.<ref name="History">{{cite</p>	<p>in downtown Los Angeles' [[Skid Row, Los Angeles Skid Row]] neighborhood. Located between two gay bars–Harold's, at 555 South Main Street, and The Waldorf, at 521 South Main Street–and open all night, it was a popular hangout for gay people, and</p>
<p>Cooper Do-nuts was a café at 215 South [[Main Street (Los Angeles) Main Street]] in downtown Los Angeles' [[Skid Row, Los Angeles Skid Row]] neighborhood. Located between two gay bars–Harold's, at 555 South Main Street, and The Waldorf, at 521</p>	<p>Cooper Do-nuts was a café at 215 South [[Main Street (Los Angeles) Main Street]] in downtown Los Angeles' [[Skid Row, Los Angeles Skid Row]] neighborhood. Located near two gay bars–Harold's, at 555 South Main Street, and The Waldorf, at 521 South</p>

So what our deceitful Wiki-editor did—over the course of ten minutes last April 21st—was add in the fairytale address, then realized it now wasn't between Harold's and the Waldorf (as had been stated in the only account of the event literally ever) and thus weakly reworded it to say it was “near” these bars. Three blocks away.

But *look!* you say. It must be true because there are *footnotes!*

Riots [\[edit\]](#)

Cooper Do-nuts was a café at 215 South [Main Street](#) in downtown Los Angeles' [Skid Row](#) neighborhood. Located near two gay bars —Harold's, at 555 South Main Street, and The Waldorf, at 521 South Main Street—and open all night, it was a popular hangout for gay people, and welcomed them.^{[7][8][5]} One evening in May 1959, two police officers entered the cafe and asked for IDs from several patrons, a typical form of harassment. The officers attempted to arrest two drag queens, two male sex workers, and a young man [cruising](#) for a date.^[9] One person they attempted to arrest was

Yeah, no surprise, none of those footnotes actually say *anything* about 215 South Main. Because no-one even deigned to entertain such fabricated notions until a few weeks ago, when some people got hot to pass a motion through City Council.

Ok, so we're all on board that there was no riot there (or in any Cooper's since the only witness/lone teller of the tale has said it wasn't at a Cooper's). Ergo, the focus has shifted—yes the riot is a myth, but no matter, *now what's important* is that Jack Evans, who ran Cooper's, was an ally, and that Cooper's should be recognized as “being the sole safe place for all LGBTQIA+ persons regardless of gender expression” (as stated in the [Community Impact Statement](#), link [here](#))—though we'll ignore the fact that Cooper's at Second and Main was across from the Archdiocese and the Union Rescue Mission, inarguably a tough area for out trans people in the 1950s, who would be more welcome in establishments a few blocks south...which is why Rechy decided to place the story on Main down by Sixth Street in the first place. (I should mention that the nomination still, of course, contends “The first recorded instance in the LGBTQIA+ community of gender-transgressive persons resisting arbitrary police arrest occurred at Cooper's Do-nuts at 215 S. Main Street in Downtown LA in 1959” which its Government Author certainly knows to be an egregious falsehood.)

We are told the nomination is important because Cooper Donuts was a “safe haven.” I believe Jack Evans didn't turn away customers if they had money. That doesn't make him an *ally*, that makes him a *capitalist*. Nevertheless, this guy—



—Jack Chester Evans, a middle-aged (b. 1907) white man from Lorenz, Iowa, we are told by the family, was an ally. Not that there weren't allies back in the day, but they're usually progressive Jewish lawyers, not *this* guy.

Apparently, there's some deep and affecting story there about how and why Jack and his wife, Colorado-born Marge, were America's most unlikely allies during the days of the Boise Panic and the blacklisting of Frank Kameny. Seriously, *what* formative moment occurred in Jack's life to make him an ally of unparalleled bravery? We want to know!

Recently, when the nominators of Cooper Donuts Square realized the whole Cooper story was pretty thin, they tied Nancy Valverde to it. Nancy is frequently mentioned as "proof" the riot happened, though it wasn't until 2019, when asked about the

subject by *Los Angeles Magazine*, she suddenly recalled that sixty years ago, she had heard second hand that something had happened somewhere. No matter; what is important, we're told, is that she went to barber school near to the Cooper Donuts, had short hair and wore men's clothes, and was welcome at Cooper's (where she was particularly fond of the glazed donuts).

Now, I have no problem with a Nancy Valverde square, given as she is a famed activist and was trailblazing as an out lesbian in 1950s Los Angeles. But Second and Main? Really? Consider:

We are told in the City's Community Impact Statement she went to Moler Barber School on Main near Third Street. That said, **according to the Los Angeles LGBT Center**, Valverde actually *didn't* go to barber school: "getting her barbers license was an uphill battle, similar to the rest of her life. She was unable to go to barbers school because she didn't finish school. However, one day, a man came up to her and told her that if she passes an IQ test, she could get her barbers license. After a lot of hard work, she passed her IQ test and became a barber."

Also, she was arrested repeatedly for being butch. (And yet, she was accepted at Cooper's!) "Valverde liked to look dapper when she was young. She purchased men's slacks and button down shirts and got them tailored to fit her slender frame (**from here**)." I find it a little odd she was arrested repeatedly for just that, in that there was a fad for 1950s women looking boyish in general. Anyone with even the most rudimentary knowledge of women's fashion, knows that post-1947 Bold Look into the 1950s, even the most vanilla housewife began wearing trousers with button-down shirts, and cutting their hair short; pixie cuts (and the less severe "Italian Cut") were all the rage, e.g. Shirley MacLaine and Audrey Hepburn during the time—up to including my own mother who, 22yo in 1959, had short hair and dressed quite boyish, as was distinctly à la mode.

Point being, Valverde would have been accepted at Cooper's because...why not? Women looking like boys was pretty common, but what Rechy specifically calls out is that boys in tight capris and midriff shirts were the picked-upon donut patrons: it would have been a *lot* easier for Valverde-in-trousers to go fetch herself a donut, rather than some transgressive boys, especially at a Cooper's directly across from St. Vibiana's and the Rescue Mission.

And yet Valverde was arrested repeatedly under LA's arcane 1898 anti-masquerading law, Ordinance 5022...before she and her attorney overturned that law in court! But what raises an eyebrow is there's never any evidence of when or how this happened. What date? What court? What judge? This would be a matter of public record down at City Archives, but I've got enough to do without going down to Piper Tech to find out. Someone please write me and give me the details, because I'd really like to know. I mean, for example, **here it states she overturned the law in 1951**. And yet, **here it states she overturned the law in 1959**. Well? (Protip: she was in fact never

arrested under, and neither challenged nor overturned, anything called “Ordinance 5022,” despite what the City’s nomination states; 5022 didn’t exist after 1936, having been renamed Municipal Code 51.52.)

As I’ve said, I’m all for recognizing Valverde, but she didn’t spend much time at Second and Main, when she (perhaps) went to barber college at Third and Main. It seems like the Law Library, or more to the point, her barber shop on Brooklyn Avenue where she was hassled by LAPD, would be more deserving of a plaque.

Nevertheless, despite all this, when City Council votes to name Second and Main “Cooper Do-nuts/Nancy Valverde Square” on Wednesday, I have NO doubt it will be passed unanimously (just as it was passed unanimously by the Board of Public Works a few days ago). Despite conclusive proof there was no Cooper’s remotely near that corner during the time of the claimed uprising, atop the fact that the only witness said it didn’t happen there anyway; despite reasonable doubt that Cooper’s was “the sole safe place for all LGBTQIA+ persons regardless of gender expression” (Jack Evans an ally? And besides, we do have evidence of **what Cooper patrons looked like in 1959, and I’m not seeing a lot of midriffs and capris**); and man, this whole newly-tacked-on Nancy Valverde bit is kind of just “well, we have to put a Nancy Valverde plaque *somewhere*, this location is as good as any, I guess.”

II.

As I mentioned above, there’s an article in yesterday’s *New York Times* about Cooper Donuts. I’m in there! There’s not much I really need to add, that isn’t covered in the above.

