

ROGER WALDINGER AND MEHDI BOZORGMEHR, EDITORS

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Our friends, colleagues, and student assistants deserve thanks. Allen Scott and Alejandro Portes e

## The Making of a Multicultural Metropolis

Roger Waldinger and Mehdi Bozorgmehr

THE HISTORY of the Los Angeles region took a new turn on April 29, 1992. On that afternoon, nine jurors—all white, all residing in a white suburban enclave just outside Los Angeles County—acquitted four white officers of the Los Angeles Police Department who had been accused of using excessive force against black motorist Rodney King. Police violence against L.A.'s black and Latino populations was nothing new, but in this case, the beating had been videotaped and then broadcast to the region's teeming millions time and again. Within hours of the jury's action, violent protest engulfed the city's historically African American South Central district; it then quickly spread throughout the region. As the whole world watched, Los Angeles burned.

Was it a riot, as the forces of law and order charged, or a rebellion, as some leaders and spokespersons of L.A.'s Latino and African American communities maintained? Continuing controversy makes it hard to label the events of those days and nights of spring 1992. But what happened then told Angelenos—and everyone else interested in the City of Angels and its environs—that something new, different, and hard to comprehend was occurring under the Southern California sun.

In a sense, the events of April 1992 encapsulated L.A.'s transformation into a few tension-packed days. The African Americans among whom the initial outbursts occurred were quickly joined by their neighbors, who turned out to be new immigrants, mainly from Central America and Mexico. The rioters directed their fury against the local storeowners and landlords, an ethnically diverse group among whom Korean immigrants loomed

*(photos on previous page, from top to bottom)*

Mexican factory worker, Santa Fe Springs, 1991; Mural at a housing project, East Los Angeles, 1992; Korean garment retailer, Los Angeles, 1994; Wedding party, Riviera Country Club, West Los Angeles, 1988; Students attend an Upward Bound program, Los Angeles, 1988. (Photos copyright Stephen J. Gold.)

particularly large. Unlike the Watts riot of 1965, which had remained confined to a fairly narrow area deep in the South Central ghetto, the disturbances of 1992 spread throughout the Southland, as the locals call it. Beverly Hills, Long Beach, Pomona, and even the San Fernando Valley—the very apotheosis of white suburban living circa 1965—saw considerable violence. Meanwhile, Boyle Heights and East Los Angeles, the region's longest-established Mexican American barrio, remained eerily quiet. Witnessing the spectacle on their television sets were the region's Anglos, a diminishing population, many of whom, like the jurors whose decision unleashed the violence, had fled multicultural Los Angeles County for the more homogeneous areas on the region's periphery.<sup>1</sup>

As turmoil exploded among the palm trees, the Los Angeles that the nation had known and fantasized about for most of the twentieth century slipped decisively into the past. Ironically, this Los Angeles of old had always been a different kind of metropolis. Unlike New York, that archrival on the East Coast with its densely packed, polyglot, contentious urbanites, Los Angeles was more a slice of white bread, a settlement of Protestant mid-westerners transplanted to an irrigated arcadia on the Pacific shores. Of course, Eden was never quite so blandly homogeneous as white Angelenos imagined. The Spanish had come here first, and though the Hispanic presence waxed and waned over the years, the Mexican-origin population never went away. African Americans found their way to Los Angeles as well, in numbers that grew rapidly in the three decades after 1940. And many Chinese and even more Japanese also made L.A. their home.

But in 1970, the typical Angeleno could be forgiven for looking around and seeing an incredibly dynamic region that was expanding yet ethnically looked much the same as it had for the past seven decades. A mere twenty years later, the images of stores being plundered and houses set afire made it clear that the Southland of old was no more. L.A.'s sudden, profound ethnic transformation is unquestioned; the problem, rather, is how to understand the changes so tightly telescoped into the past two decades. The region's self-invented past and equally distorted self-image clearly get in the way. So too does the unhealthy miasma of anxiety and apprehension released by the severe, unexpected economic decline of recent years. Further complicating the task is the region's aura as the province of fabulists and mythmakers, a setting appropriate for movies and mystery novels—not social science.

But Los Angeles and its people deserve a closer, searching look. California has been a trendsetter for the nation for the past several decades. And nowhere can one detect the shape of emerging America better than in L.A., where newcomers to the United States have transformed the country's second largest metropolis in complex ways and have set the region on a new course sure to be followed by other urban areas.

This volume of scholarly essays sets fears and myths aside to describe

the new Los Angeles of the late twentieth century and to explain the scope, characteristics, and consequences of the region's ethnic transition. We tell this story in numbers, using the wealth of information contained in the U.S. population censuses of 1970, 1980, and 1990 to portray the region's ethnic mix in all its complexities. We have organized this volume into four parts. The first part, consisting of the remainder of this introductory essay and a historical chapter that takes the reader from 1900 to 1970, sets the stage for what will follow. Part 2 examines the implications of the region's recent ethnic shifts for the jobs its residents hold, the neighborhoods in which they live, the languages they speak, and the incomes they earn. Part 3 focuses on the new ethnic mosaic itself, with chapters on each of the region's major ethnic groups. The last part sums up the volume's lessons and peers into the future to see where ethnic Los Angeles might be heading.

### THE REGION IN BRIEF

There are many L.A.'s: the once-glamorous, now-tawdry Hollywood; Huntington Beach and other affluent areas along the coast; hard-pressed South Central with its old, deteriorating bungalows and dilapidated apartments resembling motels; Moreno Valley and other instant suburbs that have popped up from farmland and desert on the region's periphery. These and all the other L.A.'s fall within the compass of this book. For our purposes, Los Angeles means a five-county region with Los Angeles County at its core, surrounded by Orange, San Bernardino, Riverside, and Ventura counties. Unless otherwise noted in the text, the words *Los Angeles* or *L.A.* or *Greater Los Angeles* will always refer to the Los Angeles region as defined here (figure 1.1).<sup>2</sup>

The Los Angeles region extends over a vast area encompassing 33,210 square miles. With this expanse, the region surpasses all the nation's other major metropolitan areas: It is almost twice as large as the New York and San Francisco metropolitan areas (18,134 and 19,085 square miles, respectively), over twice the size of Chicago and Philadelphia (14,553 and 13,844 square miles, respectively), and four times larger than Miami (8,167 square miles), that other newly minted capital of immigrant America. In this land of freeways, driving distances best communicate the region's urban sprawl: 129 miles separate coastal Ventura on the west from San Bernardino on the hot, arid east, while the affluent seaside enclave of Laguna Beach lies 119 miles south of scorching Lancaster, swollen by Angelenos in search of the affordable suburban dream, which these days usually comes at the expense of a hundred-mile round trip to jobs in the San Fernando Valley. Encompassing beaches, mountains, and deserts, the region varies widely in landscape and climate. On a typical summer day, the temperature ranges from highs in the mid-seventies at the beaches to the mid-nineties in the valleys



just over 100,000. It then exploded, gaining another 2.2 million residents by 1930. The depression slowed its growth, but the region's demographic expansion took off again with the advent of the Second World War and the years of postwar prosperity. By 1960, Los Angeles County boasted a population of 6 million, making it the second largest metropolis, after New York. Unlike other major urban centers, Los Angeles then kept on expanding, spilling over its historic boundaries as its population burgeoned. As of 1990, the five-county region was home to 14.5 million people—still smaller than the New York region but launched on a growth curve that should leave the Big Apple behind within the next decade or two.

For most of its modern existence, Los Angeles attracted newcomers who were mainly white and native-born. In 1920, just before the close of the last great immigration wave, only 17 percent of Angelenos had been born abroad, as compared with 35 percent of their contemporaries in New York.<sup>7</sup> Despite the region's proximity to Mexico and the ebb and flow of Mexican migration over the years between 1920 and 1965, immigrant Los Angeles remained relatively inconspicuous. More important than any immigrant influx during these years was the large-scale arrival of African Americans, attracted by the region's relatively hospitable race-relations climate and its burgeoning economy.

And then it all changed. What had been a small community of Mexican-born Angelenos—not quite 2 percent of the region's 7.6 million residents as of 1960—suddenly found its numbers growing, and by leaps and bounds. The 1990 census counted 3.7 million Angelenos of Mexican origin, of whom 46 percent had been born abroad. Of course, Mexicans were by no means the only group of foreign newcomers to converge on Los Angeles in massive numbers. Other countries lying south of the border—Guatemala and El Salvador, in particular—sent sizable groups of immigrants to L.A., and Asia emerged as a major sending area as well. In 1990, immigrants made up 27 percent of the region's population and 33 percent of all those living in Los Angeles County.

Other, related demographic trends produced the multicultural, multi-ethnic Los Angeles of today. Not only did the region lose its attraction for the type of native white migrant who used to gravitate west, but its Anglo population steadily deserted Southern California for greener—or perhaps whiter—pastures elsewhere. Since the immigrants were also younger than the natives and their fertility rates were higher, Californians were increasingly likely to be the offspring of the foreign-born. As of 1990, Los Angeles became a region without any ethnic majority, though Hispanics seem likely to hit the halfway mark within the foreseeable future. Since the arrival of foreign-born newcomers lies behind L.A.'s extraordinary ethnic transformation, it is to immigration and the immigrants that we now turn our attention.

## THE NEW IMMIGRATION

Unlike New York, Los Angeles is new to its present-day role as an immigrant mecca. While the comparatively late advent of immigration is not a uniquely Los Angeles phenomenon, L.A. has experienced immigration differently from almost all other major urban regions. This section briefly describes the characteristics of the new immigration to the United States and then focuses on those immigrants moving to Los Angeles.

### The New Immigration to the United States

Passage of the Hart-Celler Act in 1965 provides the conventional date for the onset of the new immigration to the United States. The 1965 reform transformed the immigration system with a few bold strokes. First, it abolished the old country-of-origins quotas, which allotted small quotas to southern and eastern Europe and still smaller—almost prohibitively small—quotas to Asia. Second, it established two principal criteria for admission to the United States: family ties to citizens or permanent residents or possession of scarce and needed skills. Third, it increased the total numbers of immigrants to be admitted to the United States.<sup>8</sup>

The system established by the 1965 reforms essentially remains in place to this day, despite constant debate and continuous overhauling. But the Hart-Celler Act spawned changes that were entirely different from its advocates' plans. The reformers thought that the new act would keep immigration to modest proportions. But for various reasons the numbers quickly spiraled; 7.3 million new immigrants arrived in the United States during the 1980s, an influx second only to the peak of 8.8 million newcomers recorded during the first decade of the twentieth century. To be sure, at 8 percent, the immigrants constituted a far more modest share of the nation's population in 1990 than was true in 1910, when fifteen of every hundred Americans were foreign-born. Still, the 1990 level represented a substantial increase over the 5 percent level recorded when the foreign-born share of the U.S. population hit its historic nadir in 1970.

A second unexpected twist concerned the act's beneficiaries. The 1965 legislation was principally targeted at eastern and southern Europeans, the groups hardest hit by the nativist legislation of the 1920s. By the 1960s, however, workers from Italy or Yugoslavia had fallen out of the orbit of trans-Atlantic migration. Instead, the newcomers who took advantage of the newly liberalized system came from Asia, Latin America, and countries of the Caribbean.

What no one expected in 1965 was the burgeoning of Asian immigration. The reforms tilted the new system toward immigrants with kinship

ties to permanent residents or citizens. There had been very little Asian immigration in the previous fifty years; how, then, could Asian newcomers find settlers with whom to seek reunification? The answer is that kinship connections were helpful but not essential. The 1965 reforms also created opportunities for immigrants whose skills—as engineers, doctors, nurses, pharmacists—were in short supply. Along with students already living in the United States, who enjoyed easy access to American employers, these professionals made up the first wave of new Asian immigrants, in turn creating the basis for the kinship migration of less-well-educated relatives. The system was sufficiently flexible for longer-established groups, like the Chinese, to renew migration streams while also allowing entirely new groups—most notably Koreans and Asian Indians—to put a nucleus in place and then quickly expand.<sup>9</sup>

Political developments added momentum to the migrant flow across the Pacific. Though the 1965 act allowed for a relatively limited influx of refugees, carefully defined to give preference to those fleeing Communist regimes, unexpected pressures repeatedly forced the United States to expand greatly its admission of refugees. The collapse of the U.S.-supported regime in South Vietnam, followed by Communist takeovers in Cambodia and Laos, triggered a sudden, massive outflow of refugees, many of whom settled on the West Coast. The first wave of exiles from the Southeast Asian elite was followed by a larger, more heterogeneous group of refugees in search of sanctuary and a new home in the United States. Thus, the original core of high-skilled immigrants from Asia rapidly grew. By the 1980s, Asia emerged as the number two source area of the foreign-born, accounting for 37 percent of all the newcomers who moved to the United States during the 1980s.<sup>10</sup>

Asian immigrants passed through the front door opened by the 1965 reforms in a variety of ways. Mexicans and later on Central Americans were more likely to come through the back door of unauthorized migration. The immediate roots of Mexican unauthorized migration lie further back, in the Bracero Program begun during the Second World War to eliminate shortages of agricultural workers. Ostensibly, the Bracero Program was destined for a short existence, and the workers it imported were supposed to head back to Mexico after a short stint of temporary labor in the United States. But the influence of agribusiness kept the Bracero Program alive until 1963, and with time, an increasing number of migrants dropped out of the bracero stream, heading for better jobs in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and other urban areas. By 1964, when Congress abolished the program, networks between the United States and sending villages throughout Mexico's central plateau were already in place, providing all the information and connections needed to keep the migrants coming, whether or not they had legal documents in hand.<sup>11</sup>

Once the former braceros abandoned the farm labor stream, the institu-

tional mechanisms of the 1965 act facilitated their passage to legal status. Marriage to a citizen or a legal resident, a change in the legal status of one's sibling, assistance from an employer eager to retain a skilled and valued hand—any one of these was enough to bring about the eventual transformation of yesterday's undocumented worker into today's legal immigrant. Since the newly minted legal immigrant could then bring over those immediate relatives still lingering in Mexico, albeit with some delay, the official statistics show a steadily expanding stream of legal migration from Mexico.

While Mexicans were drawn by the inducements of American employers, the Salvadorans and Guatemalans who headed for the U.S. border in increasing numbers in the late 1970s and afterwards were responding to different factors. Like the Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Laotians, the Central Americans were escaping political unrest, but unlike their Asian counterparts, the Central Americans had the bad fortune to be fleeing right-wing regimes propped up with U.S. government support. Hence, these newcomers mainly moved across the border as unauthorized migrants. As chapter 10 on Central Americans describes, court battles forced the U.S. government to grant some of these refugees temporary asylum in the late 1980s, though the number benefiting from this status has dwindled over the years, and at present the asylum itself seems doomed.

Just how many newcomers have arrived without authorization has long been a matter of dispute; wildly disparate estimates and guesstimates—ranging from 2 to 12 million—are stock-in-trade in the debate. Recently, demographers have settled on a methodology for “counting the uncountable,” which has yielded estimates on which most immigration researchers can agree. This methodology suggests an undocumented population of about 2 to 4 million residing in the United States as of 1980, of whom over half had come from Mexico.<sup>12</sup>

Doing something about undocumented immigration has dominated immigration policy debates ever since enactment of the Hart-Celler Act; with the passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, known as IRCA, Congress attempted to close the back door and control this unauthorized flow. IRCA had three major provisions: a so-called general amnesty for undocumented immigrants who had resided continuously in the United States since January 1, 1982; a second, “special agricultural workers” program, inserted at the behest of agricultural interests and with the help of California's then-Senator Pete Wilson, for agricultural workers who had been in the United States for a minimum of ninety days in the year preceding May 1986; and sanctions against the employers of illegal immigrants. In IRCA, undocumented immigrants found at best a “cautious welcome,” as Susan Gonzalez Baker concluded, with countless bureaucratic hurdles and anxiety-provoking administrative rules obstructing their path to amnesty.<sup>13</sup> As of 1992, 1.76 million persons had applied for IRCA's general amnesty, alongside approximately 1.3 million persons who used the special agricul-



tural worker option, a program widely known for its openness to fraud and abuse.

As expected, amnesty did diminish the pool of undocumented immigrants. Although Congress designed sanctions, and more stringent border controls were adopted to curb future undocumented flows, these efforts ultimately failed to stem the flow. Unauthorized migration clearly persists, contributing a net increment of 300,000 undocumented entrants each year.<sup>14</sup> The best estimates suggest that the total number of undocumented residents grew by over 50 percent between 1980 and 1992, even though more than 3 million persons had passed from illegal to legal status as a result of IRCA.<sup>15</sup>

Given the many circumstances of migration, it should be no surprise that the newcomers of the post-1965 years are an extraordinarily diverse lot. Though some experts have looked at the educational characteristics of the foreign-born to conclude that the "quality" of America's immigrant streams has gone down,<sup>16</sup> the extraordinary educational differences among various immigrant groups suggest that skill levels have gone up and down. Highly educated professionals and managers dominate some streams, most notably those from the Middle East, from Africa, and from South and Southeast Asia; among many of these groups, median levels of schooling leave America's native white workers far behind. Manual workers with little schooling predominate among other groups—Mexicans are the most conspicuous example—and the contribution of low-skilled workers to America's immigrant pool has risen substantially in recent years. Those populations with refugee origins tend to be internally diverse, with highly educated immigrants characteristic of the early wave and less-educated newcomers common among those who emigrate in later years. Thus, national origins and skills are inextricably intertwined, a fact of considerable importance for newcomers to Los Angeles and their fate.

