

EDITORIAL

An Identity, and a History

Los Angeles Times
June 23, 2003

For his retirement party present Wednesday, outgoing Los Angeles City Councilman Nate Holden wants his colleagues to approve his last-minute motion to rename Crenshaw Boulevard for the late Mayor Tom Bradley. Out of habit, sentimentality or sheer relief that he didn't ask to call it the Holden Highway, the council may be tempted to go along with his request. Bad idea.

Like any such change, renaming a prominent street can be a contentious undertaking. On the practical side, businesses have to bear the costs of an address change. But the biggest resistance is often emotional. Streets share an identity — and a history — with the communities alongside them.

Ten years ago, a portion of Sunset Boulevard and a seven-mile stretch of Boyle Heights' Brooklyn Avenue became Cesar E. Chavez Avenue. Today's mostly Latino Boyle Heights once was a Jewish neighborhood, and Brooklyn Avenue was its heart.

Some resisted the name change, not because they didn't want to honor the late labor leader but because they didn't want to erase their parents' and grandparents' history. Supporters were able to convince them that wouldn't be the case.

Like Santa Barbara Avenue, which was renamed for Martin Luther King Jr. in 1982, Crenshaw Boulevard runs through neighborhoods that have a sizable black population. But that hasn't translated into automatic support for renaming Crenshaw Boulevard for the city's first black mayor — who, by the way, rejected the notion that he was the *black* mayor and stressed that he was *Los Angeles'* mayor, and happened to be African American.

This change-Crenshaw-to-Bradley idea didn't bubble up from the community but down from Holden's office. As anyone but Holden might have expected, resistance has been considerable since word got out about the motion last week.

No one objects to honoring Bradley, whose moniker already graces an international airport terminal, a UCLA building, a Red Line subway station and an elementary school. But why, residents ask, change the name of a street that, after 75 years, has its own distinct history and identity?

There is simply no good reason to rush this decision. To do so would be a peculiar way to honor a five-term mayor renowned, after all, for building coalitions.