Welllll, except it seems there’s always *one more* piece of information that requires commenting upon...like some bizarre whack-a-mole of “alternative facts.” See near the end of the *NYT* piece, where it mentions there was a Cooper Donuts at 243 East Fifth? And then links to Cooper Donuts **Instagram post**?



 originalcooperdonuts • Follow
Los Angeles, California

 originalcooperdonuts Today we remember the historic Cooper Donuts location at 243 E Fifth St, Los Angeles, CA. This site was a place of refuge for the LGBTQ community, and a symbol of resistance against police brutality and oppression. #CooperDonuts #LosAngelesHistory #LGBTpride #LGBTsupporter #LGBTHistory #LGBTrights #EqualityForAll
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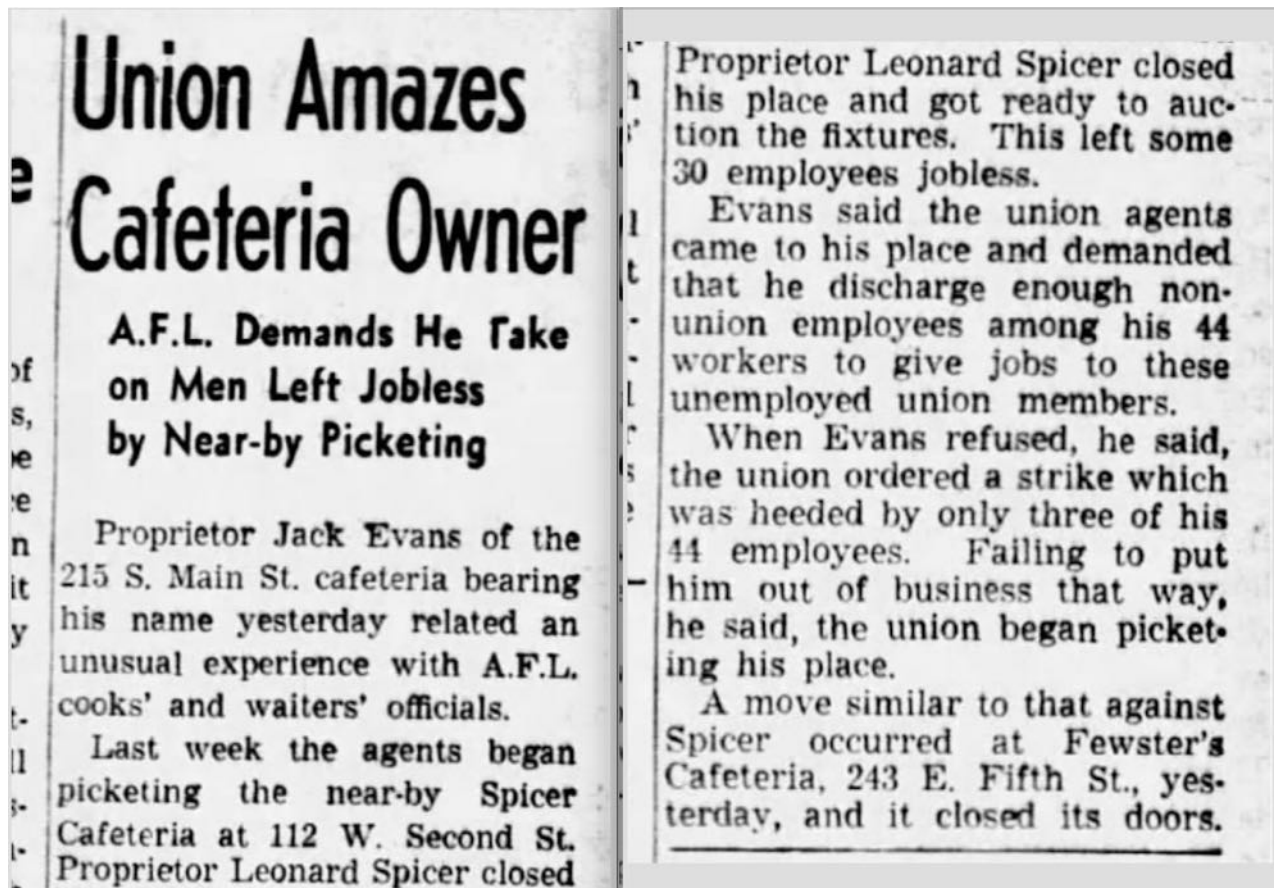
 neena_raj777 Send me pic 📷
@magazine_of_california 🇺🇸
6d Reply

7 likes
6 DAYS AGO

So, there was an Evans Cafeteria (it was never a Cooper’s Donut) at 243 East Fifth, and it was only there briefly. 243 became an Evans Cafeteria in 1953, and remained so for three years until that location went out of business in mid-1956 (the space thereafter became a bar called the Pioneer Cafe). “This site was a place of refuge for the LGBTQ community, and a symbol of resistance against police brutality and oppression.” Um, *what?* How?

On a related note, here’s an interesting tidbit: we’re supposed to believe anything Jack Evans touched equals #LGBTsupporter and #LGBTrights because he was a trailblazing ally (again, we have to take the family’s word on *that*), but we can say *this* with certainty, he sure didn’t care much for unions and union workers!



Los Angeles Times, 4 December 1941

It mentions his Evans Cafeteria at 215 and, note final sentence, the associated address of aforementioned 243 East Fifth, i.e. Fewster's "Picketed by the AFL" Cafeteria, before its three-year stint as an Evans Cafeteria. Fewster's is *also* associated with Jack Evans: Fewster's Cafeteria was the establishment of Louis Dufferin Fewster, Jack Evans' brother-in-law, which is how Jack took over the lease in 1953.

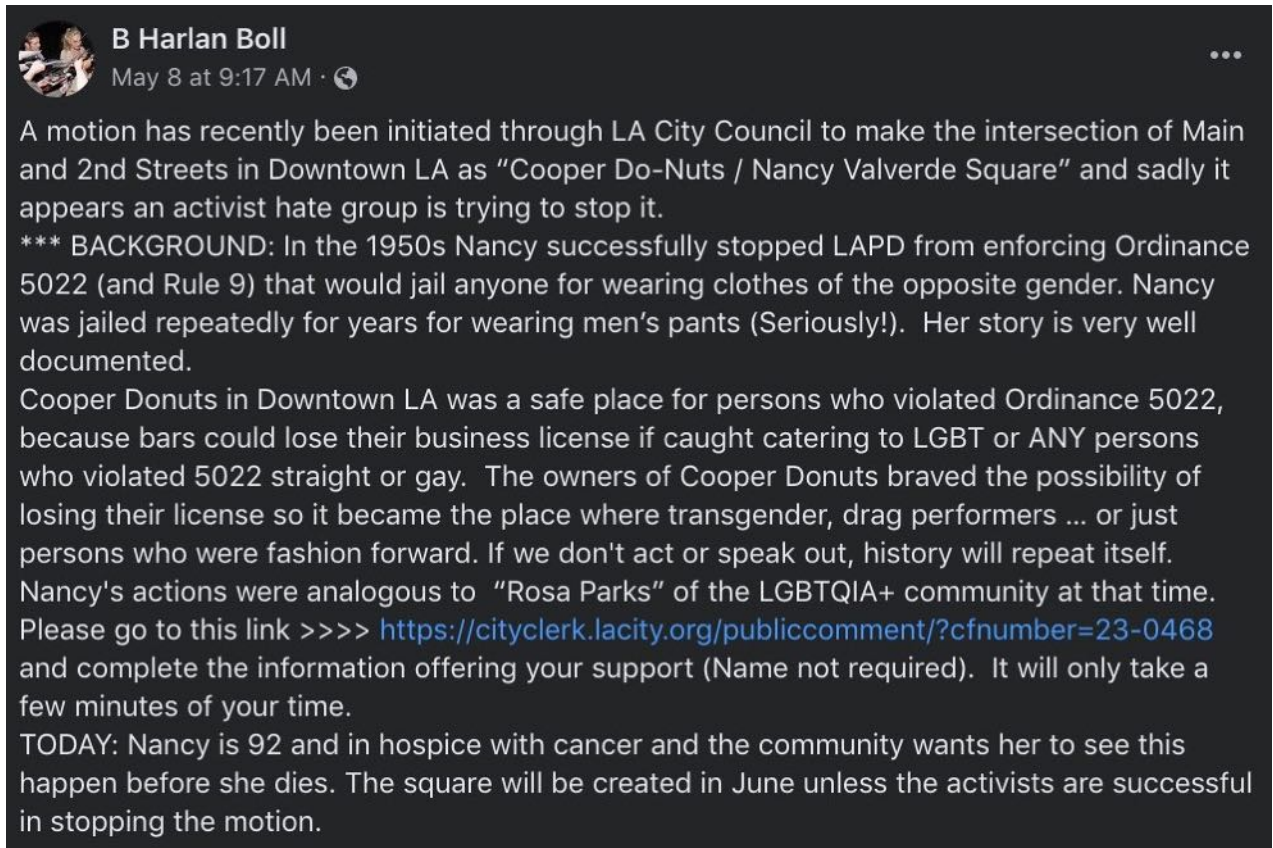
III.