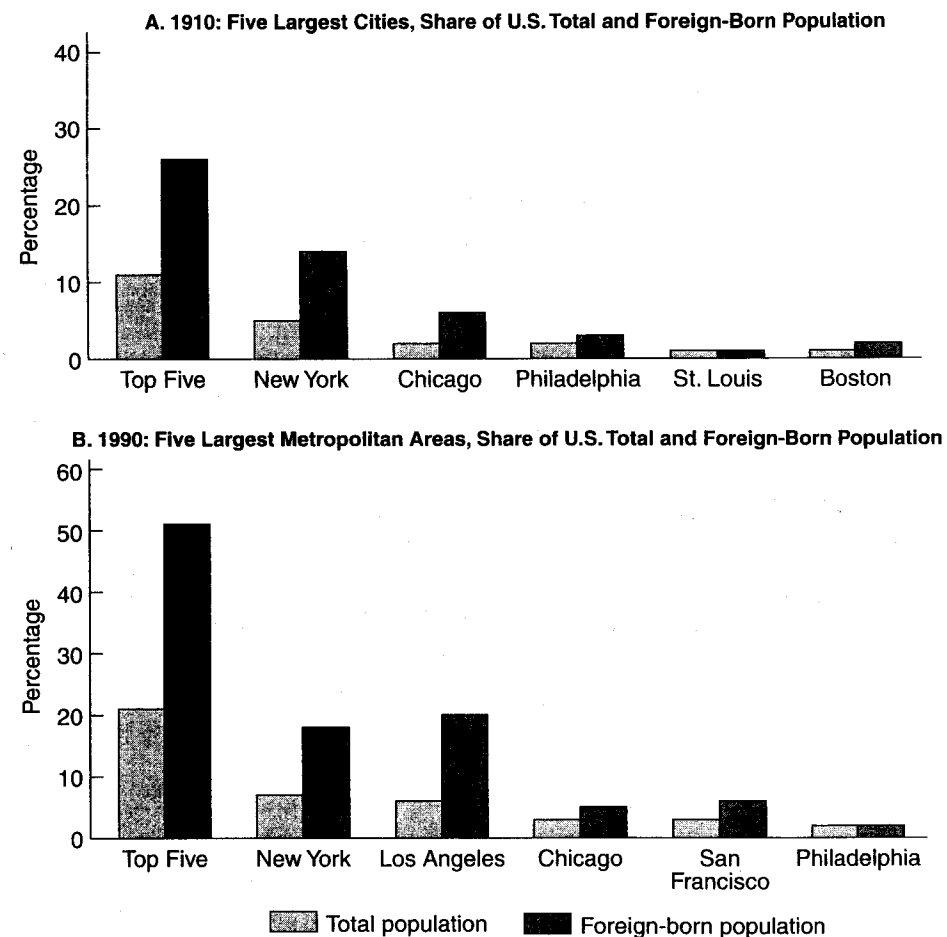
### Los Angeles and Its Immigrants

Immigrants to the United States have always been urban-bound. While one is tempted to argue that the situation is no different today, the urban attraction is in some sense greater than ever before. In 1910, when immigration from Europe hit its peak, the five largest U.S. cities contained just over a quarter of the nation's 13.5 million foreign-born residents. By 1990, when a different set topped the list of the largest metropolitan regions, just over half the country's immigrants lived in these five largest urban places. Of course, the United States is a more urban society than it was eighty years ago. But relative to total population, the five largest urban places of 1990 are comparable to the five largest cities of 1910 in their share of the foreign-born. Still, geographical concentration remains the salient trait of contemporary immigration.

Comparing Los Angeles with the major immigrant metropolises of the

past and present puts the distinctive features of today's immigrant L.A. into relief. Contemporary Los Angeles is home to a far larger share of today's foreign-born population than the immigrant New York of old. Large as it is, Los Angeles contains roughly the same portion of the nation's total population as did New York in the early 1900s. Consequently, immigrants are far more overrepresented in the Los Angeles of the 1990s than they were in the New York of the 1910s (see figure 1.2).

FIGURE 1.2 | Urban Immigrant Concentration, 1910 and 1990



In terms of immigrant density, the Los Angeles region, with 27 percent of its population foreign-born, does not quite compare with turn-of-the-century New York, 40 percent of whose residents had been born overseas. But as we reduce the geographical scale, going first to Los Angeles County, at 33 percent foreign-born, and then the city of Los Angeles, at 37 percent foreign-born, the resemblance to the older immigrant pattern becomes increasingly clear. Since 1990 already lies several years in the past, one can be sure that L.A.'s immigrant density has increased in recent years, moving the city closer to the type of immigrant city that seemed to belong to the dim past.

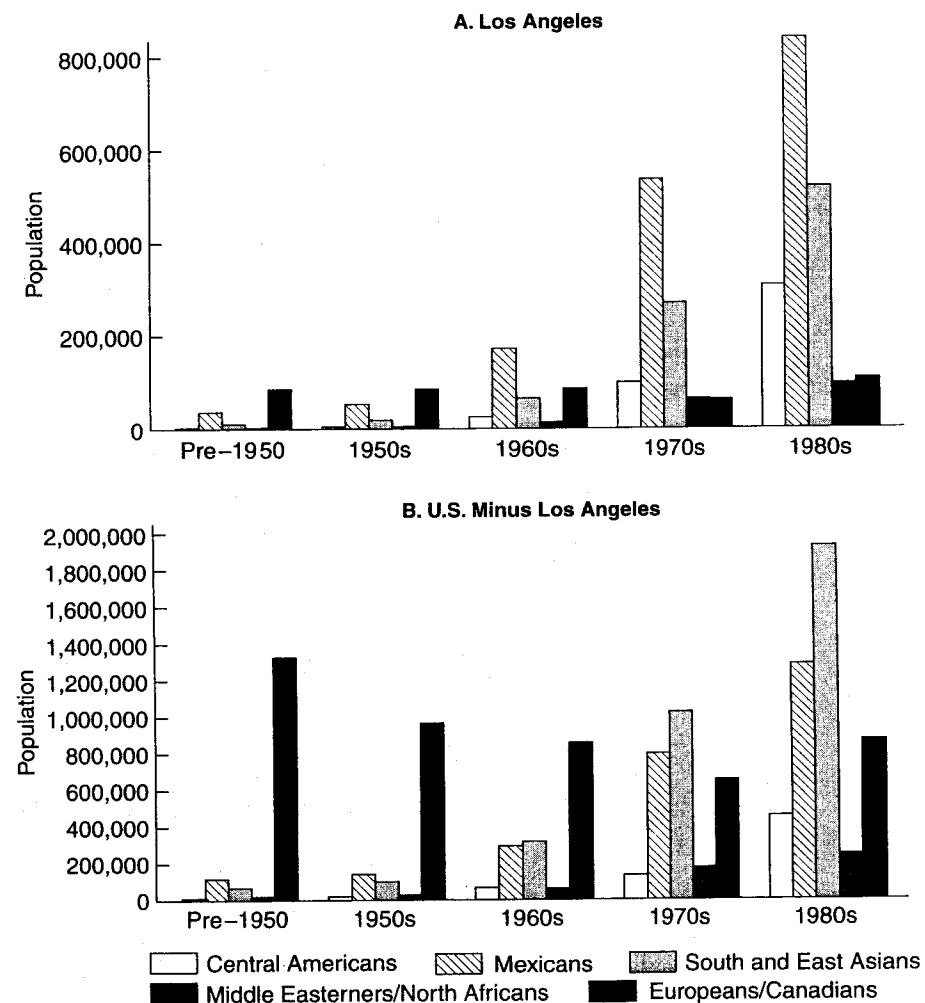
Impressive in these retrospective comparisons, contemporary Los Angeles also stands out from today's other major immigrant areas in more ways than one. In 1990, Los Angeles was home to 3.9 million immigrants, 400,000 more than New York, which stood in second place. In foreign-born proportion, its population outranked that of almost every other major U.S. city by a good degree; only much-smaller Miami, where 34 percent of the region's population comes from abroad, pulls ahead of L.A. on this count. L.A. also exceeded the others as a magnet for the very recently arrived; the immigrant wave of the 1980s made up 13 percent of the region's population, as opposed to 4 percent for the United States as a whole.

The advent of immigrant density also took place more suddenly in Los Angeles than almost anywhere else, Miami excepted. As we have already noted, the region's population leaped from 8 to 27 percent immigrant between 1960 and 1990, adding 3.3 million foreign-born residents in the process. By contrast, the other major metro areas had long served as entries for the foreign-born; hence, the new, post-1965 arrivals replaced an aging, dwindling mass left over from the earlier European immigrations.

In a sense, the key to understanding immigrant L.A. is the border and its proximity to the City of Angels. In 1990, more than half of L.A.'s post-65 adult immigrants came from three countries alone—Mexico, El Salvador, and Guatemala—with Mexico accounting for the great bulk of this group (see figure 1.3). Since many of these newcomers, as we have noted, entered the United States through the back door, L.A.'s role as the principal magnet for migrants from Mexico and Central America meant that it attracted far more than its share of unauthorized immigrants. The Los Angeles region accounted for a third of all the undocumented immigrants estimated during the 1980 census and roughly the same proportion of the population who obtained amnesty under IRCA. Despite the large number of amnesty applications, which temporarily diminished the number of unauthorized immigrants living in Los Angeles, the undocumented population continued to grow in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Elsewhere, immigrant origins are far more scrambled. New York's new immigrant population, for example, is extraordinarily diverse. Dominicans constituted the single largest group counted in the 1990 census, and they

**FIGURE 1.3 | 1990 Foreign-Born Population, by National Origin and Decade of Immigration**



accounted for just over 13 percent of the new immigrant arrivals. Chinese were the next largest, with 9.7 percent of new arrivals, followed by Jamaicans, with just over 6 percent; no other foreign country accounts for more than 5 percent of the new immigrant arrivals. Although other immigrant

cities are less diverse than New York, none approaches the Mexican/Central American dominance characteristic of L.A., Miami excepted. In this respect, the top immigrant cities more closely resemble the pattern for the United States as a whole, where Mexico, El Salvador, and Guatemala account for 25 percent of the foreign-born total.

Attractive as it may be for Mexicans and Central Americans drawn by the lure of *el norte*, Los Angeles also exerts its magnetic pull on Asia, the principal—though by no means unique—source of its high-skilled foreign-born arrivals. Starting from a relatively small base in 1970, the Asian population skyrocketed; as immigrants from China, the Philippines, Korea, Vietnam, and India (in that order) poured into the region, Asians emerged as L.A.'s third largest group, outnumbering the previously established African American population. The newcomers transformed Los Angeles into the capital of contemporary Asian America, pushing it well beyond the other major Asian American centers of New York, San Francisco-Oakland, and Honolulu. With the exception of the Vietnamese and the much less numerous Cambodians and Hmong, the new Asians became a source of extraordinarily high-skilled labor, importing schooling levels that left natives far behind as well as other endowments like capital and entrepreneurial talents that gave them a competitive edge.

Although they were the largest group, the Asians were not the only group of middle-class immigrants to gravitate toward L.A. New arrivals from the Middle East, many of them professionals and/or entrepreneurs, also converged on Los Angeles, yielding the largest regional concentration of Middle Easterners in the entire United States.

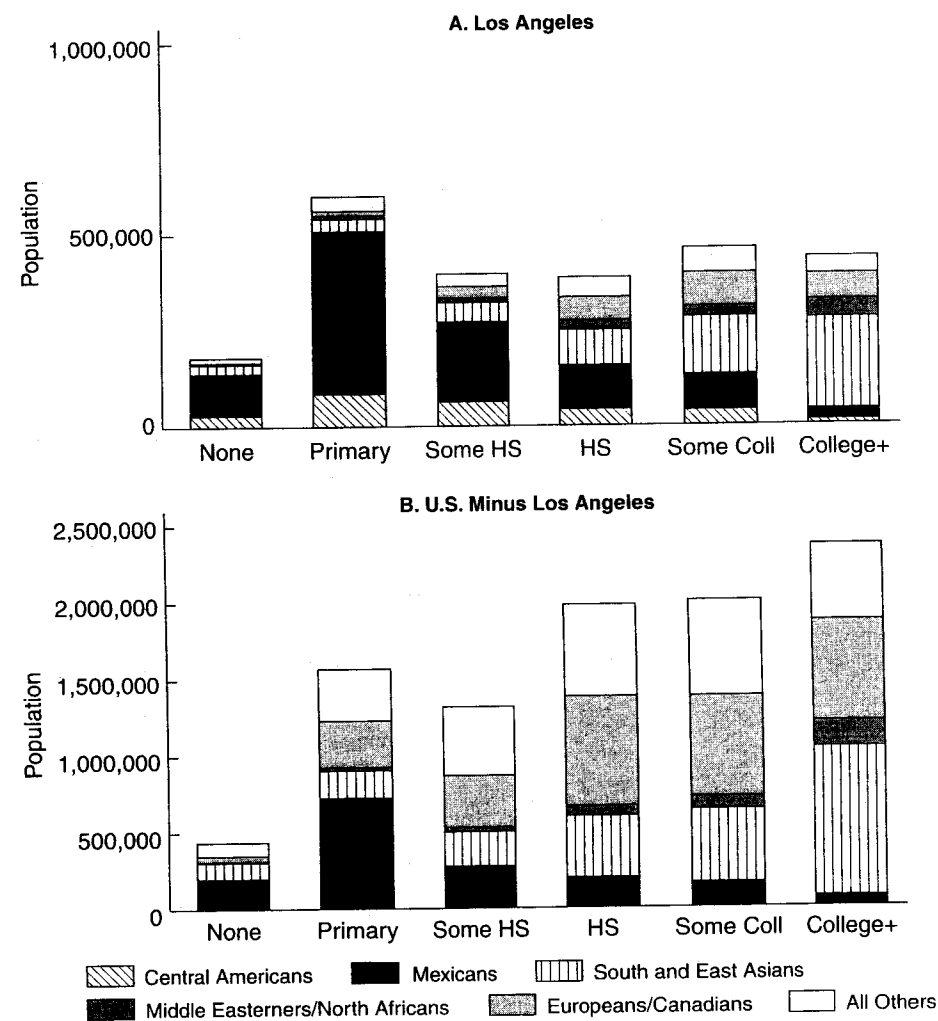
The newcomers to L.A. come from all walks of life, but the very distinctive national origins of L.A.'s immigrants means that its foreign-born mix is characterized not by diversity but by socioeconomic polarization. Elsewhere in the United States, as figure 1.4 shows, the educational profile of the foreign-born tilts toward the better educated; college graduates are as common among immigrants as among the native-born. In Los Angeles, immigrant ranks are weighted down by the prevalence of newcomers with little or no schooling, a reflection of the size and skill characteristics of the region's large Mexican and Central American populations.

Thus, the making of immigrant Los Angeles is the convergence of two broadly different types of migration streams. The combination of high- and low-skilled immigrants alters the conventional story of immigrant adaptation, as we shall now see.

**ASSIMILATION AND ITS PROSPECTS**

At the top of the immigration research agenda stands the question of how the newcomers change after they have arrived. The conventional wisdom,

**FIGURE 1.4 | Years of Education Completed, Foreign-Born Population 18 Years and Older, 1990**



both academic and popular, says that immigrants *should* change by entering the American mainstream. The concept of assimilation stands as a shorthand for this point of view.

The traditional paradigm of ethnic assimilation began with two crucial

assumptions: first, that immigrants arrived as "ethnics," and second, that they started at the bottom and gradually moved up. From these premises it followed that groups were most distinctive at the point of their entry into American society. Over time, the immigrants and their children would advance up the pecking order, narrowing the economic gap. Economic progress would yield cultural convergence; the newcomers and their offspring would give up their old country identities and cultural orientations as they increasingly resembled other Americans.<sup>17</sup>

Although it retains its defenders, assimilation theory no longer shapes the direction of current immigration research. The best-developed line of attack contends that the assimilation model works much better for some groups than for others. "Straight-line" theory does seem to fit the trajectory of European origin groups.<sup>18</sup> For Americans of European ancestry, nowhere has assimilation worked better than in Los Angeles. As chapter 14 shows, ethnicity among the region's whites appears to have melted under the California sun. Few traces of earlier differences persist; most have been lost in extensive mixing among whites of various ethnic backgrounds.

In general, the historical experience of immigrants of non-European origin requires a different approach. In straight-line theory, ethnic disadvantages ease and then gradually fade with the passage of time. But trends have followed a different path among the groups of non-European origin. In some cases—for example, Mexican Americans—time has worked less effectively, as chapter 9 will show. In part, the Mexican American lag reflects persistently lower skills, but it also results from an opportunity structure that rewards Mexican Americans less well than native whites. The Asian American experience in Los Angeles comes closer to the assimilation model of gradual convergence with native whites, but its historical background is one of much greater and more persistent disadvantage. And though the relatively small population of native-born Asians (mainly Chinese and Japanese) generally does very well, chapter 11 suggests that Asian Americans are not sharing the same rewards as their native white counterparts.

The latest wave of immigration to the United States confronts the assimilation framework with an additional, indeed thornier set of problems. The classic assimilation trajectory projects great initial difference that then narrows over time. That assumption made good sense at the turn of the century, when immigrants were a relatively homogeneous population narrowly concentrated at the bottom of the occupational scale. At the time, domestic servants and general laborers dominated the ranks of immigrants; one could assume that newcomers were similarly low-skilled and therefore entered at the bottom.<sup>19</sup>

But the immigrant situation at the end of the twentieth century looks very different because of the social and economic diversity among the newcomers who move to Los Angeles. A good number of the highly skilled,

often college-educated immigrants who have made L.A. their home begin, not at the bottom but in the middle class or beyond, as will be recounted in chapter 11, on Asians, and chapter 12, on Middle Easterners. Though ethnic studies usually focus on the downtrodden, the hidden story of today's immigration is the large number of newcomers who find themselves in a far more elevated status. In contemporary Los Angeles, such coveted occupations as medicine, dentistry, and various engineering and computer specialties have become immigrant niches. When else do we find a parallel in American ethnic history?

This starting point reverses the tenets of assimilation theory, since now the newcomers often start out close to parity with native whites, if not actually ahead. Consider the transformation of Beverly Hills, known globally for its movie stars but locally for its more recent evolution as the capital of the Iranian exile elite.<sup>20</sup> A still-better case is that of Monterey Park, a small city just east of downtown Los Angeles, which emerged in the late 1980s as the nation's first suburban Chinatown, thanks in part to the marketing efforts of a clever Chinese real estate developer who sold affluent Taiwanese on the idea of moving to the "Asian Beverly Hills." The ethnographer John Horton reported that

in this middle-class suburb . . . [a]n elderly white resident expressed a frequently heard complaint: "Before, immigrants were poor. They lived in their own neighborhoods and moved into ours after they learned English, got a good job, and became accustomed to our ways. Today, the Chinese come right in with their money and their ways. We are the aliens."<sup>21</sup>

While Monterey Park's sudden evolution seemed unusual to its established native white residents, it marked the beginning of a trend. Today, Monterey Park is just one piece in a growing belt of Asian middle-class suburbs in the western parts of Los Angeles County.

Many immigrants leap right into the middle class, not only because they import skills or capital but also because of their premigration exposure to American culture and American styles of living and making money. Part of the story involves the relentless spread of the mass media and the globalization of American culture; acculturation now begins before the newcomers ever move to the United States. But some newcomers are likely to arrive more acculturated than the rest, as chapter 5, on language, shows. Filipinos and Indians, for example, grow up in English-proficient environments. Others—Iranians, Israelis, Taiwanese, and Koreans—have moved through school systems in their home countries that gravitate toward the U.S. orbit. Many come to the L.A. region as students, motivated by the dream of returning home with a prestigious U.S. degree; years later, they discover that they have stayed for the duration. Still other immigrants, most notably the Taiwanese,

come as entrepreneurs, extending transoceanic business networks. Whatever the precise nexus connecting the region to the home societies from which its immigrants come, that linkage makes today's newcomers more "American" right from the start than were their predecessors of a century ago.

That the region's well-to-do immigrants begin with advantages does not mean that they compete on equal terrain. Middle-class Iranians, Koreans, and Chinese do better than the average white Angeleno, but they do not surpass their similarly educated white counterparts. The same proficiencies and skills yield better rewards for whites than for immigrants, as we shall see in the chapters on Middle Easterners and Asians. Consequently, the debate over immigrants' progress runs into complexities foreign to the simpler assimilation framework. Yes, the high-skilled immigrants are doing well, the argument goes, but having run into a glass ceiling, they do not do as well as they *should*. It is not clear what normative expectations inform that "should"; is it reasonable to anticipate that the foreign-born—as opposed to their children—will ever catch up with comparably schooled natives? Would such a forecast be in line with the historical record? However one answers these questions, the controversies engulfing the concept of "model minority"—dissected in chapter 11—illustrate the difficulties in analyzing the adaptation of the region's more successful newcomers.

As for those immigrants who start out at the other end of the skill spectrum, many of L.A.'s newcomers seem to resemble their turn-of-the-century counterparts; at first glance, the *ex-campesinos* from Mexico or El Salvador can be seen as the functional equivalents of the Slovaks, Poles, or Italians of yesteryear. But a closer look induces caution. If assimilation theory assumed a gap between natives and low-skilled newcomers, the disparity between "Anglos"—regional parlance for whites—and Mexican or Central American immigrants has grown to a yawning divide. Historians, for example, point to contrasting literacy rates as an indicator of skill differences at the turn of the century; in 1910, 61 percent of Italian immigrants aged ten or over were literate, as opposed to 95 percent of comparable native white descendants of native-born parents.<sup>22</sup> However dramatic this contrast may seem to historians, it pales alongside the disparities that we find in contemporary L.A. Take the case of completion of primary education. It was virtually universal in 1990 among native whites, but among the region's immigrant Latinos, one out of ten adults had no formal schooling at all, and an additional four out of ten had advanced no further than the eighth grade. One might argue that these initial deficits can and will be overcome with time. But the evidence that will unfold in the chapters to come presents a different, more somber picture. Latino immigrants have become more, not less, likely to live and work in environments that have grown increasingly segregated from whites. Relative to earlier arrivals, the most recently ar-

rived newcomers are lagging ever farther behind Anglos. And the transformations in the region's economy—the burgeoning of its low-wage sector, the attenuation of its high-wage manufacturing core, the expansion of its knowledge-intensive industries—create structural obstacles to moving beyond the initial low-level placements that the immigrants have achieved.

To all this we should factor in a final trait that sets today's immigration apart from earlier immigration histories—and from the intellectual attempts to understand those experiences. In a sense, the assimilation paradigm derives from the historically specific circumstances under which newcomers from Europe moved to and settled down in the United States. Whereas the immigrant waves from the Old World did bring extraordinarily large numbers of people to the U.S. shores, they lasted for limited periods of time. Immigration from northern and western Europe, for example, reached its peak before 1880 and then went into eclipse, in part because accelerated industrialization in the Old World kept would-be emigrants at home. The large-scale exodus from southern and eastern Europe similarly lasted for about forty years; in this case, the triumph of U.S. nativism, not home-country development, stopped the immigrant flows.

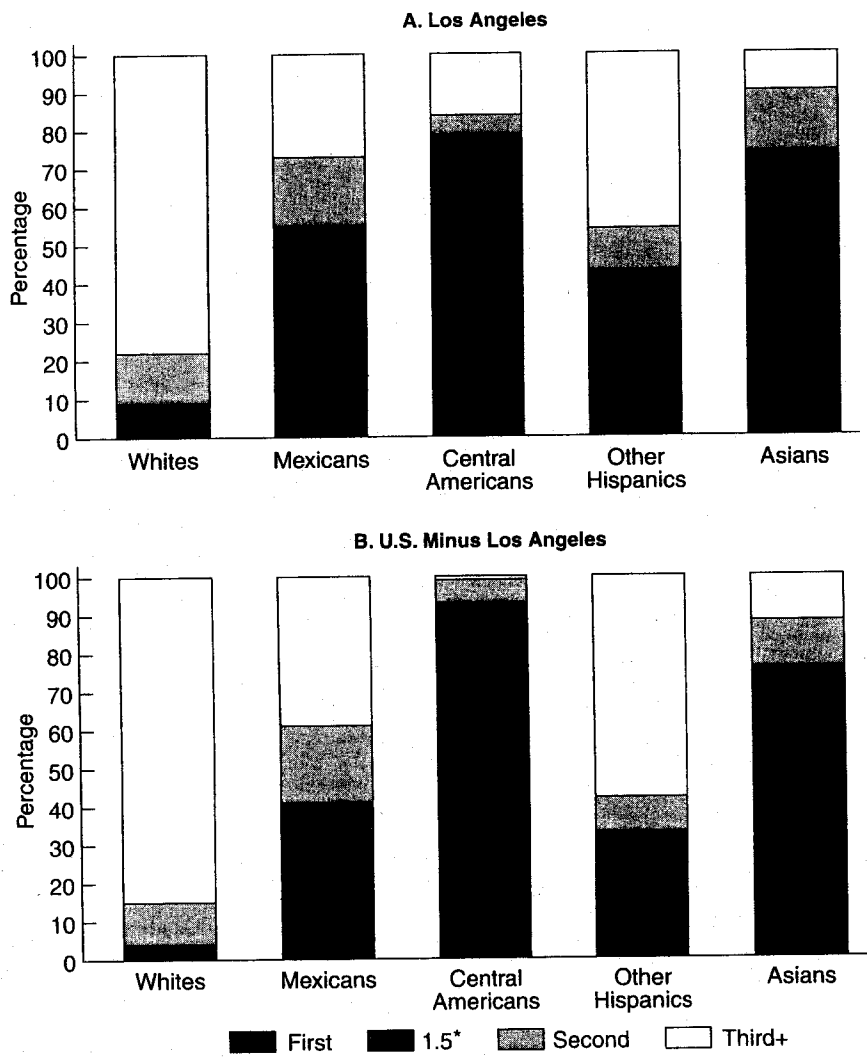
But the cessation of immigration, not its causes, is what counts for patterns of ethnic adaptation. Once the flow of newcomers stopped, old-country influences declined. As the immigrant presence weakened and diminished, the second generation moved to center stage, shifting out of the jobs, neighborhoods, and cultural institutions that the foreign-born had established. The assimilation paradigm tells the story of this particular sequence of generational succession.

That pattern stands at some remove from the contemporary scene. While contemporary immigration from Latin America and Asia is adding to a long-established population base, by their numbers the newcomers' overshadow the smaller second- and third-generation components. Mexicans and Asians are fragmented populations, made up of recent immigrants commingled with the descendants of earlier waves (see figure 1.5B). Fragmentation is particularly characteristic of Los Angeles, home to foreign-born populations that are proportionately larger than elsewhere in the United States (see figure 1.5A).

More important still is the fact that the large foreign-born population is newly arrived. Angelenos of Mexican birth constitute the longest-established, best-settled of the region's newcomer groups. But even among the Mexican-born, half came to the United States between 1980 and 1990. Other immigrant groups are equally, if not more heavily, tilted toward the recently arrived; 53 percent of the region's Middle Easterners, 59 percent of its Asians, and 70 percent of its Central Americans moved to the United States during the 1980s.

The prevalence of recent arrivals means that for many if not most of

**FIGURE 1.5 | Distribution of Generations in Major Ethnic Groups, 18 Years and Older, 1990**



\*Immigrated at age 10 or younger

the region's immigrants the process of assimilation has only begun. And the future holds more of the same. With immigration on the upswing, the "foreign-ness" of L.A.'s newcomer population will surely grow. Granted, time will push longer-established immigrants in the direction of assimilation and acculturation. But any continuing influx of large newcomer cohorts will certainly slow that process, and not just by maintaining an active link to the culture and language of the immigrants' home country. Growing numbers of immigrants will retard the process of diffusion out of established residential and occupational enclaves. They are also likely to yield changes in the behavior of native-born Angelenos, who have already begun to leave the region and whose continued exodus will produce lower rather than higher levels of ethnic mixing.

A future of continuing high levels of immigration also complicates the analytic tasks. Generation provides the master concept in the analysis of assimilation; with each succeeding generation the descendants of the immigrants move further and further away from the values, orientations, and identities of their ancestral forebears.<sup>23</sup> While native-born Mexicans, Chinese, and Japanese have moved down the road toward assimilation, as subsequent chapters will show, one must be wary about extrapolating from these experiences the prospects for the children or grandchildren of today's immigrants. As of this writing, Mexican, Chinese, and Japanese American adults still include the offspring of an earlier, much smaller immigration. Most importantly, they came of age at a time when the foreign-born presence did not loom so large and the region's economy was strong—conditions unlikely to hold for the children of today's immigrants.

In a sense, the analyst suffers the problems of the still photographer trying to capture a moving target. As we shall see in chapter 4, on residential change, the data show that the region's neighborhoods have greatly changed. Twenty years ago, Angelenos lived with people of their own ethnic kind; today, they live with neighbors of increasingly diverse origins. But is today's diversity a stable arrangement, or is it simply a stage in the evolution of a new type of homogeneity, in which most residents will be foreign-born? The answer lies largely in the size and attributes of tomorrow's immigration, characteristics that cannot be accurately predicted.

Of course, the prospects for ethnic Los Angeles do not hinge on the immigrants alone. Just how the newcomers change will depend a good deal on whether they succeed in moving ahead. But optimism about immigrants' progress is tempered by concern over the structural shifts under way in the region and in American cities at large. While immigrants join a much larger group of Angelenos imperiled by the urban economic transformations of the late twentieth century, their advent complicates the adjustments to the challenges of the 1990s.

## ETHNICITY AND OPPORTUNITY IN LOS ANGELES

If L.A.'s transformation from Iowa-on-the-Pacific to a multicultural metropolis has been more rapid than similar transitions in other urban areas, the scope and direction of change remain roughly the same. Like other metropolitan areas, L.A. now has a "majority minority" population, along with an economy that increasingly tilts toward higher-level service-sector jobs. Hence, the question of how L.A.'s population base fits into its evolving economy ranks high on the research agenda.

For the first half of this century, the nation's large urban areas worked as staging grounds for the integration of unskilled newcomer groups. Not only did cities have large concentrations of low-skilled jobs, but they had an industrial structure that allowed for upward movement based on the gradual acquisition of skills on the job. Low-skilled migrants could get jobs and slowly start the climb up the occupational ladder; with modest effort their children could count on surpassing the attainments of their parents.

But an influential set of writings, associated with such well-known researchers as William J. Wilson and John Kasarda, tells us that this scenario no longer holds. According to these authors, the postindustrial transformation of late-twentieth-century America has robbed urban areas of their absorptive capacity. Changes in technology and communications, argues John Kasarda, decimated the "traditional goods-processing industries that once constituted the economic backbone of cities, and provided entry level employment for lesser skilled African Americans." In return for the eroding factory sector, cities have gained a new economy dominated by "knowledge-intensive white-collar service industries that typically required education beyond high school and therefore precluded most poorly employed inner city minorities from obtaining employment."<sup>24</sup> Thus, on the demand side, the "very jobs that in the past attracted and socially upgraded waves of disadvantaged persons . . . were disappearing"; on the supply side, the number of "minority residents who lack the education for employment in the new information processing industries [was] increasing."<sup>25</sup> In part, the burgeoning ranks of low-skilled workers reflected the advent of African American baby boomers; in part, it resulted from the renewal of mass immigration and the arrival of poorly schooled newcomers. But whatever the precise source of demographic change, it boded ill for urban America and its future.

While this perspective has been enormously influential and has provided the underpinnings for the "underclass debate," it sheds little light on Los Angeles and its ethnic groups. From an empirical standpoint, the basic facts about the area's population and economic changes do not fit with the tenets of the skills-mismatch hypothesis just outlined. To begin with, the

story of industrial decline—whether of light manufacturing in New York and Philadelphia or of the auto and steel industries in the cities of the Great Lakes—has no ready parallel in Los Angeles. As chapter 8 shows, employment in L.A.'s goods-producing sector has followed an upward course for most of the postwar period. Admittedly, Los Angeles can now boast a "rust-belt" of its own, thanks to the demise of its auto and auto-related branch plants and the more recent erosion of its aerospace and defense sector. But manufacturing decline has come rather late in the day, and more importantly, the industries that have suffered the recent declines never provided much employment shelter to L.A.'s minorities.

A second problem concerns the interactions between supply and demand. The mismatch hypothesis began as an account of the economic problems of black men, and it is in that context that it has remained most compelling. In Los Angeles, as in other cities, the economic position of African American men has indeed changed for the worse; an increasing proportion of the region's black males are either out of work or have dropped out of the labor force entirely. But as will be seen in chapter 13, African Americans in Los Angeles are far better schooled than the recently arrived but more commonly employed immigrants from Mexico and Central America. The region's abundance of goods-producing jobs suggests that manufacturing decline is the wrong culprit for the deteriorating fortunes of less-educated black men. And black males enjoyed only limited success in gaining access to the factory sector in the first place, so they stood less exposed than others to the dislocation associated with any industrial decline.

Of course, as immigration has made urban populations increasingly diverse, the mismatch hypothesis has been recast; in this updated incarnation, the population mismatched with the urban economy is now an undifferentiated aggregate of everyone classified by the government as nonwhite. In this form, the mismatch hypothesis is fundamentally at odds with the immigrant phenomenon that has so dramatically transformed L.A. If indeed the region's employers are hiring none but the highly educated, why has the region emerged as the choice immigrant destination, particularly for newcomers with the lowest skills?