While I have you here, let's address the elephant in the room. You know, where you say "why is this Marsak guy being such a JERK?" Look, it's not *my* fault people are altering Wikipedia with lies and I have call them out on it. Seriously, I don't *want* to be the guy righting repeated falsehoods all the time; I did it two years ago with one blog post (because it was related to Bunker Hill), pointing out the impossibility of the tale, and other people keep doubling down to insist it's true, so the thing keeps snowballing.

In yesterday's *New York Times* piece Rechy states he was was weary of the "baffling hostility that has persisted" around his account, calling it "undeserved, incorrect, malicious, infuriating and, yes, saddening." Really? I've no doubt you're infuriated and saddened, but, the only account that's incorrect is yours, sir. Simply searching for

objective reality, utilizing empirical over anecdotal evidence, and relying on discoverable facts about this tale is assuredly not undeserved, and there has been—anyone and everyone will admit—nothing malicious or hostile about it.

Apparently, though, doing research is HATE. Let's look at some other typical reactions to my having poked at the story:



Note in the first sentence: should you question the establishment narrative, you are part of an "activist hate group." So, said activist hate group consists altogether of me, which is kinda rich (since as a short Jewish tweedy historian I don't exactly come off as a skinhead or whatever), and my pals Kim & Richard of Esotouric, whose politics are ultra-progressive Left (and who I might add have a **upcoming tour about Gay downtown LA**). Plus no one has in any way tried to "stop" the nomination or monument process. My job as a historian is digging up the truth; what *you* do with the truth is your business. That you choose to ignore, or worse, deny it, is rather telling.

Another typical comment:

Communication from Public

Name: Paul Zappia
Date Submitted: 05/21/2023 04:34 PM
Council File No: 23-0468
Comments for Public Posting: Hello! Thank you so much for your time in reading my comments. I am writing here to wholeheartedly endorse the motion to memorialize Cooper Do-nuts as a piece of Los Angeles LGBT+ history. Los Angeles is full of LGBT+ history and in many cases, Queer Angelenos have lead the country in fighting for LGBT+ rights and standing up against marginalization and police brutality. Cooper Donuts was a pivotal moment in the LGBT+ rights movement and took place an entire decade *before* the Stonewall riots in New York City. The least we can do as a city is begin to acknowledge the depth of history and sacrifice that exists in Los Angeles. We should be proud that Main Street, like other locations such as the Black Cat in Silver Lake, was the site of such an act of courage. Some armchair historians have claimed that the Cooper Donuts couldn't have taken place, but we have multiple accounts of people, like Nancy Valverde, who know of the riots and serve as proof that such an action did occur. Let's do the right thing as a city and memorialize both Nancy Valverde and Cooper Donuts. Thank you.

Note the bit “Some armchair historians have claimed that the Cooper Donuts couldn’t have taken place, but we have multiple accounts of people, like Nancy Valverde, who know of the riots and serve as proof that such an action did occur.” First of all, “armchair historian” is pretty funny, since I’m literally a historian, and have never been anything else (resulting in **far too many phonebooks**). But whatever, more importantly, when Mr. Zappia states regarding Cooper Donuts “we have multiple accounts of people, like Nancy Valverde, who know of the riots and serve as proof that such an action did occur” I would counter (and I hate to sound like a broken record, but) *no*, you *don’t* have multiple accounts, you have *zero* accounts: there was a) Rechy, lone and sole witness who told the (impossible/improbable for so many reasons) tale 45 years after its alleged occurrence and who then flatly stated “there was no riot at Cooper’s”; and b) Valverde, who *wasn’t there*, but sixty years after it purportedly happened and was pressed on the matter, at which point remembered she’d heard second-hand that something had happened, with no mention of Cooper’s. Those are, strictly speaking, the opposite of “proof.”

IV.

I love two things: history, and downtown LA. People are running about abusing both,

so it's only natural I'd try and right those wrongs. If *I'm* the one who's wrong, well, no-one has even made so much as a single effort to refute my claims. Rather, they want to say that I "hate" because they *feel* like I *should* be wrong. But the fact is, history matters, and when you build it upon a specious, spurious foundation, it makes the whole thing stink.

Some stories don't stink. Why not, for example, monument the site of **Blanchard Hall, which is *actually* documented**? What about the **Crenshaw Women's Center**? Well the City is super hot to tear it down, so they're tearing it down.

What about the two sites associated with gay civil rights activist Morris Kight? **1822 West Fourth**, for example, would be a great monument, except developer-lovin' YIMBY Councilmember Eunisses Hernandez is especially active in the fight to TEAR IT DOWN. Kight's **McCadden address** might have a chance, though. Unfortunately for *it*, it doesn't have the sex appeal of men dancing and singing in the street and making hardened Parker-era cops flee in terror.

Again, I am quite certain the motion will pass through Council tomorrow and the corner will be our newest monument. What's troubling—besides our society's wanton *general* disregard for truth—is that *this* monument will forever have the stain of falsehood upon it. All the good intentions in the world do not make confirmation bias, and an ad nauseam repetition of fake news, into reality. And then calling critical thinking and fact checking "hate" is an ugly way to shut down those who question the dominant narrative.

But, now it's a monument, and you, having read this post, know the truth. Accuracy and fact being as useful as a chocolate teapot in this town, so, enjoy your new monument not to truth, but to truthiness.



 **Nathan Marsak**  **June 6, 2023**  **Uncategorized**

One thought on "Cooper Donuts...AGAIN"

Pingback: **We Need to Talk About Cooper Do-Nuts – Bunker Hill, Los Angeles**

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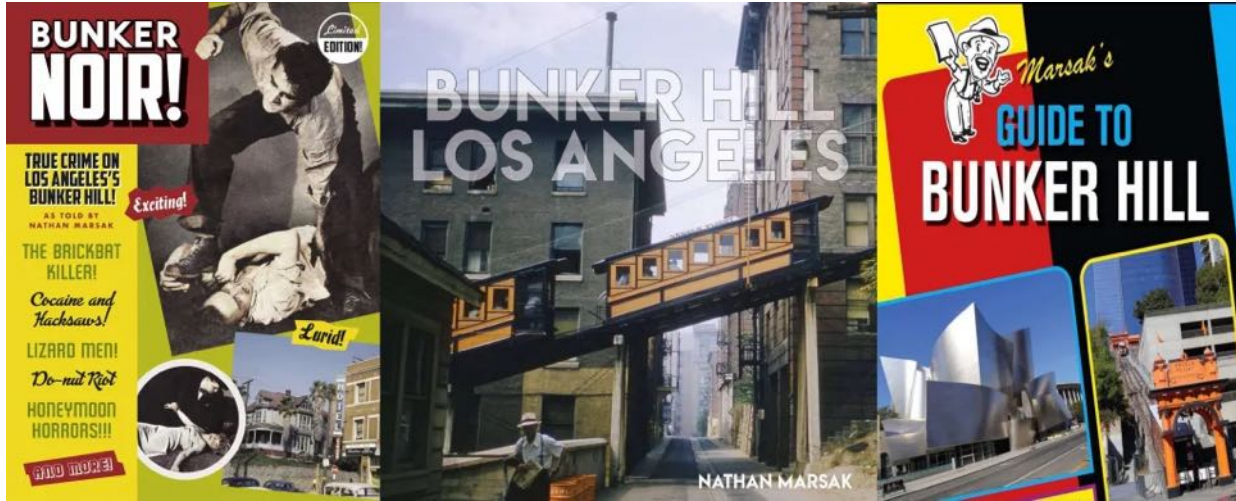
Communication from Public

Name:

Date Submitted: 06/06/2023 06:09 PM

Council File No: 23-0468

Comments for Public Posting: submitting this blog post for public comment



Bunker Hill, Los Angeles

Cooper's Do-Nuts — Addenda



Last June I posted **[We Need to Talk About Cooper Do-Nuts](#)** regarding John Rechy and the famed, alleged uprising.