An oft-cited answer, and one more in keeping with the region's specific experience, suggests that immigration is part of a fundamental process of urban economic restructuring, in which the growth of services breeds a demand for both high- and low-skilled labor while increasingly excluding workers with middle-level qualifications. In this view, the postindustrial transformation of American cities yields service industries with a bifurcated job structure, offering both high wages and stable employment for highly educated workers and low wages and unstable employment for less-skilled workers displaced from manufacturing. The result is an increasingly high level of inequality. Job arrangements in the service sector also lack

well-developed internal labor markets, with the result that low-skilled workers, whether new entrants to the labor market or displaced workers from manufacturing industries, have few opportunities for upward mobility.

Restructuring, so the argument goes, works in dynamic relationship with immigration. By creating jobs for people with low skills, it also creates the demand for workers willing to work at low-status, low-paying jobs. While such low-wage jobs are increasingly found in the advanced services, the simultaneous proliferation of high-paid service workers adds further to the demand for immigrant workers. Once in place, the immigrants provide a cheap, easily managed labor force that can bolster the declining goods-producing sector and help revive sagging urban economies.<sup>26</sup> Thus, unlike the mismatch hypothesis, the restructuring hypothesis tells us that urban areas retain abundant, perhaps even increasing numbers of easy-entry jobs. The downside of the restructured metropolis is not the paucity of starting places, as in the mismatch view, but rather the absence of better jobs or developed mobility paths that would let the newcomers get ahead.

Even skeptics will admit that the restructuring hypothesis enjoys at least some validity when applied to Los Angeles. As we have noted, Los Angeles has become a favored place for the lowest-skilled among the nation's new arrivals. The region's massive absorption of immigrants has paralleled an equally great shift in its industrial structure: Low-wage, immigrant-dominated manufacturing industries have flourished, continuing to do well even in recessionary years, while high-wage, high-value-added manufacturing has foundered in a twenty-year-long state of decline. But there is more to this story, as chapter 8 shows; a new cultural division of labor is emerging, along with a widening high-wage/low-wage gap, and Hispanic immigrants are increasingly split off from the rest of the manufacturing work force in a tier of poorly paid jobs. Evidence of the linkage between restructuring and immigration need not be limited to manufacturing. Chapter 10, on Central Americans, for example, underlines the centrality of low-level service work for this recently arrived population; among Guatemalans and Salvadorans, one of every four works as a private servant, janitor, maid, or cook. For some groups, the immigrant job ceiling also appears to be very low—indeed, getting lower over time. Chapter 9 shows that the wage gap between Mexican immigrants and native whites has increased over time. The emergence of an hourglass economy may also provide the best explanation for the limited occupational attainments of the region's native-born Mexican Americans, a population that will expand rapidly in the very near future.

While it is a useful guide to the impact of changes in opportunity structures, the restructuring hypothesis is nonetheless incomplete. It offers a more plausible explanation of the immigrant convergence on L.A. than the mismatch hypothesis, but it treats the foreign-born as an undifferentiated mass, whereas the newcomers are highly diverse, not just in original charac-

teristics but in the social and economic experiences they undergo once in L.A. How immigrants do is influenced by the endowments they bring with them, and here the fact that Los Angeles has been the destination for a large group of highly skilled, sometimes affluent professionals and entrepreneurs is an especially important consideration. An adequate analysis must deal with the emergence of a large, diversified immigrant middle class, the growth of a variety of ethnic economies, as well as the expansion of the immigrant working class and a burgeoning lower class, with foreign- and native-born components.

More importantly, the restructuring hypothesis neglects the economic problems of blacks. As an explanatory framework, it shares the deficiencies of the mismatch approach, starting from the premise that workers are matched to jobs on the basis of skill. This assumption begs the question of why so many low-level jobs go to the newest arrivals from abroad and not to African Americans. And it forecloses the possibility of labor-market competition—between immigrants and various native groups and among different immigrant groups themselves.

In the end, both mismatch and restructuring approaches tell a story of impersonal structures inexorably working on an inert urban mass. In our view, by contrast, the historical transformations of L.A.'s economy yield a set of parameters for adaptation within which groups might follow a variety of possible paths. Seen in this light, the ethnic division of labor in L.A.'s economy represents a social arrangement, responding to broader economic forces but shaped by the various groups that make and maintain the structures of the region's economy.

As we have seen, L.A.'s ethnic groups differ from the outset. But they also vary in the historical context of incorporation, a point that directs our attention to the interaction between structures and groups. Because ethnic incorporation is a social process, seemingly similar groups get sorted into different positions. The contrast between Mexican and Central American immigrants nicely illustrates the point. As groups, both tend to cluster at the bottom tier of the region's economy, but not necessarily in the same positions. Domestic service, for example, which counts as a sector of high Central American concentration, employs a relatively low proportion of Mexicans, whereas agriculture, which still ranks high in the Mexican profile, has absorbed few Central Americans.

In the aggregate, individual cases of clustering yield distinctive occupational or industrial patterns. These patterns are measured with the index of dissimilarity (D), which reveals, for example, the percentage of Central Americans who would have to change jobs in order to have the same occupational distribution as Mexicans. While detailed discussion of the many sets of Ds will have to await the individual chapters, the reader can count on a wealth of evidence pointing to the central role of ethnicity in the ordering of L.A.'s economy. Clear lines of ethnic demarcation show up not



just among lower-skilled groups like Mexicans or Central Americans but among groups that are more likely to work in upper-tier positions—for example, the variety of Middle Easterners discussed in chapter 12. And in some cases, the economic disparities among groups conventionally gathered under the same ethnic rubric are large enough to bring the category itself into question, a theme that emerges from chapter 11, on Asians.

Ethnic economic distinctiveness often reflects the development of an ethnic niche, an occupational or industrial specialization in which a group is overrepresented by at least 50 percent. Ethnic networks sort workers among jobs, with the result that groups move into distinctive places in the labor market and then maintain those concentrations over time, albeit at varying rates of persistence.<sup>27</sup> The burgeoning of L.A.'s ethnic economies exemplifies this process, which we can trace through the development of initial specializations and then the diffusion of ethnic entrepreneurs into related occupations and trades. Chapter 7, on self-employment, illuminates the economic singularities in this classic ethnic niche. Not all groups move into entrepreneurship at equal rates; consider the contrast between Mexicans, among whom roughly seven out of every hundred men are self-employed, and Iranians, among whom one of every three men is working on his own account. Sorting also occurs among the most entrepreneurially active groups; the Chinese, for example, have carved out a niche in high-tech and advanced services, such as engineering services and data processing, while the Koreans concentrate in traditional middleman minority lines.

Business represents one classic ethnic niche, public employment another. In Los Angeles, as in most other American cities, the search for opportunity and mobility has taken African Americans deeply into the public sector. As chapter 13 shows, the black experience in government illustrates both the tendency toward concentration and its consequences: Just six government functions, each providing wages well above the region's average, employ 13 percent of the region's black work force.

In the conventional wisdom, convergence in niches is a transitory experience, limited to the first generation and then abandoned as later generations move up and diffuse through the occupational structure. Even the first generation is likely to spill over beyond the boundaries of the niche, since few economic specializations seem large enough to absorb a continuing influx of new arrivals.

But in Los Angeles, as in other metropolitan areas, ethnic concentration turns out to be an enduring element of the economic scene. Ethnic carrying capacity naturally differs from one industry or occupation to another; still, many of the groups studied in this book concentrate in some relatively small set of specializations. Nor does clustering inevitably diminish over time; the African American convergence on government employment has increased substantially in recent decades. The public sector seems a likely destination point for second-generation Mexicans as well as for Asians, who

have already established notable concentrations in a variety of government functions. And the group most concentrated of all turns out to be L.A.'s U.S.-born Jews, who have clustered in a particularly favorable set of postindustrial niches, as chapter 14 will show.

If ethnic ties pull one group of categorically distinctive workers into a set of occupations or industries, they may also lead to crowding, as the newest arrivals cluster in the very same activities that engage more established workers. Indeed, the prevalence of intragroup job competition seems to be the one point of consensus in the massive econometric literature on the subject, a finding consistent with the description in chapter 9 of the deteriorating economic prospects of Mexican immigrants. Conversely, ethnic sorting could also bar the route to others, in which case L.A.'s massive immigrant population might have gained jobs that would otherwise have gone to the region's native-born, an argument developed by several authors in this book, most notably Paul Ong and Abel Valenzuela. But one could also imagine a scenario in which ethnic networks bring in a new group of low-ranked outsiders, enabling a previously established group to jump up the ladder; it is precisely this pattern that appears to characterize the interaction between Latina immigrants and black women workers.

In the end, events on both supply and demand sides have probably reduced the region's ability both to absorb newcomers and to propel its residents up the occupational ladder; in this respect, the turn-of-the-century urban pattern seems unlikely to recur in late-twentieth-century Los Angeles. But if changes in demography and economy have limited the possibilities for some portion of L.A.'s myriad ethnic groups, they have not done so in the deterministic way that the literature often suggests. Since ethnicity turns out to be crucial in understanding who gets which jobs in L.A.'s economy and why, we can count on diverging ethnic fates as the region's cultural division of labor evolves.

#### **ABOUT THIS BOOK: ORGANIZATION, CONCEPTS, AND MEASURES**

A few words are needed to explain how this book is organized and to provide a brief, nontechnical overview of some of the recurrent themes and measures. Harold Rosenberg once described New York intellectuals as a "herd of independent minds," and some such combination of intellectual autonomy and collectivity applies to the authors who have written this book. While the authors here all thought and studied at the same institution (the University of California at Los Angeles) and frequently exchanged ideas and papers as this project evolved, the book should not be read as a group statement. Rather, it is a collection of closely related but still independently authored papers, which do not necessarily adhere to a single line. Similarly, the reader should be warned that the introductory and concluding chapters

do not so much represent the collective wisdom of the group as express the views of the editors (first Roger Waldinger and Mehdi Bozorgmehr jointly, and later Waldinger alone) and their understandings of the lessons to be distilled both from the chapters in the book and from the data on which those chapters are based.

All the authors agree, however, that Los Angeles is in the throes of an unprecedented ethnic transformation, largely brought about by immigration, with enduring consequences for all aspects of the region's life. We also agree that the job of understanding the ethnic changes underway in Los Angeles is fundamentally a comparative enterprise, in which the relevant contrasts are both external and internal, involving, on the one hand, whites—the socially, if not numerically, dominant group—and, on the other, any of the various subgroups that get lumped together under the conventional ethnic labels.

These essays also share an assumption about what the word *ethnic* denotes when attached to the name of a place, as in *Ethnic Los Angeles*. For our purposes, *ethnic* is an adjective that refers to the culture, language, history, or religion of a category of people. By contrast, when linked to the noun *group*, the word *ethnic* implies that members have some awareness of their distinctive cultural characteristics and historical experiences and that they share a sense of attachment to or identification with the group.<sup>28</sup> In this book, we begin with the understanding that what is ethnic about Los Angeles is the proliferation of people sharing common historical experiences and linked through a set of connections that promote regular patterns of interaction. Consequently, we focus on the subcultural dimensions of ethnicity—that is to say, the social structures that bind an ethnic group, attaching members to one another and either circumscribing or promoting their interactions with outsiders. These social structures consist, broadly speaking, of two parts: (1) the networks around which ethnic communities are arranged, and (2) the interlacing of those networks with positions in the economy and space.

Seen from this perspective, the social structures that bind an ethnic group are in part a matter of choice, in part a matter of constraint. It follows, therefore, that race is a special case of the broader ethnic phenomenon, in which the degree of separation from others is mainly, if not entirely, imposed by outsiders; members of a racial group may wish to work or live together or marry one another but have few options to do otherwise if they so prefer. In this sense, Irving Kristol's famous article "The Negro of Today Is Like the Immigrant of Yesterday"<sup>29</sup> got the issue right, although the interpretation was largely, if not completely, wrong. As their subtitles indicate, the chapters on the population of Mexican origin and on Central Americans suggest that today's newcomers might be headed toward a dead end, a trajectory quite different from that followed by their predecessors, and one that would move these groups closer to a situation of a racial kind.

By contrast, the chapter on African Americans, emphasizing the development of *two* black L.A.s that differ considerably in their options for work and residence, argues that at least some component of this population is moving to a situation of a more conventional ethnic kind.

Our approach also implies that the relevant categories are not given but constructed. Ethnic groups are made by insiders interacting with outsiders under conditions not of their own making. Here, we are engaged in a simpler, though certainly debatable, enterprise of applying labels for the purposes of comparing and contrasting. We make no claim that our labels reflect the ways in which the various peoples of Los Angeles see themselves; we do believe that our categories are sensible, given the work we have set out to do and the danger of proliferating groups into an intractable number. Of course, we are not free to combine people into groups as we choose; given our reliance on census data, we have to work with the various ethnic categories developed by the Census Bureau over the past decades. These categories have their virtues, most notably a growing accuracy in identifying persons who might be members of minority groups. They also have their faults, including the tendencies to pigeonhole people into groups that make no sense, as when persons originating from any part of Asia that lies west of Pakistan get turned into whites, and to deny ethnic categories the fluidity they possess. Readers interested in details about census definitions and how they are used to create the groups we examine are urged to consult the technical appendix to this book.

We have organized the book to take two passes at the region's changing ethnic configuration. The first, consisting of a series of thematic essays, surveys a set of topics holistically, seeking to understand the pattern of social and economic changes among many, if not all, of the region's major groups. In the second pass, we look at the major groups one by one. While the authors do not march in lockstep fashion with one another, our focus on the social structures of ethnicity has led us to cover a series of recurring topics in roughly similar ways, allowing readers to attempt their own comparisons. Here, of course, the potential for comparison is constrained by our own assessment of which groups deserve special scrutiny and how those groups should be defined. Considerations of numbers, relevance, and the space available in this book dictated our choice: Seeking to focus on the most important groups, with importance usually defined in terms of size, we have devoted individual chapters to the Mexican-origin population, to Central Americans, to Asians, to Middle Easterners, to African Americans, and to Anglos and white ethnics. Mexicans make up the largest of the region's immigrant groups; they are dominant among Latinos, who in turn rank second, after whites, among the region's ethnoracial groups (see chapter 3, figure 3.3). Since the Mexican-origin population is also split, roughly in half, between native- and foreign-born components, and since native/foreign differences are considerable and command our attention, it seemed

appropriate to devote a separate chapter to Central Americans, a recent, rapidly growing, and immigrant-dominated group. Asians rank third among the region's ethnic groups, albeit as an extraordinarily varied collection differing by nationality and birthplace, of whom only the Chinese exceed the Salvadorans in numbers. African Americans fall into fourth place among the region's major groups; the Middle Easterners are the last. Although a hodgepodge of different nationality and ethnic groups, the Middle Easterners possess a basic social and economic commonality, and their immigration has given Los Angeles the largest Middle Eastern concentration in the United States. In view of the historic importance of ethnic differences among whites, we have devoted a final chapter to a comparison of subgroups within the region's European-origin population.

The group chapters use a series of common indicators designed to examine the social structure of L.A.'s ethnic groups in terms of specialization and rank. These indicators are described briefly in the paragraphs that follow; further detail and clarification are provided in the technical appendix to this book.

Specialization refers to the horizontal dimension of ethnic social structure; here, the emphasis is on the boundaries that distinguish one group from another. One convenient way of thinking about ethnic distinctiveness is to begin with those boundaries that lie closest to the self and then move outwards. In a recurrent note of discontent, our authors complain that the census tells us nothing about ethnic self-concept or identity. It does, however, provide information on the ethnic structures of a reasonably intimate relationship, namely marriage, and our first indicator is the traditional measure of ethnic in- and out-marriage or intermarriage. For example, a raw in-marriage rate tells us that 24 percent of Russian-ancestry women aged 25-34 years are married to comparably aged Russian-ancestry men. While informative, this raw rate tells us much less than the whole story, since the Russian-ancestry population is small, and Russian-ancestry men are a relatively rare element in the pool of marriageable men and therefore available in limited supply. To compensate for this problem, we also calculate the *odds ratio* of in- to out-marriages, which, after adjusting for differences in group size, shows that Russian-ancestry women are thirty-eight times more likely than other women to marry Russian-ancestry men. By contrast, in-marriage rates are identical among comparable English-ancestry women, but since the English-ancestry population is so much larger, English-ancestry women are only six times more likely than other women to marry English-ancestry men.

Since personal relationships often arise in a local context, residential patterns constitute another component of the horizontal dimension of ethnic social structures.<sup>30</sup> We are interested both in differences in the distribution of groups over space and in the way in which those distributions affect

the types of in- and out-group contacts available within neighborhood settings. The *exposure index* ( $P^*$ ) measures how likely members of a *subject group* (for example, Salvadorans) are to be exposed either to members of a *target group* (let us say, Mexicans) or to their own group. This measure is dyadic and ranges between zero (no likelihood of contact) and one (certainty of contact).  $P^*$  is also an asymmetric measure, since differences in the relative size of groups affect the likelihood of contact. For example, the Salvadorans, a small group, tend to have frequent exposure to Mexicans, yielding a relatively high score of .36 on  $P^*$ ; Mexicans, a very large group, have relatively little likelihood of contact with Salvadorans, which produces the very low  $P^*$  score of .03.

The *index of dissimilarity* ( $D$ ) is like the exposure index in that it ranges between 0 and 1, but it measures the degree of difference between the distributions of two groups. As of 1990, the index of residential dissimilarity in the Mexican/Salvadoran case stood at .54, indicating that the residential patterns of these two groups overlap to a considerable extent, despite the differences in contact probabilities. More precisely,  $D$  tells us that 54 percent of the region's Mexican population would have to move to have the same distribution as the region's Salvadoran population. Unlike  $P^*$ ,  $D$  is a symmetric measure; consequently, full integration of the region's Mexican and Salvadoran residents would require 54 percent of the region's Salvadoran population to move.

We also use the index of dissimilarity ( $D$ ) to describe the ethnic division of labor, the way in which groups are sorted among occupations and industries. The same interpretation that is used for residential dissimilarity applies when  $D$  is used to describe the degree of difference between occupational or industrial distributions. The *ethnic niche* is the concept that we apply to identify the distinctive occupational or industrial clusters that groups develop. For the purposes of this book, a niche is an occupation or an industry in which a group is overrepresented by at least 50 percent. For example, blacks constitute 6.6 percent of all employed persons in the region but 12 percent of all janitors; dividing the black share of janitors (.12) by the black share of total employment (.06) yields an index of representation of 1.8, which makes janitors a black occupational niche.

One could argue that the ethnic division of labor involves issues of rank more than specialization. Indeed, the traditional approaches to the adaptation of ethnic groups assumed that segregation in the labor market was a transitory phenomenon, associated with initial disadvantage and transcended as groups moved ahead and diffused throughout the economy. Since we make no such assumption, contending instead that ethnic niches may be either temporary or durable and that ethnic group mobility may take the form of either diffusion or persistent concentration, we think of the ethnic division of labor as pertaining to the horizontal dimension of

ethnic social structures. Nonetheless, ethnic niches clearly differ in the quality of the jobs they contain, and we use several straightforward indicators to show how one group's niches compare with another's.

The vertical dimension of ethnic social structures concerns the degree of ethnic inequality; in pursuing this issue, we repeatedly ask how well the various groups of ethnic outsiders are doing relative to the region's dominant ethnic group, native whites. For the most part, those comparisons use simple descriptive statistics that require no further elaboration. But efforts to measure ethnic economic disparities often involve a two-part question: First, we want to know how much of the difference is due to the fact that a given group has not yet caught up to native whites on some crucial ingredient to economic success, such as education. Second, we want to know how the disparity might change if there were no background differences among persons of the same gender, so that the average Mexican American male, for example, had the same education as the average native white male. To answer these questions, we first look at *raw earnings* among persons with at least \$1,000 of earnings in the year prior to the census and then compute their *adjusted earnings*, assuming that members of a group had the same background characteristics as native whites of the same gender.

Not all the group chapters use all these indicators, since their authors have quite rightly varied in their decisions as to which aspects of ethnic social structure deserve greater emphasis. Still, there is sufficient uniformity for the reader to make an informed judgment about the shape of ethnic differences in contemporary Los Angeles. We invite the reader to do so and then see how this assessment compares with our own appraisal, which appears in the concluding chapter to this book.

### Notes to Chapter 1

1. For an assessment of the civil unrest of 1992 and its implications, see the essays in Mark Baldassare, ed., *The Los Angeles Riots: Lessons for the Urban Future* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1994).
2. This definition is identical to the Census Bureau's definition of the Los Angeles Standard Consolidated Statistical Area.
3. Robert M. Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis: Los Angeles, 1850-1930*, 2nd ed., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).
4. Major annexations ceased after 1927. Though many smaller additions were subsequently made, almost all involved relatively small parcels, varying from less than one acre to one hundred acres. As the population mushroomed, the city also experienced numerous secession efforts, generally unsuccessful, with the great exception of West Hollywood, which became a separate municipality during the 1980s. See Winston W. Crouch and Beatrice Dinerman, *Southern California: A Study in Development of Government for a Metropolitan Area* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), chapter 6.

5. Edward Soja, "Los Angeles, 1965-1992: From Restructuring-Generated Crisis to Crisis-Generated Restructuring," in Allen Scott and Edward Soja, eds., *The City: Los Angeles and Urban Theory at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, forthcoming); Joel Garreau, *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier* (New York: Doubleday, 1991); Rob Kling, Spencer Olin, and Mark Poster, *Postsuburban California: The Transformation of Orange County since World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), chapter 1.
6. Allen J. Scott, *Technopolis: High-Technology Industry and Regional Development in Southern California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 13-14.
7. The data for Los Angeles apply to the region; in Los Angeles County, the foreign-born share of the population was half a percent higher.
8. David Reimers, *Still the Golden Door: The Third World Comes to America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).
9. The same trajectory was followed by other groups—various Middle Easterners and Africans—with the result that the immigrant population diversified to groups that had never previously made the United States their home.
10. Calculated from *1991 Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1992).
11. Ernesto Galarza, *Merchants of Labor: The Mexican Bracero Story* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: McNally and Loftin, 1964); Douglas Massey, et. al., *Return to Aztlan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).
12. Robert Warren and Jeffrey Passel, "A Count of the Uncountable: Estimates of Undocumented Aliens Counted in the 1980 United States Census," *Demography* 24 (1987): 375-93.
13. Susan Gonzalez Baker, *The Cautious Welcome: The Legalization Programs of the Immigration Reform and Control Act* (Santa Monica, Calif.: Rand Corporation, 1990).
14. Barry Edmonston and Jeffrey Passel, "The Future Immigrant Population of the United States," in Edmonston and Passel, eds., *Immigration and Ethnicity: The Integration of America's Newest Arrivals* (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, 1994), chapter 11.
15. Robert Warren, *Estimates of the Unauthorized Immigration Population Residing in the United States, by Country of Origin and State of Residence: October 1994* (Immigration and Naturalization Service Statistics Division, 1994), 30.
16. See George J. Borjas, *Friends or Strangers* (New York: Basic, 1990). Borjas argues that educational levels among immigrants have declined over the past several decades.
17. Milton Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964); Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1969).
18. Herbert J. Gans, "Second-Generation Decline: Scenarios for the Economic and Ethnic Futures of the Post-1965 American Immigrants," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 15 (1992): 173-92.

19. Richard Easterlin, "Immigration: Social and Economic Characteristics," in S. Thernstrom, ed., *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980).
20. Ron Kelley, "Wealth and Illusions of Wealth in the Los Angeles Iranian Community," in Ron Kelley, Jonathan Friedlander, and Anita Colby, eds., *Iranageles: Iranians in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 247-73.
21. John Horton, *The Politics of Diversity: Immigration, Resistance, and Change in Monterey Park, California* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 20-21.
22. Calculated from Susan Cotts Watkins, ed., *After Ellis Island: Newcomers and Natives in the 1910 Census* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation Press, 1994), 376.
23. Richard Alba, *Ethnic Identity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).
24. John Kasarda, "Cities as Places Where People Live and Work: Urban Change and Neighborhood Distress," in Henry Cisneros, *Interwoven Destinies: Cities and the Nation* (New York: Norton, 1993), 82. The article we are citing here provides a particularly succinct and clear expression of Kasarda's views, which he has elaborated in many publications over the past fifteen years or so. For other examples, see his "Entry-Level Jobs, Mobility, and Urban Minority Employment," *Urban Affairs Quarterly* 19 (1984): 21-40; "Jobs, Mismatches, and Emerging Urban Mismatches," in M.G.H. Geary and L. Lynn, eds., *Urban Change and Poverty* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1988, 148-98; "Structural Factors Affecting the Location and Timing of Urban Underclass Growth," *Urban Geography* 11 (1990): 234-64. William J. Wilson, a still more prominent mismatch proponent, liberally cites Kasarda's findings and endorses his views, in his influential book, *The Truly Disadvantaged* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).
25. Kasarda, "Cities as Places," 83.
26. Saskia Sassen, *The Mobility of Capital and Labor* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988); *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Bennett Harrison and Barry Bluestone, *The Great U-Turn* (New York: Basic Books, 1988).
27. Though using the term "special niches," Stanley Lieberman similarly argues that "most racial and ethnic groups tend to develop concentrations in certain jobs which either reflect some distinctive cultural characteristics, special skills initially held by some members, or the opportunity structures at the time of their arrival" (*A Piece of the Pie* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980], 379). He then notes that "such specialties can only absorb a small part of a group's total work force when its population grows rapidly or is a substantial proportion of the total population"—a contention not supported by the evidence in this book. For a formulation analogous to ours, see Suzanne Model, "The Ethnic Niche and the Structure of Opportunity: Immigrants and Minorities in New York City," in Michael Katz, ed., *The Historical Origins of the Underclass* (New York: Princeton University Press, 1993). Model operationalizes a niche as a "job" in which the "percentage of workers who are group members is at least one and a half times greater than the group's percentage in the labor force" (164). For a further discussion of the ethnic niche and its consequences, see Roger Wal-

- dinger, *Still the Promised City? New Immigrants and African-Americans in Post-Industrial New York*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).
28. William Petersen, "Concepts of Ethnicity," in S. Thernstrom, ed., *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980).
29. Irving Kristol, "The Negro of Today Is Like the Immigrant of Yesterday," in Peter I. Rose, ed., *Nation of Nations: The Ethnic Experience and the Racial Crisis* (New York: Random House, 1972); Kristol's essay originally appeared in the *New York Times Magazine* in 1966.
30. We recognize that there is also a hierarchical dimension to the diffusion of groups across space, since localities differ widely in the amenities and resources they provide.

## Ethnicity and Opportunity in the Plural City

Roger Waldinger

BOOSTERISM HAS NEVER been alien to Los Angeles, but the seemingly boundless prosperity of the 1980s—that last great expansionary wave—pushed it to new heights. “Just as New York, London and Paris stood as symbols of past centuries,” proclaimed the Final Report of the Los Angeles 2000 Committee, “Los Angeles will be THE city of the 21st century.”<sup>1</sup> Unlike past visions of Los Angeles as the best of all possible worlds, with no place for ethnic outsiders, *LA 2000* saw “a mosaic with every color distinct, vibrant, and essential to the whole” and embraced it. The newcomers transforming Southern California were certainly different, but difference made L.A. not only bigger but better than before. The emerging multi-ethnic Los Angeles, asserted the report’s authors with confidence, was a “community that welcomes and encourages diversity and grows stronger by taking the best from it.”<sup>2</sup>

So much for prophecy. A few years into the 1990s the optimism that suffused *LA 2000* vanished. The long tide of postwar, Cold War–induced prosperity came to a crashing halt early in the decade, as factories either closed or decamped, retailers and banks showed managers and clerks to the streets, and property values plummeted. Gradually it became clear that Angelenos were witnessing the end not of a boom but of the region’s near-continuous history of growth.

With good times gone, the region’s hospitality to outsiders disappeared. Never happy about the influx of the foreign-born—though not averse to employing newcomers willing to work at bargain rates—California’s badly rattled Anglos decided that it was time to “save our state” by stopping illegal immigration. The occasion for doing so was

*(photos on previous page, from top to bottom)*

Romanian Baptists run “Kinder Cuts,” a children’s hair salon, La Habra, 1993; Russian sign at a drug store, West Hollywood, 1994; Little India, Artesia, 1993 (Artesia and neighboring Cerritos are now among the most ethnically diverse communities in the United States); Latino workers salvage bricks from an earthquake-destroyed store, Whittier, 1988; Whittier College graduation, 1993. (Photos copyright Stephen J. Gold.)

the election season of 1994; the mechanism was California's plebiscitarian democracy, which allows for referenda on proposed changes to the state constitution.

A motley coalition of right-wingers, environmentalists, and former officials of the Immigration and Naturalization Service launched a campaign to add a constitutional amendment denying illegal immigrants all but the most essential state services. The "save our state" measure, which in due course became Proposition 187, was of dubious legality, shutting illegal immigrant children out of schools when the constitutional right to education for all resident children, legal or otherwise, had been reaffirmed by the Supreme Court just ten years before. And it had little dollar-saving value, since enforcing exclusion carried a significant monetary cost, regardless of legalities or ethics. But the voters had little patience for niceties such as these, and the state's political leadership saw no capital to be gained from persuading them to think otherwise. Indeed, the safe money lay in leading the anti-immigrant charge. No matter that Governor Pete Wilson, as a U.S. senator, had fought hard for a temporary migrant-worker program tailor-made for the needs of the state's growers, nor that he had gladly acquiesced in the special agricultural workers' amnesty, written by two California congressmen and a New York colleague in a way that gave carte blanche to virtually any illegal with sufficient nerve, determination, and the necessary false documents. Now gains were to be made by urging the electorate to vote their fears, and Wilson proved up to the task.

The Proposition 187 campaign and the reactions it evoked exposed the political fault lines dividing Californians of all ethnic hues and stripes. With 187 a surefire winner among white voters, still the dominant bloc in the electorate, few politicians had the stomach for open, high-profile opposition until the election's closing weeks. Latinos, who initially told pollsters that they too favored a halt to illegal immigration, eventually took umbrage; seventy thousand demonstrators, many waving Mexican flags, crowded downtown L.A. in October 1994 to rally against 187. The following weeks saw high school students, the next generation of voters, take their protests to the streets. Toward the end of the campaign, right-thinking Anglos also found the courage of their convictions and led a chorus of criticism against 187 and its deficiencies on both constitutional and moral grounds. As editorialists fulminated and national leaders from both parties joined in the attack, 187 began losing stock in the opinion polls.

Californians talked differently in the privacy of the voting booth; Proposition 187 won handily, with over 59 percent of the vote. Though 187 did best among Anglos, it had broad appeal. Half the black and Asian voters and more than one quarter of the Latino voters also voted yes. Legal action stopped enforcement within a week of 187's passage, and as of this writing the amendment's practical future remains uncertain. But there can be little doubt that California, with its fifty-two electoral votes, sent Washington a message that will not be ignored.

Behind the passage of 187 lies another story, the one that we have tried to tell in this book: There is trouble in the suburban paradise that was once L.A., trouble connected to the sudden and deep ethnic shifts that have transformed the region over the past two decades. Immigration, of both the illegal and, more importantly, legal variety, has been the driving force of change; since 1965, more immigrants have flocked to the Los Angeles region than to anywhere else in the United States. In retrospect, the timing of the immigrant influx could not have been worse. Though the immediate roots of today's immigration stretch back to the 1960s, the immigrants came in dizzying numbers in the very late 1980s, just when the supernova of L.A.'s economy was about to explode. And the choice of destination may not have been the wisest; Los Angeles had grown through migration, but it had historically preferred migrants of the midwestern, white, Protestant type. Of course, African Americans, Mexicans, and Asians had also headed for L.A. in the past, but they had rarely been treated with much kindness, nor had they enjoyed the full fruits of the region's bounteous economy. Never having fully accepted the minority residents who had previously made L.A. their home, the region was poorly prepared for the avalanche of immigrants who arrived after 1965.

But all that is history; Los Angeles is now profoundly, irremediably ethnic. The issue confronting the region is whether this newly polyglot metropolis can work. And that is not a question for the region alone. In L.A., late twentieth-century America finds a mirror to itself. Los Angeles, after all, is not an old, decaying inner city. Instead, it is America's quintessential suburb, the dynamic product of postwar U.S. capitalism at its most robust, and for that reason, as the writer David Reid noted, "the American city the world watches for signs and portents."<sup>3</sup> If residents and prognosticators are right in their sense of foreboding and gloom, then the rest of the country is unlikely to do better than L.A. in its adjustment to the new demographic reality and its implications. But L.A.'s popular transformation from dreamland to dystopia can also be read as a sign of the anxiety aroused by the rapid, unexpected ethnic shifts of the last decade. Before we write its obituary, there is still time for a realistic assessment of L.A.'s encounter with ethnic change. As will be seen in the pages to follow, the lessons learned from this book about ethnic Los Angeles provide reason for trepidation, but also for hope.

#### **OPPORTUNITY AND DISADVANTAGE IN THE PLURAL CITY**

If Angelenos have lost heart over the region's changing fortunes and new demographics, they should be excused; social scientists tell them two conflicting stories about the relationship between the modern American urban economy and its increasingly multicultural population base, and the news from both stories is bad. The received academic wisdom emphasizes the



passing of the city of production and its baneful consequences for the urban, largely minority poor. In this view, the advent of the postindustrial urban economy of producer services and knowledge-intensive jobs has been good for the well-schooled but leaves out the largely nonwhite unlettered, no matter how willing they may be. The rival interpretation tells a tale of occupational polarization amidst industrial transformation; urban high-tech postindustrial development comes at a price, measured in the decline of the well-paying factory sector and its replacement by proliferating low-skill, low-income jobs. In the new polarized metropolis, minorities serve as the new drawers of water and hewers of wood and have little chance of making small steps toward the middle class.

Notwithstanding the contrast, the two stories accent similar themes. Each account forecasts an increasingly divided—indeed dual—metropolis. At the top stands a growing cadre of well-paid, highly educated labor; depending on one's point of view, the bottom is either taken up by an underclass excluded from employment or else an increasingly impoverished working class. Either way, the new urban industrial order creates an increasingly isolated mass of poor people with ever-slimmer chances of getting ahead. These denizens of the metropolitan lower world come from socially stigmatized, visibly identifiable groups: African Americans, on the one hand, and Third World immigrants, on the other. As a growing minority population finds itself blocked from moving up in the pecking order, widening class differences accompany hardening ethnic boundaries.