Six months later theLAnd published **[this interview](#)** with Rechy wherein he states “*There was no riot at Cooper’s.*”

Which is an important statement. Remember, Rechy is the sole, lone source of the story. It’s his story: there’s no other evidence, so he alone dictates canon.

When I say it didn’t happen, much less at Cooper’s, so what, who am I but a lowly historian? But when the guy who *actually* came up with the story now says nothing happened at Cooper’s, that’s a major wrench in the cultural consciousness—when you consider the *hundreds* of descriptions of Cooper’s presently on the web. The **[t-shirts and patches](#)**. The **[enthusiastic artwork](#)**. Cooper’s Do-nuts **[even re-opened](#)**, in a fashion. Heck, people are getting Cooper’s **[tattoos](#)**.

But even before the famous 1967 Black Cat protests in Silver Lake, you've said that there were other equally pivotal gay rights demonstrations, specifically the 1958 Cooper Do-nuts Riot.

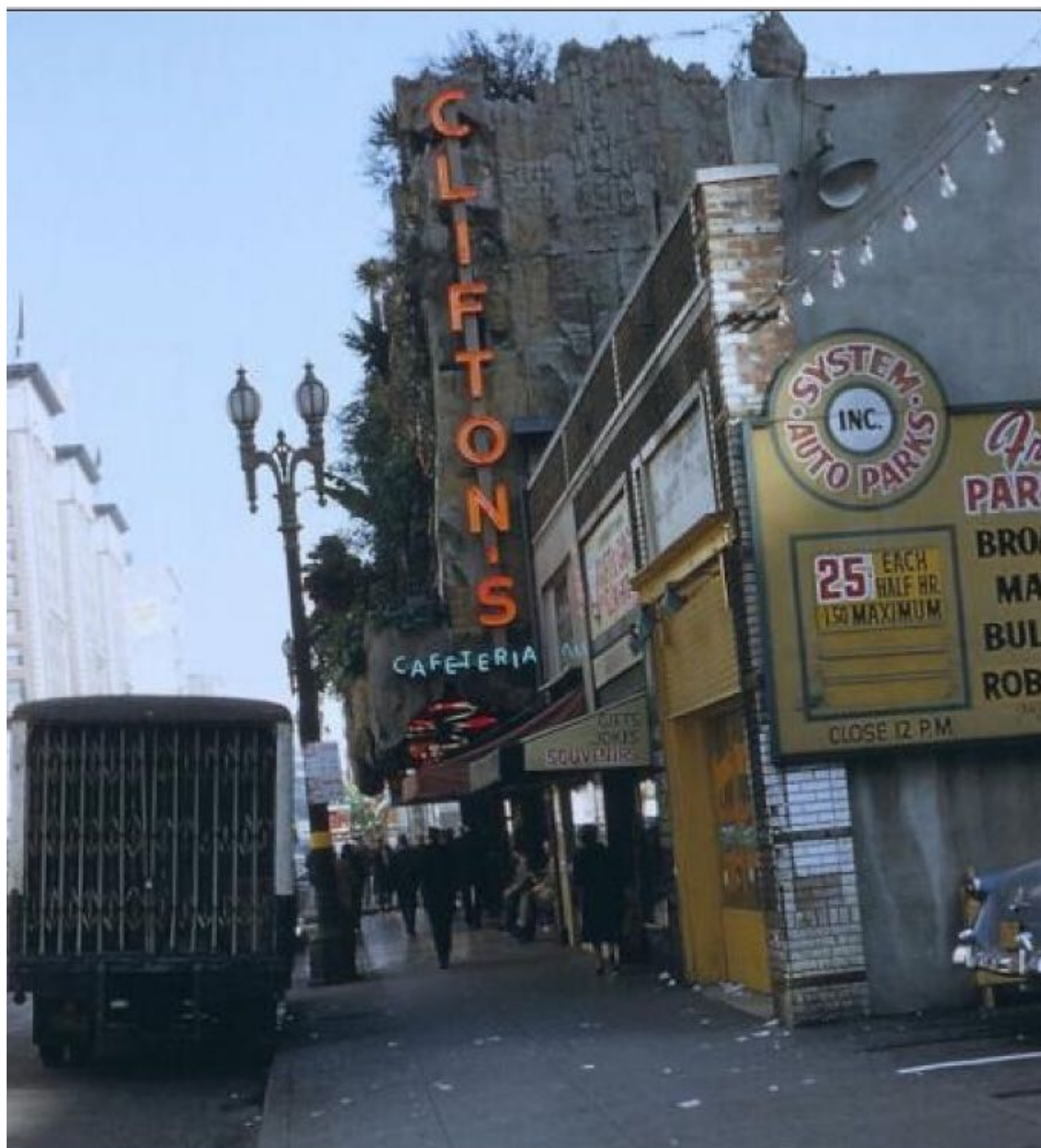
The overemphasis on Stonewall is bullshit. It's just that there were a lot of writers there that day to cover it.

There was no riot at Cooper's. It was actually another donut shop, but at that time, people called every donut shop in the city "Cooper's" because there were so many. This particular one is gone now. What basically happened was that around 2 AM on Main Street downtown, everyone from the bars would go into the donut shop, and it was a very democratic assembly of drag queens, hustlers and just people staying out late.

So, where was this other, not-Cooper's donut shop? According to the 1959 Yellow Pages the only other downtown donutery was Angel Food Donut at 423 South Hill, in the Subway Terminal Building. If we're married to Main Street, Pat's Donuts, at 654 South Main, opened in March 1959; too late if the riot happened in 1958 (Rechy told Los Angeles Magazine, and others, it had occurred in 1958) but in time for "spring of 1959" as Rechy originally told the story in 2005—though Rechy did insist *his* donut place was between Harold's and the Waldorf, placing the action across the street and a block north from Pat's.

On to other things: of the collection of Coopers around downtown, there were two a stone's throw from Pershing Square, Rechy's renowned haunt. One was just north of the park, on Hill above Fifth, which I covered extensively in the aforementioned post, and of which I provided a nifty color photo, about which I was pretty happy.

The other Cooper's was down Olive, just south of the park, the other side of Sixth. And I struggled to find an image of that 628 South Olive Street location. For the darnedest time the only shot I had was *this* one:



Painted in good ol' **Cooper Yellow**. From [here](#).

Then, I recently picked up a new Clifton's slide, and we have now been blessed with *this*:



Red-bordered Kodachrome, ca. 1958



And there you have it! As far as I'm aware, the first sighting of the Olive Street Cooper's.

As long as I've got you here. I also searched for an image of the initial incarnation of Cooper's Donuts at 215 South Main, when it was still in the Albert Cohn Bldg (Morgan & Walls, 1908), before that location went out of business in January 1958. All of a sudden, this site popped up: <https://www.cooperdonuts.com/> And on said site is this shot:



That's demo scaffolding in front; the building owner applied for a demolition permit in November 1957. It's made a parking lot in mid-January 1958; in 1959 the Cooper folk take out a permit to build a little standalone on corner of the site:



213 South Main gets its Certificate of Occupancy on October 28, 1959; it **stands to this day**. [USC Digital Archive](#)

Those, then, being some further tidbits about Cooper Do-nuts. Yes, I know, this is ostensibly a Bunker Hill site, and these nuggets of Old LA are perhaps merely tangential to the Hill—but I say we get a pass since there were *two* Cooper's on Bunker Hill, and hey, it's all grist for the mill (nudge nudge, if you want an image of the Cooper's on Bunker Hill's Third Street flats, go **buy *Bunker Noir***).

👤 [Nathan Marsak](#) ⌚ [March 22, 2022](#) 📁 [Uncategorized](#)

3 thoughts on “Cooper's Do-Nuts — Addenda”

Pingback: [Cooper Do-Nuts, Pt. III – Bunker Hill, Los Angeles](#)

Pingback: [We Need to Talk About Cooper Do-Nuts – Bunker Hill, Los Angeles](#)

Pingback: [Cooper Donuts...AGAIN – Bunker Hill, Los Angeles](#)

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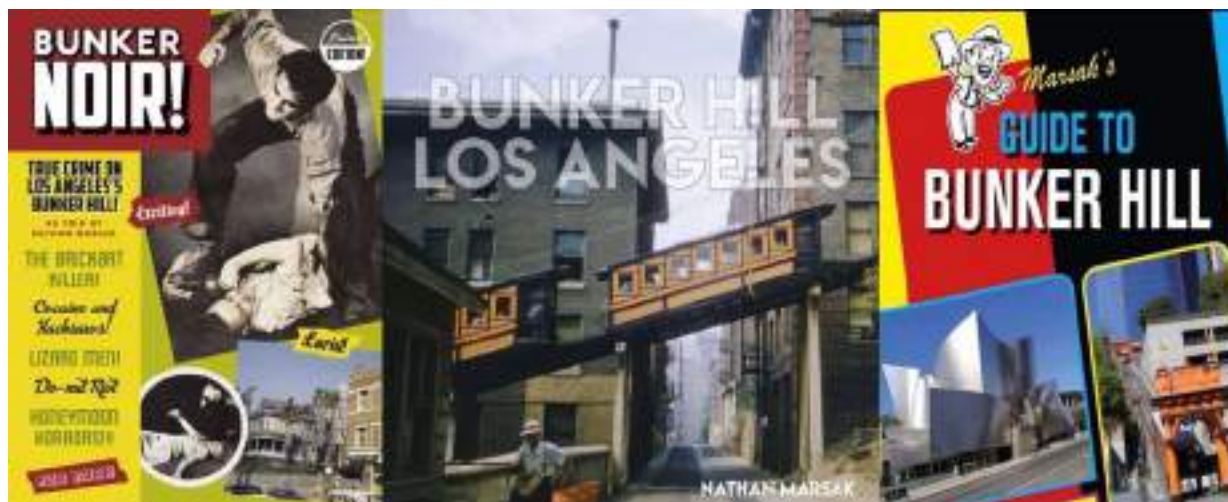
Communication from Public

Name:

Date Submitted: 06/06/2023 06:12 PM

Council File No: 23-0468

Comments for Public Posting: submitting blog post for public comment



Bunker Hill, Los Angeles

We Need to Talk About Cooper Do-Nuts

*This is Part I. Make sure to read **Part II** and **Part III!** And now...**PART IV!***



This being Pride Month, there has been an uptick in journalistic chatter about the Cooper Do-Nut Riot (e.g., [here](#)/[here](#)/[here](#)).

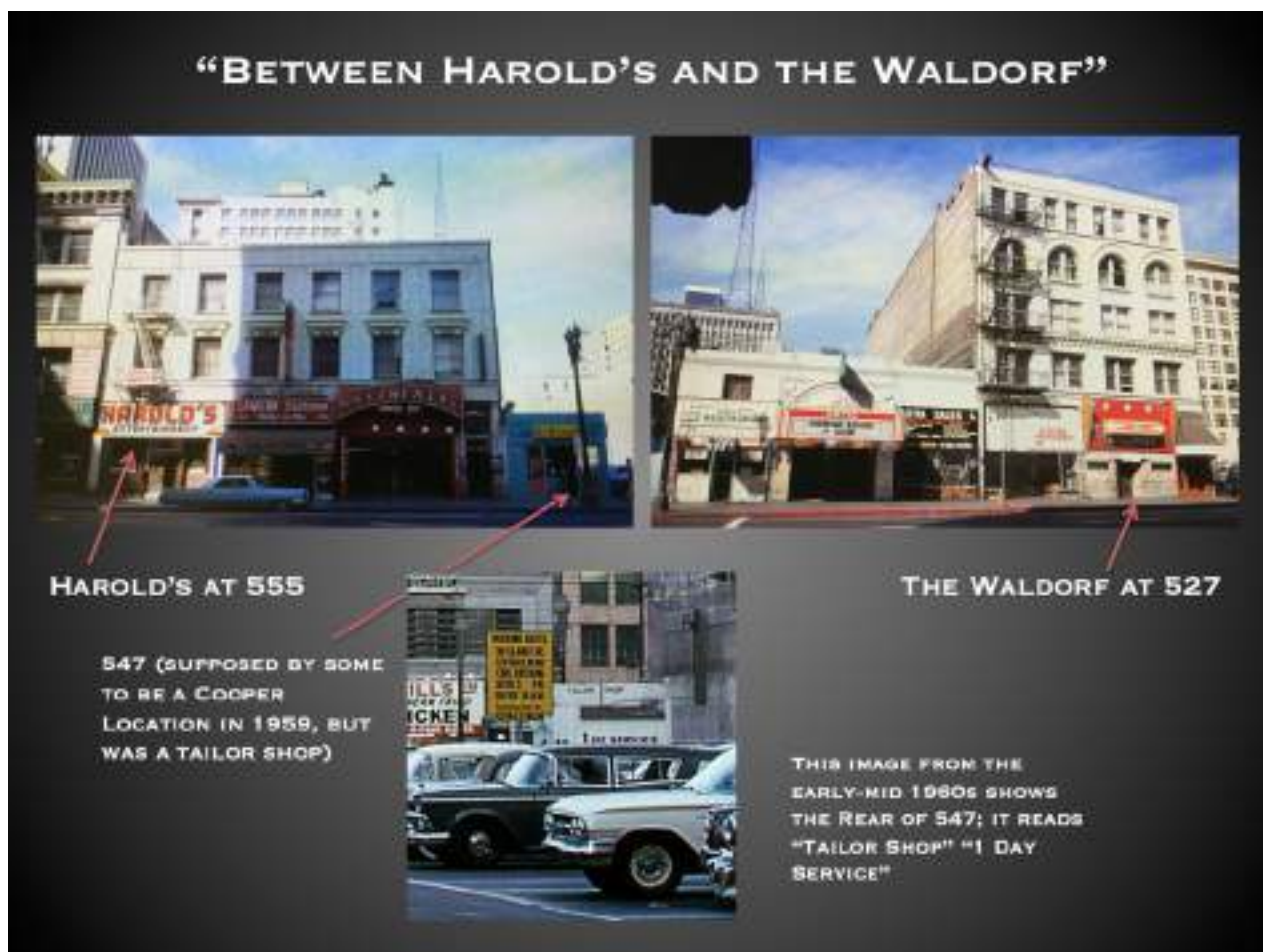
The story, in a nutshell: Cooper's was a little doughnut spot nestled between two venerable gay bars, the Waldorf and Harold's Café (at 527 and 555 South Main, respectively). Cooper's was LGBTQ+ friendly, populated by queens and hustlers and trans POC, which made it a frequent target of LAPD harassment. Aspiring writer John Rechy was hanging out one night in the spring of 1959 when LAPD officers arrived (they were known for checking IDs to make sure gender presentation and legal gender matched) and without reason hauled Rechy and two other patrons out toward the squad car. But the collected queens had had enough! They began pelting law enforcement with coffee and donuts and the officers ran scared. Patrons began yelling and singing and rocking police cars, allowing Rechy and his compatriots to escape; police backup was called—multiple police vehicles roared up with lights ablaze and sirens blaring—and rioters were arrested and jailed. Main Street was cordoned off and remained closed till the next day. This event was famously recounted in Rechy's 1963 debut novel *City of Night*.