Both stories convey a compelling message but prove inadequate to the reality they seek to describe and explain. In Los Angeles, the demographic transformations of recent decades have created a new ethnic order, one far too complex for the binary oppositions of any dualistic scheme. At the end of the twentieth century, Los Angeles is not so much a dual as a plural city, in which the myriad new ethnic groups have created a segmented system, where each group largely lives and works in its own distinctive social world. From this point of view, conventional accounts that emphasize an ever-more-radical separation of majority and minority miss the main drift. There are now too many distinctive groups for the old undifferentiated category of "minority" to make much sense. And with increased ethnic diversity, the divisions among the various Angelenos of non-European origin constitute the salient ethnic differences of today.

The material in this volume accents the interplay between ethnicity and economics and the role that ethnicity plays in organizing economic life. The majority of jobs in the region are held by the increasingly scrambled non-European-origin population, and those positions are not simply divided up at random or by the conventional mechanisms of skill or longevity. Because getting a job remains very much a matter of whom one knows, ethnics get hired through networks; the repeated action of network recruit-

ment leads to ethnic employment concentrations, or "ethnic niches," as we have called them in this book.

In the conventional view, concentration is a newcomers' phenomenon, waning quickly as numbers grow and later arrivals spill over into the broader economy. But in Los Angeles, ethnic clusters have hardly diminished, despite the large and rapid immigrant infusion of recent years. In 1970, just over half the region's relatively small Mexican immigrant population worked in industries that could be classified as Mexican niches. Twenty years later, a vastly expanded Mexican immigrant population was just as concentrated in niches as it had been two decades before. And to a surprising extent, some of the very same specializations in which Mexicans had originally clustered—domestic work, apparel and furniture manufacturing, gardening, and agriculture—retained their importance, providing entry-level jobs for thousands of new arrivals.

Numbers make the Mexican story supremely important, and the very particular niche that Mexicans have established renders their story distinctive. But as an instance of concentration, the Mexican story exemplifies the ethnic economic experience in L.A. In 1990, just about half of every major immigrant group worked in industries that could be classified as niches (see table 15.1). Thus the clusters established by each one of the major groups have turned out to provide very significant absorptive capacity.

Moreover, the immigrant pattern finds its parallel among the native-born. Here the tendency toward concentration is not quite so strong (note the Mexican American difference, a matter to which we shall shortly return); nor is it quite so certain, as some of the native-born populations are still quite small. But these caveats aside, the striking fact is the persistent role of ethnicity in economic sorting. And the situation of the region's longer-established ethnics—Jews, Japanese Americans, and African Americans, who have carved out very distinctive specializations—points to the trajectory that the descendants of the newer arrivals are likely to follow.

The ethnic ordering of L.A.'s economy can be characterized along the horizontal and vertical dimensions of specialization and rank, as table 15.1 shows. On the horizontal dimension, Mexican immigrants, Korean immigrants, and African Americans define three basic modal types, with Mexicans ensconced in manufacturing, Koreans in self-employment, and African Americans in the public sector and few points of niche intersection among them. For all practical purposes, the region contains no black concentrations in manufacturing, nor does it contain Korean and Mexican niches in the public sector. Other groups are also clustered, but none in equally specialized roles.

The region's pattern of ethnic specialization also constitutes a system of inequality. Even the most fortunate of the newer Angelenos are some distance from the top of the hierarchy, as can be seen from a comparison



TABLE 15.1 | Niche Employment, Los Angeles Region, 1990

	Industrial Niches			Employment in Specific Niches, as Percentage of Niche Employment					Mean Earnings (\$)
	As Percentage of Group's Employment	Mean Years Education	Self-Emp't (%)	PubSec (%)	Mfg. (%)	Mgr/Prof (%)			
Israeli FB	64	14	31	6	18	44	47,678		
Mexican FB	55	7	6	0	50	4	16,589		
Salvadoran FB	53	8	8	0	37	4	12,748		
Guatemalan FB	52	8	7	0	32	3	12,805		
Chinese NB	51	16	9	16	24	78	51,060		
Filipino FB	47	15	3	20	9	50	34,568		
Iranian FB	47	15	35	3	4	41	34,278		
Korean FB	46	13	47	0	13	18	28,618		
Vietnamese FB	45	13	7	9	73	27	26,839		
Chinese FB	44	13	17	5	21	38	31,481		
Arab FB	44	14	23	7	4	35	35,307		
Russian NB	42	16	35	5	0	68	75,513		
Armenian FB	40	12	28	2	12	21	25,395		
Armenian NB	38	15	24	6	8	55	38,319		
Japanese NB	37	15	10	36	18	58	45,036		
African American	36	13	1	57	1	33	31,900		
Mexican NB	18	13	3	52	11	18	34,813		

with native-born Russians/Jews, the one persistently ethnic European-origin group. Still, as figure 15.1 shows, Chinese and Japanese Americans have moved into advantageous specializations, where they find ample opportunities to work in high-paying white-collar jobs and do better than in industries of lower ethnic density. Other groups—African and Mexican Americans, as well as Korean, Filipino, and Vietnamese immigrants, for example—occupy the middle ranges of the continuum, sometimes doing better in industries of high ethnic density, sometimes doing worse. Mexican, Salvadoran, and Guatemalan immigrants—the most concentrated of all—do the very worst, crowding into menial employment where the wage ceiling is extremely low.

Niching is pervasive, but not every niche proves rewarding. Some do, notably those concentrations that provide opportunities for self-employment; ethnic Angelenos who work on their own earn a considerable self-employment bonus, which holds even after taking human capital factors into account. One could add a public-sector difference comparable to the self-employment bonus; for African Americans, government is an advantageous niche because it reduces exposure to employers who might discriminate as well as to immigrants who might compete for jobs that blacks have until recently held. By contrast, Mexicans and Central Americans seem to have been herded into niches that constitute mobility traps; in these cases, concentration in an ethnic specialization saturates supply and thus increases the potential for competition with one's own kind.

Thus, the economic complexities of L.A.'s ethnic order cannot be reduced to the antinomies of conventional academic views. While the region's ethnic transformation has been accompanied by a growing gap between rich and poor, that division does not organize the ethnic map of contemporary L.A. The march toward greater social distinction has occurred most rapidly *within* the region's African American population; whether one looks at earnings, family patterns, or residence, better-educated African Americans are far more distant from their less-fortunate brethren today than they were in 1970. And while keeping in mind the defects of the model minority view, it is worth noting that native-born Asian families do better than native whites on not one but several significant indicators.

Not only do the new Angelenos span the entire social spectrum from metropolitan heaven to inner-city hell, the purgatories to which the region's poor have been confined clearly are different social worlds. The term *underclass* has gained international fame and notoriety as the master concept for identifying the distinctive characteristics of today's poor, but it is a chaotic concept, referring both to those excluded from the labor market and to those confined to the least secure, most marginal positions that the economy provides. In Los Angeles, these distinct relationships to the labor market define two very different groups.

If we think of the underclass as a relational concept—the most downtrodden of a series of connected groupings—then L.A.'s underclass consists

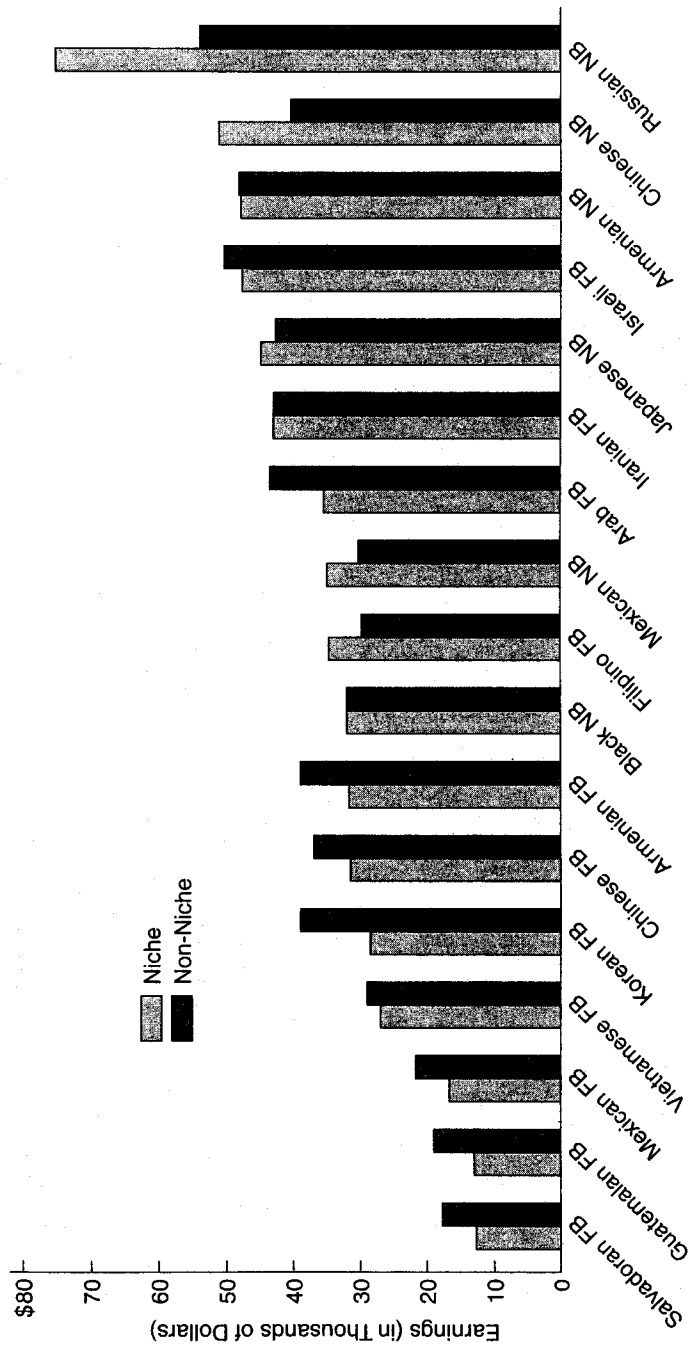
of those groups whose jobs are at the very bottom of the totem pole. That underclass consists of immigrants from Mexico and Central America who have been stuffed into the very lowest-level jobs, where they work in isolation from the rest of the region's ethnic groups.

But in established academic parlance, L.A.'s impoverished immigrants are not an underclass. For conservatives like Charles Murray and Lawrence Mead, the newcomers provide a remembrance of things gone by; they are a collection of hardworking folk always willing to toil, no matter how pitiful the remuneration may be. And for more liberal analysts, such as William J. Wilson, the immigrants laboring in L.A.'s industrial belt hark back to the urban proletariat of yore. As economic restructuring has relegated the traditional working class to the museum, the underclass is the term used to refer to "the groups . . . left behind"—that is to say, impoverished black Angelinos.<sup>4</sup>

The region's poor African Americans can be seen only as an *outclass*, however, not as an *underclass*, as the comparison with their impoverished immigrant brethren makes clear; the former face a penury of jobs and the latter an abundance, albeit at pitifully low wages. Modifying the concept to refer to the "ghetto poor" will not do; the traditional African American ghetto is shared with Mexicans and Central Americans, who enjoy good connections to the employers of low-level help. And the Mexican residents of east Los Angeles—the region's "purest" ghetto for its high degree of ethnic homogeneity—have no difficulty finding work, though securing good jobs is quite another story.

Poverty has increased among black Angelinos, but not because the openings for unskilled work have become scarcer. In contrast to other urban areas, L.A.'s low-skill sector remains alive and, if anything, all too well; such lower-level jobs as domestics, janitor, or sewing machine operator, which African Americans formerly held, not only remain abundant but have increased enormously. But the pool of those seeking low-level jobs has also expanded as foreign-born newcomers have poured into the region over the last two decades: Mexican and Central American immigrants have largely taken over the easy-entry positions once filled by less-educated black Angelinos. The dynamics of competition are complex and go beyond the scope of this book. Part of the story involves the prevalence of network recruitment, which brings immigrant communities into the workplace, detaching vacancies from the open market and thus diminishing opportunities for blacks. Another part has to do with the choices of employers, who expect that immigrants will be the more productive workers and also see immigrants as more tractable labor than blacks. Together, the inexhaustible supply of immigrants and employer preferences for manageable recruits with connections to incumbent workers have produced industries like furniture manufacturing and apparel in which African Americans are not just a sociological but a quantitative—often very small—minority, vulnerable to the pressure from an immigrant work force. Consequently, immigration has

FIGURE 15.1 | Comparative Earnings in Niche Employment, Los Angeles Region, 1989



made younger and less-educated blacks more likely to be unemployed in Los Angeles than in other metropolitan areas, all other factors controlled.

The fact that low-skilled whites have been relatively unaffected by the immigrant influx suggests that more is involved here than the simple substitution of one low-skilled group for just any other. To be sure, low-skilled whites have been leaving the region more quickly than comparable African Americans, which may mean that whites who experience an adverse immigrant impact respond by moving away. Nonetheless, migration disparities are unlikely to explain why the jobless gap between low-skilled blacks and low-skilled whites *increased* during the 1980s. The persistent legacy of racism makes African Americans more vulnerable to immigration's displacing effect; never having attained their fair share of the region's most stable, best-paying manual jobs, blacks were also the most vulnerable when changes on both the supply *and* the demand side took a turn for the worse.

Ironically, the African American concentration in government work, while it shelters black Angelenos from the full force of immigrant competition, also presents relatively high hurdles, especially for men with troubled employment and personal pasts. Up to now, at least, government has been relatively immune to changes in the pay schedule for comparable jobs in the private sector. Hence L.A.'s black janitors, half of whom work on the public's payroll, make several thousand dollars more than their immigrant counterparts. But if the public sector pays its janitors well, it also scrutinizes them a good deal more carefully than a hotel or factory would; the average educational level of black janitors is just shy of a high school degree. As a whole, the contemporary black niche provides no replacements for the easy-entry jobs of the vanished past, since educational requirements for government employment are generally quite high.

Consequently, poverty takes a different face among the region's African American poor than it does among its immigrant working class. Blacks do considerably better than Latino immigrants in the earnings distribution, but *not* in the distribution of family earnings, mainly because the typical African American household contains only one earner. Since relatively fewer African Americans hold jobs, poverty rates approach immigrant levels and might well exceed them, were it not for the smaller size of black households. By contrast, Mexican and Central American immigrant households package income by bundling several paychecks earned from factory, service, or household work. Unfortunately, these types of jobs provide meager recompense; while the typical Mexican immigrant household boasts two earners, 22 percent of Mexican immigrant households endure under the poverty level, with close to another fifth just one notch above.

In the end, the demographic transformations of the past twenty years have created a new ethnic division of labor in which ethnicity intersects with class. The region's Chinese and Japanese Americans make up a professional middle class integrated into the region's core industries in manufac-

turing and professional services. Koreans, Iranians, and Chinese immigrants make up a diversified business grouping, with Koreans struggling as an embattled *petite bourgeoisie* and Iranians and Chinese on the road to high-tech, high-skill entrepreneurship. African Americans divide into two groupings, an emergent middle-class component linked to government and other large employers and an impoverished lower-skilled segment increasingly extruded from the employment system itself. Mexicans are likewise divided into a native-born, working/lower-middle class of skilled laborers and lower-level bureaucrats that overlaps little with foreign-born ranks and an isolated immigrant proletariat confined to the bottom tiers of the region's economy where they are joined by Central Americans, the latest additions to the region's low-wage labor pool.

### IMMIGRANTS' PROGRESS

One is often tempted to argue that immigrant Los Angeles has returned to the world of Jacob Riis's *How The Other Half Lives*; like their turn-of-the-century predecessors, the immigrants of the latest wave are learning, sometimes to their sorrow, that the streets are not paved with gold. Of course, even the garment sweatshops of downtown Los Angeles and the dilapidated Victorian rooming houses of the Westlake district compare favorably with conditions that prevailed on the old Lower East Side of New York. And while outsiders may be struck by the gap between immigrant and native standards and compensations, the immigrants keep coming; *for them*, settlement in Los Angeles must represent a change for the better.

From a historical perspective, starting out at the bottom is the American way, as long as the newcomers and their descendants can gradually climb or even claw their way out of the socioeconomic cellar. In this respect, our reports on Los Angeles and its newcomers provide occasion for both congratulation and concern. Substantial numbers of immigrants are clearly making it and doing so more rapidly than immigrants have ever done in the past. For the most part, these newcomers, coming from South and East Asia and from the Middle East, arrive with skills and other assets that ease their entry into American society and hasten their move up the totem pole. Clearly, care needs to be exercised when generalizing about Asian and Middle Eastern immigrants and their success; some groups—for example, Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Armenians from the former Soviet Union—are doing notably worse than others. In most cases, the newest arrivals start quite far down the scale. All groups contain substantial numbers that are not faring particularly well; however glorious the earnings of Korean physicians and Chinese engineers, Korean cooks and Chinese sewing machine operators bring home considerably smaller checks, although one must note that they do a good deal better than their Mexican or Central American

counterparts. While poverty rates tend to be lower than the region's average—again with national group exceptions—the proportion of Asian immigrant children living in poverty is disturbingly high, the combination of large family size and reduced earnings associated with recent arrivals depressing per capita income.