It's a good story, but trouble is, as history, it has...issues. These are issues I cannot let go by unremarked upon because, after all, I detailed them in last year's *Bunker*

Noir!, which no journalist deigned to read, apparently. So, briefly:

a) no, the story does not appear in Rechy's *City of Night*. (There are a couple passing references to a "Hooper's" but nothing remotely riotous there occurs.) In fact, the Cooper's story did not exist in *any* form until 2005, when Rechy told it to Stuart Timmons, for inclusion in *Gay LA*; the story was birthed as the 45-year-old memory of a 75-year-old man. Moreover, those times Rechy has repeated the Cooper tale since, major points—the year it occurred, and other fundamental details—have changed significantly.

b) there *was no* Cooper Do-Nuts on the 500 block of Main Street. (Yes, their first location was up at 215 South Main, but that was in a larger building demolished in early 1958, and not rebuilt as **a standalone Cooper's** [still extant] until the autumn of 1959; moreover, though only three blocks away, being across from St. Vibiana's and the Union Rescue Mission made it a very different social landscape than the 500 block.) Though Rechy has never provided an address, some authoritative sources (e.g., **QueerMaps**, the **One Archives**) have *chosen* 547 South Main as its definitive location—a logical assumption, as it's the only typically "little Cooper Do-Nut-type building" on the block. However, while the small standalone structure at 547 had *been* a restaurant, one of Peter DiNova's Pete's Burger Basket locations, by 1959 the structure had become **a tailor shop**. To give you an understanding of what that famed stretch "between Harold's and The Waldorf" looked like, including the supposed Cooper-in-question, here are a couple shots from 1974—



c) Rechy's first-hand account details rioters shaking police vehicles, riot police with sirens wailing, multiple arrests, police cordons, the street shut down into the next day, etc. As someone who studies what Los Angeles newspapers reported on in the 1950s, I can say with some assurance that *that* would have made the papers. It is Mr. Rechy's assertion that the reason it did *not* make the papers, is **because the rioters were gay**; that the papers kept homosexuals "invisible." However—conversely—papers in the late '50s/early '60s delighted in discussing "**the homosexual problem**" with its "perverts" and "**sex deviates**" and other **lurid language of the day** (and, rather than consign them to invisibility, would in fact print their **letters to the editor**).

Not to say *something* didn't happen, somewhere. It's an intriguing story and would be an important part of our collective memory. But as history *this* story has too many holes to be repeated as fact; of course that it has been enshrined in journalistic and academic canon without even the most basic fact-checking is, unfortunately, routine. I'm not saying Mr. Rechy made it up, necessarily, but consider the source: the first time Rechy tells the story, in his 2005 interview with Stuart Timmons, it was soon after he shrugged off his guilt for **making up fake book reviews praising his own work**.

At this point you're thinking, that's all very interesting, but this being a Bunker Hill

blog, what's it got to do with Bunker Hill? Excellent question, answer being, because among the some half-dozen Cooper locations around downtown, two were on Bunker Hill!

One location was at **807 West Third Street**, in the stretch west of the Hope Street tunnel entrance (I detail some of the frightful happenings there in the *Bunker Noir!* section “Third Street—Haven of the Thirsty Reprobate”), and in the entry about the doughnut riot you may view the only known image of said Cooper's on West Third.

Another was at **441 South Hill Street**. This one, you actually know very well. That's because it's the most-seen of all the Cooper locations, although no-one has ever seen fit to mention its address. It's the **image used on the Wikipedia page**; it's the image **used by Los Angeles Magazine** (in describing “downtown's Cooper Do-nuts,” seemingly content to allow you to think you're looking at the famed, fabled Main Street location); it's just absolutely everywhere, e.g. **here** and **here** and **here** and **here**.

Few mention it is an image plucked from Kent Mackenzie's docudrama **The Exiles**, when Yvonne goes on her desultory **walk about downtown**:



Which is a Cooper's location on Hill Street just north of Fifth, on the southeast corner of Bunker Hill:



Looking south on Hill across Fifth into the sunlit, cruisey banana palms of Pershing Square, October 1957



Built by the Meal-O-Mat Corp in 1952; it is demolished in May 1977

Particularly interesting about this location is that unlike all the other Cooper locations, this one was actually adjacent Pershing Square, AKA central hub of The Run, the circuit of gay-friendly bars and cruising destinations. (However, at that time Fifth and Hill was one of the busiest intersections in Los Angeles, and a major civil disturbance *there* would unarguably have left a footprint.)

So, that's *my* take on the thing, which is why I wrote about it in *Bunker Noir!*—



—therefore, might I suggest, if you are intrigued by tales of Old LA's marginalized people (but, you know, backed by actual historic research) and other such Bunker debunking, you might want to pick up a copy; **it is available here.**



Postscript: unlike most historians, I *love* to be proven wrong! *You* might be the one who has photographic evidence of Rechy's Main Street Cooper's — so do not hesitate

to drop me a line at oldbunkerhill@gmail.com as we continue our quest for historical truth!

 [Nathan Marsak](#)  [June 15, 2021](#)  [Uncategorized](#)

29 thoughts on “We Need to Talk About Cooper Do-Nuts”

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Martin Pal

OCTOBER 26, 2022 AT 11:07 AM



Nathan, I thank you for your time trying to correct something that seems to spiral more and more into fact, when it is not. Whenever I encounter it I also try to do the same and your writings about it are what I refer people to read. I hope you don't mind.

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Richard Alan Adkins

APRIL 14, 2023 AT 11:33 AM



Excellent research Nathan, but I must take issue with the analysis of the news media being eager to print stores of the LGBTQ community. In the mid-1970s, I was working as a graphic artist in the news department of KNBC-TV in Burbank. We were called upon to create a visual for a story that was used one night regarding the LAPD rounding up the gay hustlers on Selma Ave. in Hollywood and the female hustlers

along Hollywood Blvd. and marching them (single file I might add) down Highland Ave. then to Santa Monica Blvd. into the Los Angeles County area in order to make their trade the county's problem, not the city's. This was before West Hollywood was incorporated. Fast forward to a couple of years ago when I was researching gay history in Hollywood for a display at the former Circus Disco building and I was trying to find evidence of this event. It almost seemed like a figment of my imagination because I could find no newspaper accounts. I did finally find several but they were concentrated not on the nature of the participants, but by the dispute between the county and the city law enforcement regarding one group transporting their problems to the other's territory. True that it might have been a slow news night, but I remembered it clearly.

Thanks for the healthy skepticism. Please encourage it in others!

Richard Adkins

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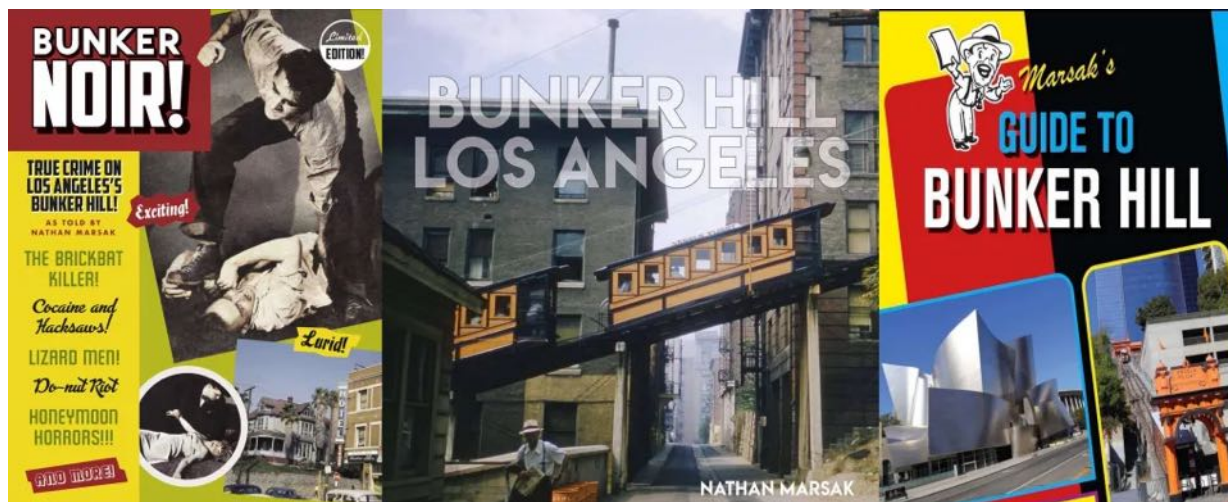
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Date Submitted: 06/06/2023 06:04 PM

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Comments for Public Posting: Submitting this blog post for the record



Bunker Hill, Los Angeles

Cooper Do-Nuts, Pt. III

I hate to be that guy, but I mean, come on.

The Downtown Los Angeles Neighborhood Council **passed a letter requesting City leaders to formally recognize the site of the Cooper Do-Nuts Riot**, specifically, at 215 South Main:

**DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES
NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL
OFFICERS**

CLAUDIA OLIVEIRA
PRESIDENT

NAIRA HAROOTUNIAN
VICE PRESIDENT OF ADMINISTRATION

ANGELA DELEON
VICE PRESIDENT OF
COMMUNICATION & OUTREACH

JIM SARRATORI
SECRETARY

TONY HOOVER
TREASURER

CITY OF LOS ANGELES

CALIFORNIA



December 6, 2021

Re: Memorialization of *Cooper Do-nuts* Site - 215 S. Main Street

Dear Councilmember De León:

At a special public meeting on December 6, 2021, the Board of Directors of the Downtown Los Angeles Neighborhood Council ("DLANC") voted to provide the following comments below:

The City of Los Angeles has a rich history connected to the LGBTQIA+ civil rights movement. At the request of the City of Los Angeles Department of City Planning Office of Historic Resources, a Citywide Historic Context Statement on LGBTQ history was commissioned then published in September 2014 which contained several sites of historical importance to the LGBTQIA+ community including *Cooper Do-nuts*.

The City of Los Angeles has taken significant steps to preserve this history, especially in Council District 13, as seen with the Historic-Cultural Monument designation of the Black Cat Bar (HCM 939) in Silverlake which was also included in the Planning Departments survey. A plaque at the corner of Hollywood Blvd. and McCadden Place marks the origination of the nation's very first gay pride parade on June 28, 1970 - one year after the Stonewall Riots in New York.

The first known instance in the LGBTQIA+ community of gender-transgressive persons resisting arbitrary police arrest occurred at *Cooper's Do-nuts* at 215 S. Main Street in Downtown LA in May of 1959. The customers throw their coffee and food at the arresting officers driving them from the shop. This minor but significant rebellion transpired ten years prior to the better-known rebellion at the Stonewall Inn in New York City in 1969 and seven years prior to a similar occurrence at Compton's Cafeteria in San Francisco in 1966. 60 years after the *Cooper Do-nuts riot*, on August 23, 2019, three transgender women were attacked at Las Perlas bar located near 2nd and Main Streets only steps away from the original location of *Cooper Do-nuts*. This event which went viral on social media around the world underscores the fact that much still needs to be done to recognize issues specific to the transgender community.

The Downtown Los Angeles Neighborhood Council therefore asks Councilmember Kevin de León to consider memorializing the significance of the *Cooper's Do-nuts* site at 215 S. Main Street in either of the following manners:

- Submit a motion for the City Council to initiate the consideration of the original site of Cooper Donuts at 215 S. Main Street, using a historic feature from the site such as a streetlight or terrazzo tile, as a City Historic-Cultural Monument under the procedures of Section 22.171.10 of the Administrative Code, and instruct the Planning Department to prepare the Historic-Cultural Monument Application for review and consideration by the Cultural Heritage Commission.
- Consider memorializing an adjacent street lamp near the site, in a treatment similar to that of the Jonathan Gold memorial at Grand Central Market, with paint using the LGBTQ Pride rainbow colors, a historic sign, and LED colored lighting
- Consider a ground surface treatment, on the public right-of-way, adjacent to the site, with a memorial through the placement of a plaque, paint, bas-relief, and other interventions to recognize the significance of the adjacent site
- Submit a motion for the City Council to designate the intersection of 2nd & Main Streets as *Cooper's Do-nuts Square*, and instruct the Department of Transportation to fabricate and install permanent ceremonial signs to this effect at this location, in consultation with Council District 14 and DLANC
 - As part of an intersection designation process, consider potentially activating the crosswalk with paint, using the LGBTQ Pride rainbow colors,

Sincerely,



Claudia Oliveira
President,
DLANC



Tony Hoover,
Treasurer,
DLANC

CC: Office of Historic Resources, Department of City Planning (via email)
Cultural Heritage Commission (via email)
Transgender Advisory Council, Civil + Human Rights and Equity Department (via email)
Los Angeles Neighborhood Council LGBTQ+ Alliance (via email)

Irrespective of issues to be had with the alleged Cooper Do-Nut Riot (covered at length [here](#) and [here](#))—the story always involves said uprising occurring on the 500 block of Main Street.

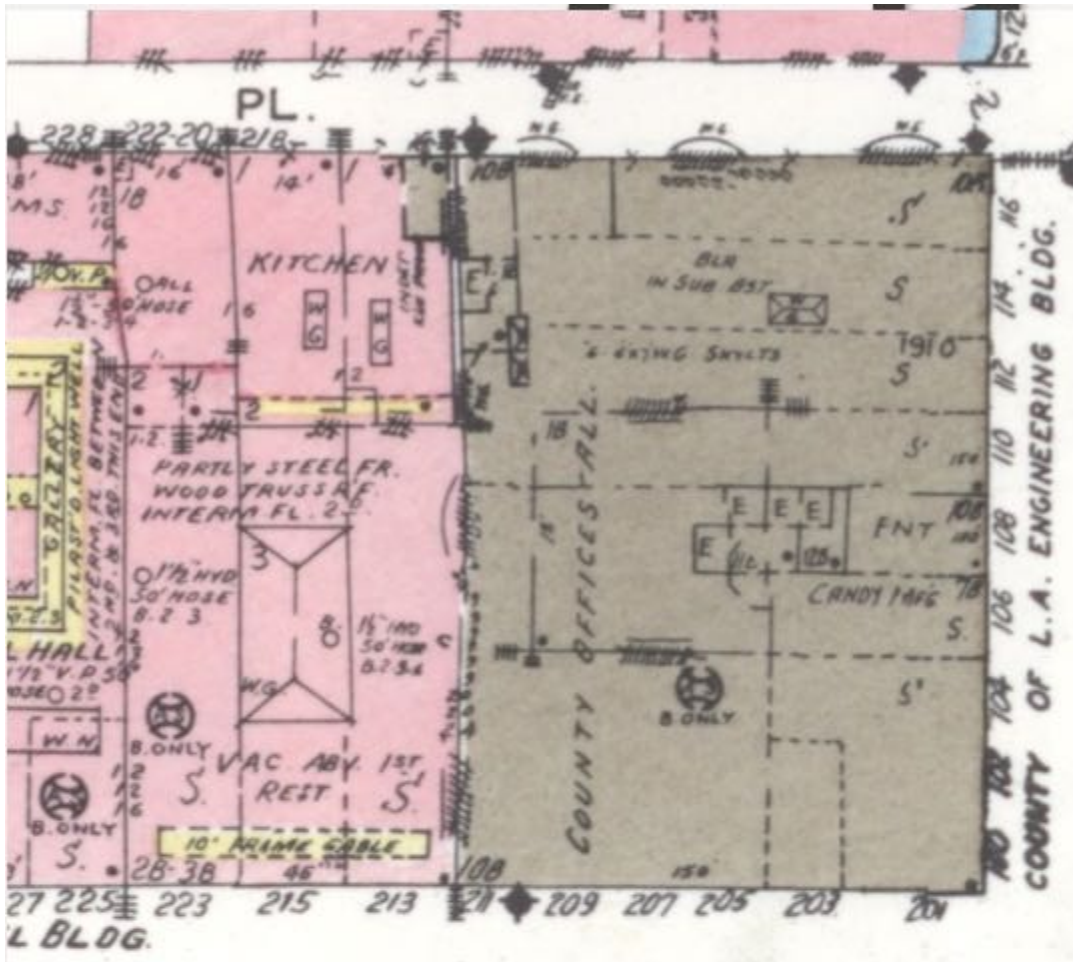
How and why DLANC elected to memorialize the Cooper's Do-Nuts at 215 South Main is a mystery. After all, while there is conjecture as to whether the 500-block-of-South-Main-event even occurred (besides, there was no Cooper's down there, and lone recounter Rechy has come out and **said the story did not happen at a Cooper's**) the choice of 215 South Main as a location is in fact impossible, in that there was no Cooper's there either, during the time Rechy contends the event transpired.