But if today's snapshot contains more than a few somber patches, the bigger—and more importantly the moving—picture looks a good deal brighter. Migrations generally become less selective over time, and the advent of large refugee populations has worked against immigrant selectivity for both Asians and Middle Easterners; nonetheless, each decade has consistently brought a cohort of highly skilled newcomers. Not all the immigrants manage to take advantage of the proficiencies they bring with them, one reason why so many get drawn into occupational and industrial niches. While the various Asian and Middle Eastern niches contain their share of less-desirable jobs, they range widely over the job spectrum; hence, average earnings in the ethnic concentrations have gone up, in real terms, over time. On the whole, many of the problems experienced by the region's Asian and Middle Eastern immigrants seem to be associated with the travails of initial adjustment. The foreign-born disadvantage fades as the immigrants gain the skills, experience, and familiarity with local employers needed to compete favorably with native-born white workers. Catching up is not simply an experience associated with a highly selective cohort of early arrivals; the Asian immigrants of the 1970s appear to have progressed faster than did their predecessors who came during the 1960s. Since Asian immigrant women make faster progress toward closing the gap with native white women and are also more likely to be employed, the prospects for improving family incomes are rosier still.

The true test of immigrant adaptation lies in the future, and it is too early to tell how the children of the newcomers will fare; however, the experience of native-born Asians is instructive. While discrimination against Asians persists, it takes the form of preventing male engineers or pharmacists from earning quite as much as comparable white males. This outcome is hardly satisfactory, but it has not barred progress into the middle class. On most indicators of family well-being, native-born Asians do better, on average, than the region's native whites. Of course, today's population of native-born adults is a numerically small group; the pessimist might argue that conditions will change for the worse once the large cohort of immigrant children enters the labor market, a movement that has already begun. There is no gainsaying that scenario, but what we know of the immigrant children suggests that they will begin well positioned to move ahead. Fewer Asian teenagers than whites drop out of high school, and the rate plummets further for children who arrived in the United States under the age of ten—that is, the 1.5 generation. Moreover, 18-to-24-year-olds in every Asian group attend college at rates that exceed that of whites, with the native-born

leagues ahead of whites on this count. Forecasts as to how well employers will treat these students when they graduate from college are risky, but it seems reasonable to predict that their educational attainments will steadily lift the Asian economic boat in an economy that increasingly values high-level skills.

The trajectory followed by the newcomers from Mexico and Central America, however, is quite another matter. Clearly, some of the region's residents—mainly Anglos, but not Anglos alone—are unhappy about the massive flow from south of the border. But for now, living the good life in Southern California has much to do with immigration—as suggested by the fact that the region employed twice as many gardeners and servants in 1990 as it did ten years before. There can be little question that L.A. needs the large Mexican and Central American population that it has acquired over the past few decades. It is not just anecdotal evidence that suggests that there would be no gardeners, no baby-sitters, no garment workers, no hotel housekeepers without the Mexican and Central American newcomers. The census data tell the same story; the bottom tier of L.A.'s manufacturing and service sectors rests on a labor force that disproportionately comes from Latino immigrant ranks.

Thus, while some segments of the region's population may dream of "sending them home," the reality is that L.A.'s Mexican and Central American immigrants are here to stay, largely because the economy has learned to make good use of them. But it is not clear that the move to Los Angeles has been all that good for the immigrants. And even if it is judged relatively satisfactory for now—a minimum wage job in the garment center is better than an unyielding plot of land in Mexico's central plateau, not to speak of a visit from a Salvadoran death squad—the terms of comparison might shift drastically in the future, once the immigrants compare their conditions against the standards enjoyed by other Angelenos.

A search for immigrant progress will find few glimmers of hope in the record of the past two decades. The route into the region's economy has been through a relatively small tier of low-paying occupations and industries, as can best be seen by focusing on Mexicans, the very largest group. The chief Mexican concentrations of 1970 had extraordinary absorptive power—not a particularly fortunate characteristic, since these were low-wage, competitive industries to begin with and the expansion of the labor supply had the predictably depressing effect on paychecks. Of course, Mexican employment spilled over into a broader set of industries as the labor force expanded. But while the Mexican industrial and occupational base diversified, it paradoxically became more distinct from that of the rest of the labor force. Already very segregated from other groups in 1970, Mexicans became more and more so, in occupational and industrial terms, over time. As their numbers increased, Mexican immigrants found themselves crowding into a narrow set of industries in the secondary labor market that

proved highly responsive—as theory would suggest—to shifts in supply. Employers adapted to the increased availability of greenhorns by expanding employment, but as the newcomers headed for the same industries and occupations in which their kin and friends were already employed, they unwittingly depressed wages for all. Between 1970 and 1990, real earnings in the Mexican immigrant industrial niches declined by over \$6,000 a year. The downturn is not simply a matter of exchanging bad jobs for worse; real earnings declined in all of the industries that served as Mexican niches in 1970, before the massive immigration truly began.

But a picture like this, which paints the portrait in aggregate terms, could be misleading. With half the Mexican immigrant population having arrived in the 1980s, it might be thought that their problems had pushed the average down, obscuring the progress that earlier arrivals had made and that, by inference, the newcomers would be likely to repeat. Again, however, the data dash brighter hopes. Comparisons with earlier cohorts at a comparable stage show that the low earnings of recent immigrants are not simply a correlate of recent arrival and the associated pains of adjustment but rather something new, reflecting the increasingly adverse labor market environment of the 1980s. That environment does not work well for the earlier arrivals either, who have seen the gap separating them from natives grow.

So there is substantial evidence to indicate that the newcomers from Mexico (and Central America as well) find themselves not only at the bottom but at a bottom that is increasingly removed from the top and from which exit is hard to find. The immigrants' low skill levels lend further credence to this point of view. The massive absorption of a barely schooled—in some cases, utterly unschooled—population provides the ironic side to L.A.'s march into postindustrialism. Of course, the fact that the immigrants are so extensively employed suggests that these exiles from the fields and factories of Mexico and Central America do indeed arrive with skills that employers want, in contrast to black or Chicano high school graduates or dropouts whose training consists of whatever can be learned in the region's troubled schools. But if immigrants' manual, home-grown proficiencies fit nicely with the wants of employers in the secondary sector, employers at a higher level are looking for skills that schools do—or at any rate should—teach. And these types of skills are precisely what the immigrants lack.

For a decade now, the immigration literature has been embroiled in a debate over charges that America's immigrants are of "declining quality." Specifically, the question concerns the skill levels of the latest newcomers, compared with those of their predecessors. In absolute terms, the educational levels of the region's immigrants from Mexico and Central America have actually gone up over the past two decades. Since that climb was relatively modest, took off from a low base, and left the great majority of the

most recent cohort with less than a high school education, it probably means little to prospective employers. Moreover, the disparity between immigrants and natives, and more importantly those natives with jobs (a proxy for skill requirements) has grown to a yawning divide, making it doubtful that the immigrants can find better-paying jobs of the sort that require some level of literacy and numeracy.

But if the future lies with the children, as we have argued, then the immigrants and their problems of today may all be beside the point. Indeed, considerable solace is to be gained from a look at the children of the foreign-born, but not quite enough to convince that the newer generation is moving ahead as it should. The region's age structure has a distinctive ethnic twist, with Hispanics greatly overrepresented among the young. What that means is that Mexican immigrant households contain lots of children; the result is the lowest per capita earnings of all ethnic groups and a very high proportion of children living in poverty. History suggests that those children will grow up with greater expectations than their parents had, but an impoverished family background will make it harder to realize those dreams. Moving beyond the world of cleaning and factory work will require the literacy, numeracy, and interpersonal competencies learned in school; the schooling data, such as they are, suggest that immigrants' children are indeed acquiring those skills, but not at an adequate rate.

A slightly cynical realist, however, one attentive to the immigrant trajectories of the past, would find grounds for satisfaction—although not complacency—in a future of a Polish or Italian American type. From this point of view, what counts *for now* are the prospects that go along with truck driving—the well-paying blue-collar occupation that happens to be the single largest Mexican American occupational niche. Rising college attendance and graduation rates are important, to be sure, but if one can forecast entry into the lower-middle and skilled working classes, a good deal of solace can be found in successful pursuit of the traditional path of immigrant progress.

Strictly speaking, it is too early to tell; only the oldest children born to the relatively small cohort of immigrants who arrived in the 1960s had entered the labor market in any significant numbers by 1990. And with most of the Latino immigration compressed into the 1980s, the full arrival of the second generation will be delayed for another decade or two. Still, the experience of the region's Mexican American population has lessons to offer, provided we recognize that this group is only a crude proxy, and therefore uncertain predictor, for the second generation yet to come.

In many respects, the Mexican American story in Los Angeles bears more than a passing resemblance to the experience of white ethnics of the Northeast and Midwest circa 1930–60. Though certainly not at the top of the region's pecking order, Mexican Americans are not at the bottom either, finding themselves at midpoint on most indicators, which puts them slightly ahead of African Americans. Median household income is up com-

pared with 1970 and per capita income more so, thanks to reduced household size. Real earnings have also increased, for men and for women, although relative to native whites men have fallen further behind. As Mexican Americans have diversified economically, shifting from a position of high to low concentration in niches, their employment profile has increasingly converged with the pattern of whites. Occupational integration has brought upgrading; the proportion with professional and managerial jobs almost doubled between 1970 and 1990. And unlike African Americans, the region's Mexican Americans have a solid base in skilled blue-collar jobs.

On balance, one can detect a passage from humble to modest status for Mexican Americans. Not all signs point in the same direction, however. Male job-holding slipped considerably after 1970. High school graduation rates, as we have noted, also leave much to be desired. More importantly, one wonders whether one could not have asked for more. L.A. boomed during the past two decades, and not much had to be done to absorb the relatively small Mexican American cohorts that entered the labor market during these years. With a return to prosperity still far off on the horizon and a massive second generation ready to hunt for jobs, the region will be hard-pressed to do as well.

And that might not be good enough. Unlike the children of the Italian and Polish immigrants who began with little, ended up with more, but never expected a lot, today's second-generation Mexican Americans experience rampant consumerism and relentless media exposure to the standards of upper-middle-class life. One doubts, therefore, that a truck-driving future will satisfy the children of today's servants and assemblers. And the scenario gets a good deal more pessimistic if the region's next economy fails to deliver or simply throws up more bad jobs.

### ASSIMILATION REVISITED

Thus far, we have focused on how well or how poorly groups fare in their climb up the greasy pole. But there is more to ethnic change than dollars and cents. In the past, at any rate, the ethnic experience also involved shifts in self-concept and social worlds. Unfortunately, census data do not provide a window for observing how Angelenos think of themselves ethnically and with what intensity, but they do shed considerable light on the social structures—households, neighborhoods, and speech communities—within which ethnicity is lived.

The problem is how to talk about those social structures and their evolution. Assimilation provides the convenient term at hand, but it has come under severe attack, and not only for the reasons that we advanced in the introduction to this book. As a concept, assimilation is not quite neutral; it

asserts not only that outsiders *will* change but also that they *should* change and how, namely by shedding their original group preferences and affiliations. That teleology sits uneasily with a society more accepting of ethnic difference than in the past and less certain as to who or what constitutes the mainstream. Moreover, assimilation takes groupness for granted, when it is precisely the nature of ethnic aggregates that stands in flux. Not every set of outsiders constitutes an ethnic collectivity in any meaningful sense. While those collectivities are likely to evolve into something else, they need not change in the direction that assimilation implies, that is, by merging into some broader American mainstream. And whatever that mainstream might be, its own response to the infusion of new groups plays a crucial role. The Proposition 187 scenario, in which the Anglo campaign to "save our state" led Latinos to demonstrate amidst Mexican flags, further polarizing Anglo opinion, nicely demonstrates the reactive process that transforms an aggregate of ethnic outsiders into a true collectivity. Since aversion can take the form of both conflict and withdrawal, Anglos' continuing out-migration may set a natural limit on the possibilities for the increased intergroup contact entailed in assimilation.

From this perspective, the chapters in this book tell us that the ethnics of Los Angeles are set on trajectories of very different types. One is the two-step path followed by the massive and rapidly growing population of Mexican and Central American origin. The first step is the formation of a new collectivity. In 1970, the Mexican immigrant population was just beginning the transition from the circular migration of *bracero* days, when immigrants would move back and forth in response to the needs of the harvest and other seasonal industries, to the one-way movement that migration studies have universally shown to be inevitable. Settlement and its imprint show up in the transformation of household structures. In 1970, Mexican immigrant households were only slightly larger than white households; more importantly, 35 percent contained only one or two people and only 23 percent had six or more. By 1990, the median Mexican immigrant household contained five people, more than twice the number in households headed by native whites. Single- and even dual-person households, previously common, were now rarities, and more than a third of the population lived in households of six or more.

If settlement is the first step, the second is the development of a large, distinctive social world encompassing the broader Latino immigrant population. Here, numbers play a crucial role. With so many new arrivals, Latino densities are high in both residential and economic contexts, so that opportunities for interpersonal contacts of all types tend to involve others of the same kind. Although many Latino immigrants live in diverse settings, as in the areas surrounding the ethnically homogeneous core, transition from either black or white to Latino is rapidly underway. Latinos were already



more segregated in 1990 than they were ten or twenty years before, and there is every reason to think that the shocks of the last few years—social, economic, and seismic—have only accelerated that trend.

In this light our data on economic segregation and niching take on new significance; ethnic isolation in the neighborhood context has its parallel in the environments where people work. For all practical purposes, the Mexican (and indeed, Central American) niches at the bottom of the labor market are predominately Latino worlds. Granted some of the supervisors and certainly the bigger bosses are likely to be of another kind—very possibly Asians in the clothing shops, Anglos in furniture factories or hotels. But the direction of ethnic change across these occupational divides is more likely to involve employer adaptation to the immigrants than the other way around; the path of least resistance leads employers to hire foremen and other intermediaries who come from the immigrant communities and to work out managerial and supervisory routines that make Spanish the *lingua franca*.

But there is a certain slippage in our argument for a bigger, more distinctive, more separated immigrant world; we began by talking about Mexicans and ended up discussing Latinos. Clearly, L.A.'s immigrant Latinos are more diverse than ever before, mainly because the large Central American influx of the 1980s added a significant non-Mexican component where none had been before. The Central Americans differ from their Mexican brethren on several counts, including economic and residential factors, but these are differences in degree, not in kind. There is more overlapping than separation; the circles of Mexican and Central American occupational concentration coincide, and there is not a single Central American niche in which one does not find a sizable Mexican cluster. The same holds true on the residential scene, and not only because segregation between the two groups is relatively low. Central American neighborhoods there may be, but none that is exclusively so. L.A.'s Central Americans live in predominately Mexican communities where the common language that brings them together effectively bridges the other barriers that divide them.

Of course, neighbors, whether at work or at home, do not always become friends. The same can be said for ethnic groups. Niche overlap can, and does, lead to conflict; we also know from field research that relations among the members of L.A.'s diverse Latino population are not always of the warmest kind. Still, the structure of interaction counts, especially when reinforced by cultural and linguistic affinities. The region's Latino subgroups are essentially the same in their use of Spanish and fluency in English. At the social level, the differences between recent immigrants from Mexico and their Central American counterparts are slight, especially in light of the disparities that separate both groups from Anglos. The probabilities of contact, at work and at home, are also high although not symmetric, since

Central Americans are more likely to encounter Mexicans than the other way around.

Consequently, we forecast the emergence of a pan-ethnic Latino group, in which Central Americans will be gradually assimilated into a larger and slowly changing Mexican-origin world, before either group is assimilated into the mainstream. Should we be right, this merging of smaller units into a much larger aggregate will mean greater ethnic persistence among the region's Latino immigrants and their descendants. Numbers will be a crucial if not decisive factor, increasing the probability that Latinos, whether at work, in the neighborhood, or in more intimate circles, will interact with others of the same kind.

To this shift we also detect a countertendency, one in which the native-born descendants of earlier Mexican arrivals are increasingly distanced from their immigrant cousins. Adaptation has just begun among the newcomers and will take place more slowly than in the past, for the reasons just advanced. Moreover, the changes in the region's social, economic, and legal environment have made Mexican Americans less like the foreign-born than before. As we have noted earlier, Mexican Americans have diffused over an increasingly wide occupational and industrial spectrum in the last two decades. Although there are certainly instances where the immigrant and Mexican American niches overlap, these are becoming less common. More importantly, perhaps, the Mexican American economic specializations involve contact with the full range of L.A.'s ethnic mosaic. The modest movement into the lower reaches of the middle-class is bringing about related changes in the more intimate structures of life. The native Latino population has begun to move out toward the outer counties, whereas the immigrants remain overwhelmingly concentrated in the Los Angeles County core. Mexican American households are now a good deal smaller than immigrant households, reversing the pattern of two decades ago. And those households are increasingly likely to be an ethnic blend of some sort; young Mexican American women are far more likely to marry outsiders than are women of their mothers' age.

This projection of immigrant/native fragmentation, like all other predictions, is a risky affair. Anglo reaction to immigration may ironically help Latinos build bridges of ethnic solidarity that cross the foreign-born native divide. Mexican American social mobility could well yield the same effect, producing a college-educated elite more open to the politics of identity and sensitive to its appeal. Still, differences in everyday life and work will remain, with consequences for politics and identity. There is considerable anti-immigrant sentiment among the region's Latinos, as shown not just in public opinion studies but by the not-inconsiderable support that Proposition 187 garnered from L.A.'s Hispanic voters.

In the end, the pattern of Latino ethnic adaptation looks distinctive, but

not because change is occurring more slowly than it did in years gone by. Nostalgia colors the way in which that earlier experience is seen; the historical literature shows that earlier immigrants often opposed Americanization, making concerted efforts to retain their language and culture. But in the past, the halt in large-scale migration rapidly accelerated the shift from old-country habits and affiliations. As of this writing, a change of that sort is nowhere in sight.

The story is quite different for the region's largely middle-class immigrants from Asia and the Middle East. It would be wrong to say that these newcomers do not have strong ethnic attachments. The more intimate structures of everyday life are defined largely in ethnic terms; witness the prevalence of in-marriages among almost all of the Middle Eastern and Asian groups. And as with other immigrants, these newcomers have a preference for living with their own kind, as can best be seen in Monterey Park, now famous as the nation's first suburban Chinatown, or in Orange County's Little Saigon.

But the broader structures of ethnicity are not nearly as encompassing as in the Latino case and are more likely, therefore, to speed the process of change among immigrants and, more importantly, among their descendants. Once again, compositional factors play a crucial role. Massive immigration has led to a burgeoning Asian population; however, "Asian" as a category has limited sociological content as chapter 11 has shown. The immigrants who have flocked to Los Angeles from Asia are a diverse lot, with little in the way of culture, language, or religion to connect Indians to Filipinos to Chinese at the very outset. Education and skill are unifying elements, but the importance of networks and personal contacts in the search for jobs and homes means that each group of higher-skilled immigrants enters the region in its own way. Consequently, economic specialization may be typical of each of the Asian groups, but these specializations tend to be particular to each group—nursing for the Filipinos, and storekeeping for the Koreans. Occupationally and industrially, the various Asian groups are as segregated from one another as they are from whites.

The same pattern applies on the residential front. Not only have the region's various Asian groups settled along different paths, producing the relatively high levels of intra-Asian segregation noted in chapter 11, but they have also moved into the newer areas in the region's outer ring. There, mixing is more prevalent and the massive Asian migration has therefore yielded declining segregation levels, quite in contrast to the Latino pattern.

Intra-Asian differentiation matters because it increases the likelihood of contacts across ethnic lines. The various individual Asian groups are small; although distinctive in their residential and economic patterns, they are too few in number to dominate an occupation, industry, or even more than a cluster of residential areas. And because Asians are spread out unevenly, their numbers do not add up to the critical mass that would keep contacts

within a broader Asian ambit. At the residential level, Asians from one group are more likely to interact with whites than with Asians from some other group. The same is true in industries and occupations, where Asian penetration never comes close to the levels recorded by Latinos, even in such Asian specializations as accounting, nursing, and engineering.

Since the Middle Eastern story reads much the same and is propelled by similar factors, it need not be reviewed here. But in both the Asian and Middle Eastern cases, the newcomers' middle-class—in some cases, higher-class—background helps account for the distinctive pattern of ethnic adaptation. Clearly, personal ties matter for the job search of immigrant professionals or managers, almost as much as they do at the labor market's bottom tier. And there is reason to think that the movement into upper-tier jobs furthers the process of assimilation and acculturation. The nature of work and training at the upper level reduces, if it does not eliminate, the potential for immigrant/native competition. Since whites remained enconced in occupations like engineering and nursing that have become high-level immigrant niches, these fields become arenas for immigrant/Anglo interaction, which presumably yields changes in friendship, language use, and cultural patterns on both sides of the immigrant/native divide. Higher earnings, greater English-language proficiency, and the enhanced ease in navigating the Anglo world provided by extended schooling also enlarge residential options. Consequently, the move to the suburbs of the peripheral counties is a realistic possibility for many Asians and Middle Easterners. That, in turn, means a shift to neighborhoods of lower immigrant density, where the newcomers have higher levels of exposure to Anglos. Since their children also find better schools, the circle (virtuous or vicious, depending on one's view of ethnic persistence) comes to a close; the combination of class, culture, and context brings the Asian and Middle Eastern second generation into a social environment that both promotes mobility and corrodes ethnic attachments.

As always there are countervailing trends. Generalization is hazardous; the foregoing one clearly fits awkwardly with the experience of refugees from Southeast Asia. Rather than hastening diffusion, the rapid advance up the social scale may create new concentrations that enhance the potential for intra-Asian interaction; note the situation at the region's major universities, where a minimum of one out every four students is of Asian descent. Ironically these settings represent greater Asian density than the suburban communities from which many Asian students come. Intra-Asian national differences may not matter much to students of the 1.5 or second generation who have lost facility in the mother tongue and contact with their ethnic cultural institutions but find virtue in Asian panethnicity.

But no discussion of the prospects for assimilation can conclude without consideration of the region's major native-born groups, namely Anglos and African Americans. Mention of the latter group lays bare the ideologi-



cal underpinnings to assimilation. On the one hand, the notion that ethnic change occurs through a natural process of generational adjustment shifts the burden of explanation away from whites and their resistance to black progress; and on the other hand, the normative implication, that African Americans *should* change by abandoning their group affiliations, appears inherently and unacceptably ethnocentric. Still, there are intellectual parallels to pursue, most notably the question of whether the region's African Americans remain as confined to occupational and residential ghettos as before. The best answer is that there is greater mixing, although in such areas as Watts and South Central, which have received sizable immigrant inflows, not necessarily because of diffusion. Demographic transition in these historically black neighborhoods helps explain the recent substantial declines in residential segregation; equally important is the fact that African Americans have at last been able to join the outward flow to new suburbs on the periphery that, so far, reflect the region's new-found diversity. The occupational scene is somewhat different, given the persisting importance of a clearly defined black niche in the public sector. But here, composition comes back into play; however overrepresented blacks may be in any industry or occupation, they still find themselves in a minority, which means interaction with and exposure to others.

Since assimilation is a two-way process, one also has to factor in African Americans' reactions to the newcomers from abroad. That response has often been less than favorable, as Korean storekeepers discovered to their distress during the civil unrest of 1992. It is clear that the residential transitions underway in South Central and Watts are also the cause of considerable unhappiness among black residents. And the fire next time may well occur in the black concentrations in government, pitting African Americans against Latinos, who see government as a lever of ethnic mobility and are well aware that blacks have gotten more than their share of public jobs. Any such combustion seems likely to lead to a hardening of ethnic boundaries on both sides.

In the end, however, the region's Anglos may turn out to be the great wild card. As usual a historical perspective helps. The white Anglo-Saxon Protestants of an earlier day were less than overjoyed when the Irish, Italians, Poles, and Jews came searching for opportunity in the promised land. It took a long time for the established groups to accommodate themselves to those newcomers and their descendants. Signs and ads reading "Irish or Jews need not apply" may belong to the past, but their memory has not yet been extinguished.

Anglos' discontent with immigration inhibits contact and for that reason alone retards tendencies among the immigrants to assimilate. But the options available to the diminishing Anglos of the L.A. region (no longer just Protestant and Anglo-Saxon) are not the same as before; restrictive covenants and ethnically discriminatory hiring practices are no longer the or-

der of the day. Flight remains a possibility, however, and one should not forget that many of the region's Anglos are themselves migrants or the children of migrants, with weaker roots to the area than might be found in older parts of the country. To put it bluntly, the entire region might follow the path of the San Fernando Valley, from orange groves to "Leave It to Beaver" to the growing impoverished Latino barrio of today, ringed by prosperous, nervous whites on the hillsides, wondering whether they will be next to leave. And all that in the space of fifty years.

### THE LESSONS OF LOS ANGELES

Congress revised the U.S. immigration laws in 1965 having little inkling of the consequences that would flow from this act. It certainly had good intentions, although the Congressional mindset was more on the past and its injustices than on the factors that would influence future flows to the United States. As the legislative history shows, Congress was conservative, indeed far too much so, in its assumptions about how immigration would unfold in years to come. What no one in Washington expected—and in fact what no one there wanted—was a flood of newcomers from the countries that have sent the great majority of immigrants who have arrived over the past thirty years.

But those immigrants had good reason to come to the United States, namely, jobs and the possibility of doing better than they could at home. If the immigrants sought to move to the United States, employers were also looking to fill their bottom level jobs at low rates; the best available candidates turned out to be foreign-born. In the Los Angeles region, farmers in the still-verdant outlying areas found a growing immigrant labor force to be particularly handy; so did hospitals, hotels, restaurants, manufacturers, and also the region's good burghers, who came to enjoy the convenience of an expanding servant and gardening class.

The fit between the desires of immigrants and those of the region's established inhabitants goes far to explain L.A.'s continuing attraction for the foreign-born. History is important, too, most notably the eight-decade-long tradition of recruitment in Mexico's Central Plateau for work in California's fields and farms. Geography also comes into play, in L.A.'s proximity to Mexico and location on the Pacific Rim, which makes the region a natural reception point for newcomers from Mexico and Asia. The postwar economic boom, once seemingly endless, added to the magnetic force, ensuring that there was always room—indeed, usually need—for an extra hand.

But once a nucleus of newcomers had been put in place, immigration became a self-feeding mechanism, with a momentum all its own. The more immigrants who moved to Los Angeles, the easier it was for the next batch to follow behind. Settlers were able to help with jobs, housing, and the

money to come to L.A. Employers became accustomed to recruiting and hiring newcomers, all the more so once there was a cadre of experienced hands who not only furnished a continuing supply of applicants from back home but vouched for them, trained them, and made sure that they fulfilled the boss's basic expectations. Entrepreneurs gravitated to Los Angeles in much the same fashion; seedbed immigrants established business concentrations in specialized lines like apparel, construction, or import/export trade. Once in place, those clusters sent a signal to prospective immigrants about the commercial opportunities to be found in L.A. The contacts between veterans and newcomers as well as the institutions they founded (such as newspapers and churches) further lubricated the movement into business.

These mechanisms made for a steadily expanding immigrant economic base, in part through their effects on natives. With immigrant recruitment networks keeping job information from leaking out into the broader labor market, natives found it harder to get jobs in industries and occupations that became immigrant-dependent. They also found those jobs less desirable, especially as the immigrant influx made it easy for employers to push the wage level down. And as the region's core manufacturing sector eroded, replaced by labor-intensive industries that could make good use of the growing immigrant work force, restructuring further weakened the region's hold on its native workers, Anglo and African American workers alike. Once an importer, L.A. became an exporter of less-skilled Anglos, who left for better opportunities in neighboring states. African Americans also joined the outward flow, although with fewer resources, not as many could do so; proportionately more dropped out of the labor force altogether. As the supply of natives dwindled, options for immigrants correspondingly increased.

And so Los Angeles became an intensely immigrant region, receiving a disproportionate share of the immigrant inflow that began to grow in the 1970s and then burgeoned in the following decades. Native Angelenos found the sudden, massive ethnic transformation unsettling, but the boom times of the 1980s had a soothing effect on their nerves. The region's elite, sensitive to the downside of immigration, nonetheless accepted it as the price for catapulting the region into the ranks of the world's global cities. Thanks to understanding administrations in Sacramento and Washington, there was never any reason to worry about policies that might have curbed the region's hunger for cheap, immigrant labor, such as more vigorous protection of labor standards, a more permissive environment for union organizing, enforcement of the penalties against hiring undocumented immigrants (enacted as part of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986), not to speak of a stiff hike in the minimum wage. And the immigrant advocates played their role in the process as well, assuring those members of the public who cared to listen that the newcomers had come here only to work at jobs that no one else wanted to fill.

The good times eventually ended, however, and once they did the politics and perceptions of immigration changed as well. Thinking that they had imported workers, the region's Anglos were aghast to find that they had gotten mothers and fathers equipped with children, instead. True, the newcomers had been willing to do the region's dirty jobs, as the immigrant advocates had noted, and at bargain basement wages. But in a state where the tax system retained some progressivity, low earners made relatively slight contributions to the public's till. Moreover, the arrival of the newcomers' children—and there were many of them relative to the number of immigrant earners—meant that immigration eventually produced claims on the state's services. As some observers worried that the immigrants' children would be less eager than their parents to take on the region's undesirable jobs but not equipped with the skills to do much better, one began to sense that the bill for immigration had finally come due.

Unfortunately, Californians had grown accustomed to hearing their political leaders tell them that something could be had for nothing, and when it came to immigration matters, the state's political class was not about to change its tune. Hence, the electorate succumbed to the sirens of Proposition 187—and who could blame them, since few political figures of any prominence had dared to tell them the unpalatable truth that immigration was now part and parcel of the good Southern California life. And it was not simply that the region's economy had learned to accommodate to the immigrant presence; more importantly, its adaptation to immigration was so deep and pervasive that any shift in the abundant flow of newcomers would come at a fairly stiff price. One could reduce the supply of immigrant cooks and maids, but hotel and restaurant prices would then go up, with less than salutary effects on the region's crucial tourist trades. One could curb the inflow of foreign-born garment workers, but that would simply transform what had been a growth industry into another one of the region's declining sectors. And one could encourage the legions of foreign-born laborers and construction workers to go home, but their departure would not help the region's hard-pressed builders nor do anything to contain home prices that were already far too high.

All this is not to say that one should not strive to reduce immigration, in my mind the very direction to which the evidence from this book points, but one still must note that there is no free lunch. The effects of curtailing immigration will be felt far beyond L.A.'s foreign-born communities. And the costs of yesterday's search for cheap immigrant labor will be paid tomorrow and the day after, in the form of educating the children of poorly schooled immigrants and making sure that they have the tools needed to do well in the next century.

While Washington can do more to curtail immigration than it has in the past, its hands are far from free. Scaling back drastically, as the nation did in the 1920s, is not on the agenda, especially now when international

flows of goods, services, and people are accelerating and the United States is moving toward greater economic integration with its neighbors. Since the same changes in communication and technology that lubricate trade also facilitate migration, the ties between immigrant communities and their home societies will be harder to disrupt now than they were earlier in the century. And one should not forget that the regime of restricted immigration lasted barely two decades, with modest upward flows beginning shortly after the Second World War. As the forces pushing people to move across national boundaries are both strong and worldwide, they seem unlikely to decline.

Thus, even if Washington makes some move toward restrictionism, the United States is likely to remain an immigration country, allowing five or six hundred thousand persons to enter the country each year, rather than the eight or nine hundred thousand of the recent past. At that level, Los Angeles can expect to receive a large and disproportionate share of the country's immigrants for the foreseeable future; the networks that link newcomers to settlers and connect immigrants to the region's employers will exercise a long-lasting inertial effect. Similarly, attempts to alter the skill composition of the migration flows, even if successful, will yield results only gradually, and with further delay in Los Angeles, where the history of low-skilled immigration will mean more of the same.

Consequently, ethnic Los Angeles is here to stay, whether the region's political class and its largely Anglo electorate wish it or not. Immigrant adaptation takes time, even under the best of circumstances, and for Los Angeles and its troubled economy these are not the best of times. The first step is to recognize the permanence of the region's ethnic transformation, admit that it results from the actions of both immigrants and established residents, and make the necessary adjustments in policies and programs. But the prospects for realism in immigration matters are poor, since fantasy flourishes in L.A. Unfortunately, continuing controversy can be expected as the region seeks to turn the clock back in its search for a homogeneous Anglo world that is no more.

### Notes to Chapter 15

1. *LA 2000: Final Report of the Los Angeles 2000 Committee* (Los Angeles: 2000 Committee, 1988), 59.
2. *LA 2000*, 51.
3. David Reid, ed., *Sex, Death, and God in L.A.* (New York: Pantheon, 1992), xxxi.
4. William J. Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 41.

## Sources of Data, Group Definitions, and Measures

APPENDIX

THIS APPENDIX describes the sources of the data that appear in this book, the definitions used in identifying the various racial/ethnic groups, and some of the measures that appear in the group chapters.

### THE DATA SOURCES

The Bureau of the Census has produced publicly available computer datasets based on several of the census counts conducted during this century. Datasets are currently available for 1910, 1940, 1950, 1960, 1970, 1980, and 1990, and other census years may be available soon. For most of these years, only individual-level data are available, and these include characteristics of individuals and the households in which they live. Because of concerns about privacy, these Public Use Samples (or PUS, for years 1910-70) and Public Use Microdata Samples (PUMS, for years 1980-90) have very limited geographical information, allowing analysts to determine the location of persons only down to the level of the city or county in which they live, and then only if the city or county has a large enough population. The exceptions are 1960, when no cities or counties were identified, and 1980-90, when some smaller geographical units were introduced, although these were still quite large in terms of area and population. Unless otherwise mentioned, the data appearing in all tables and figures derive from PUMS.

To compensate for the lack of geographical information in the individual-level data, the Census Bureau has also released datasets that contain selected pieces of infor-