As in: the first Cooper Donuts—as evolved from the Evans Cafeteria—was at 215

South Main, in the Albert Cohn Building. That structure was demolished in toto, January 1958. On a corner of the newly-blacktopped parking lot, the Cooper Donut folk built a little standalone shop, which opened in late October 1959. Rechy has stated that the uprising occurred in both **May 1958** and **May 1959**. Whichever it may have been, there was in any event no Cooper's at 215 South Main between January 1958 and October 1959.

Evidentiary whatnot: the **demolition permit from November 1957**, the application to **build the new structure in January 1959**, which passed final inspection and **received its Certificate of Occupancy in October 1959**.

Again, to be clear:



213-223 South Main, **the Albert Cohn block**, seen in the 1953 Sanborn map, top, made a parking lot in January 1958. Below, in the recent aerial, note the presence of the **little 1959 donut stand** adjacent the Higgins Building.

Ok? Sorry to be persnickety about the thing, but a group like the DLANC, with their hearts in the right place and all, are still not allowed to play recklessly with historical truth. No-one is. **This guy**, taught me that, and I stand by it.

ADDENDUM

After I penned the above post a couple weeks ago, the good folk over at Esotouric linked to it on Reddit. **That post prompted this reply**, and, though not going to do a whole ‘nother post about it, I do feel the need to address it.



jdilberian · 15 hr. ago · edited 14 hr. ago

Actually, it seems they are not creating a monument to the riot that may or may not have happened but rather focusing more on the fact that Cooper Do-nuts was a safe haven for all, regardless of their gender affiliation. Here's a recent post DLANC put on FB with more info: <https://www.facebook.com/DlancPage/posts/pfbid027CAEVac1pCCZQfFcqusvmp419duY1wyKTzapKzuZmVDb9wLKUFm8qjWxrKkD1uo9l>

The claim that the proposed site is impossible is also incorrect.

There actually was a Cooper Do-nuts at 215 S Main St in 1959. That location was previously an Evans Cafeteria and sold Cooper Do-nuts in the early 1950s but was (in the late 1950s) torn down and rebuilt as a Cooper Do-nuts by the same owners. The new structure was not only completed before early 1959 but the structure itself is, in fact, still present in that location as an immigration law firm:

<https://www.google.com/maps/place/215+S+Main+St,+Los+Angeles,+CA+90012/@34.0505313,-118.2449419,3a,75y,351.82h,102.25t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1s1XKQZhvRHmE9XHVZRUSaTw!2e0!7i16384!8i8192!4m5!3m4!1s0x80c2c64915d71a6d:0x12fd1ba07490e250!8m2!3d34.0508414!4d-118.2450027>

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Let’s “unpack this” as the kids say. First of all, Ms. Dilberian contends “it seems they are not creating a monument to the riot that may or may not have happened but

rather focusing more on the fact that Cooper Do-nuts was a safe haven for all, regardless of their gender affiliation” although, in fact, the opposite is true. The DLANC letter, and the **Facebook post to which Ms. Dilberian links**, are solely about creating a monument to the riot, and not focused on any “safe haven” element; that idea goes unmentioned in both documents.

Secondly, the site of the first Cooper Do-nuts was not demolished by Jack and Margaret Evans—Ms. Dilberian states Evans Cafeteria structure was “torn down and rebuilt as a Cooper Do-nuts by the same owners”—when that structure was, rather, demolished by the building’s owner, Martin Lee, Inc. (In fairness, Ms. Dilberian’s syntax is unclear, so we don’t know whether she intended to connote the “same owners” tore down *and* rebuilt, or *just* rebuilt.)

In any event, the new structure was not completed “before early 1959” since the building permit was applied for in early 1959 and the location didn’t even get its Certificate of Occupancy, thus allowing it to open, until the late fall.

Lastly, *one* point is correct—said location stands to this day, which I pointed out in my **post from over a year ago**:

b) there was *no* Cooper Do-Nuts on the 500 block of Main Street. (Yes, their first location was up at 215 South Main, but that was in a larger building demolished in early 1958, and not rebuilt as a standalone Cooper's [still extant] until the autumn of 1959; moreover, though only three blocks away, being across from St. Vibiana's and the Union Rescue Mission made it a very different social landscape than the 500 block.) Though Rechv has never provided an address, some authoritative sources (e.g. QueerMaps, the

As we know, there was no uprising at Cooper’s, especially given as the *one and only* witness we have to any such event **has stated it was not at Cooper’s**.

With that out of the way, what we are *now* led to believe is that Cooper’s was unique for its inclusivity:

Get To Know Cooper Donuts

Meet The Family Members Who Created The Legacy

Mr. Jack Evans

Originally, Jack Evans grew up on a farm in Chicago, Illinois. In pursuit of the American Dream, he moved out to California during the Great Depression. Upon his arrival in the Golden State, he held a series of jobs as a chef until inspiration finally struck him to open his own restaurant, the Evans Cafeteria, in 1950 in the heart of Los Angeles.

Mrs. Marge Evans

After Jack and Marge got married in 1955, she went to school to learn cafeteria management and bookkeeping so that she could help run the donut shop. In fact, she was instrumental to the aesthetic of Cooper Donuts after its transition from Evans Cafeteria. Marge not only designed the Cooper Donuts logo but also the counters inside the stores were also all salmon because it was her favorite color.



A Safe Haven For All

Open 24 hours, Cooper Donuts was always a safe place for people from all walks of life since it first opened its doors. Regardless of sexual orientation, everyone was welcome at Cooper Donuts and could feel comfortable in the company of others. The owners of the establishment never passed judgment on their patrons and even employed all members of the LGBTQIA community equally. This inclusive atmosphere is what made Cooper Donuts a special place for so many people and helped establish its foothold in the community.

from [here](#)

And we are supposed to accept that Jack C. Evans was a 1950s ally to the trans community because...why? We have no evidence, save for *the family says so*. Is there an oral history they took from Jack before he passed? Are there eyewitness declarations? (Mind you, oral histories are routinely contradicted by archival evidence, and anyone in the legal or law enforcement biz will inform you that eyewitness testimony is the most unreliable of evidence.)

Ms. Dilberian, who started today's conversation, *is* Evans family, after all, her being wed to Keith Evans, Jack's grandson. The move to push the City to designate a "Cooper's Do-nut Square" is motivated, it would seem, by the need to shine a kind, modern light on the family. However, the contention that these 1950s Evanses were trailblazing LGBTQIA+ supporters seems...forced.

Consider, there were twenty-six Cooper locations in Los Angeles, and they were all "safe havens"? With, presumably, the one at Second and Main as top safe haven banana, despite its location directly across from the Cathedral of St. Vibiana *and* the

Union Rescue Mission. Point being, it's a bit much to imagine men in tight capris, their shirts knotted at the midriff (as Rechy describes young donut aficionados) parading, seventy years ago, directly across from the seat of the Archdiocese, and rubbing elbows with the Rescue Mission habitués, which (unlike today) consisted of hard-bitten older white alcoholics.

On top of which, the gay bars were three blocks south, closer to The Run. (Yes, Survey LA's *LGBT Historic Context Statement* states that in the 1940s there was one gay bar in the area—Smitty's at 242 South Main, but even *that* claim is suspect, in that a) the Navy went out of its way to state Smitty's was *not* included on the infamous "off limits to military personnel" list, and b) it was the scene of b-girl busts, which, had the arrests been same-sex, would certainly have made what was already lengthy coverage all the more newsworthy.)

So, again, we have only the family to believe. The remaining Evanses are proud of some sort of legacy, but their grasp on history is, perhaps, tenuous: for example, the above screengrab states that Jack and Marge were married in 1955, whereas **the 1950 census shows them to already be husband and wife.**

Ultimately, history is about evidence, and in discerning the wheat from the chaff we build a hypothesis, from which we gauge likelihood. As my buddy the forensic scientist says "all your history is just forensic science with more goddamn epistemology." And the Cooper tale keeps being, over and over again, added to and morphed into ever-increasing unlikelihood, raising repeated questions of belief vs. knowledge, and piling on more of that g-d epistemology. In short, one sniff test after another, it just smells worse and worse.

 [Nathan Marsak](#)  [June 11, 2022](#)  [Uncategorized](#)

2 thoughts on "Cooper Do-Nuts, Pt. III"

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