

The Making of a Multicultural Metropolis

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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

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.¹

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 midwesterners 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).²

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

pearance. Initially, the peripheral suburban areas served as bedroom communities for workers commuting to jobs in Los Angeles; by the 1980s, however, analysts detected an “exopolis,” a set of new “edge cities” made up of the high technology clusters, office centers, and retail emporia scattered throughout the region’s periphery.⁵ The economic bust of the 1990s suggests that the region’s heyday probably belongs to the past. Even in the doldrums, however, L.A.’s tendency to diffuse toward its outer rings remains in full swing. As this book goes to press, the remaining farms and wetlands in Ventura and Orange counties are succumbing to the developers’ bulldozers.

For most of the twentieth century, the Los Angeles region has been home to a fabulous job machine. To be sure, the 1910s and 1920s did not see the region’s economy diversify quite as quickly or as extensively as its leaders in real estate and commerce had wished. But the heavy industrial base that developers and business interests so coveted arrived in the 1930s, in the form of branch plants of the tire, steel, and auto giants of the time. The advent of the Second World War then unleashed a fury of growth and, more importantly, transplanted the nascent aerospace industry from the East to the West Coast. The Cold War did the rest, thanks to the robust growth of Southern California’s high technology complex, which belonged almost entirely to the Department of Defense.⁶ Though natural resources, tourism, and Hollywood—“*the industry*” in local parlance—helped, the region’s emergence as the nation’s premier concentration of manufacturing jobs accounts for its history of stupendous growth.

A new pattern emerged in the late 1970s and 1980s. On the growth side, the Reagan-era defense build-up kept the high-tech complex alive and well up until the late 1980s. The climate of easy money and the region’s attraction to foreign—especially Japanese—capital made for an extraordinary burst of office development. As in other metropolitan areas, the service and finance sectors enjoyed the greatest growth. For a while, Los Angeles—home base to the junk-bond king Michael Milken and the savings and loan financier, Charles Keating, then headquartered in Orange County, later housed in jail—seemed poised to emerge as an international finance complex, smaller than but still rivaling New York. Not all the region’s sectors, however, enjoyed equally favorable times: The older, high-paying manufacturing base in non-defense-related durables had begun to erode in the 1970s, and by the early 1990s had been reduced to a fraction of its former self. To some extent, expansion in the region’s labor-intensive sectors took up the slack, but these rapidly expanding jobs paid miserably low wages.

Located on the West Coast, far from the nation’s historic population concentrations in the East and Midwest, Los Angeles has always depended on long-distance migration for its growth; thanks to its economic dynamism, the region has enjoyed a steady stream of new arrivals. At the turn of the century, the city of Los Angeles was a modest urban concentration of

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.⁷ 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.⁸

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.⁹

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.¹⁰

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.¹¹

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.¹²

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.¹³ 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.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵

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,¹⁶ 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.

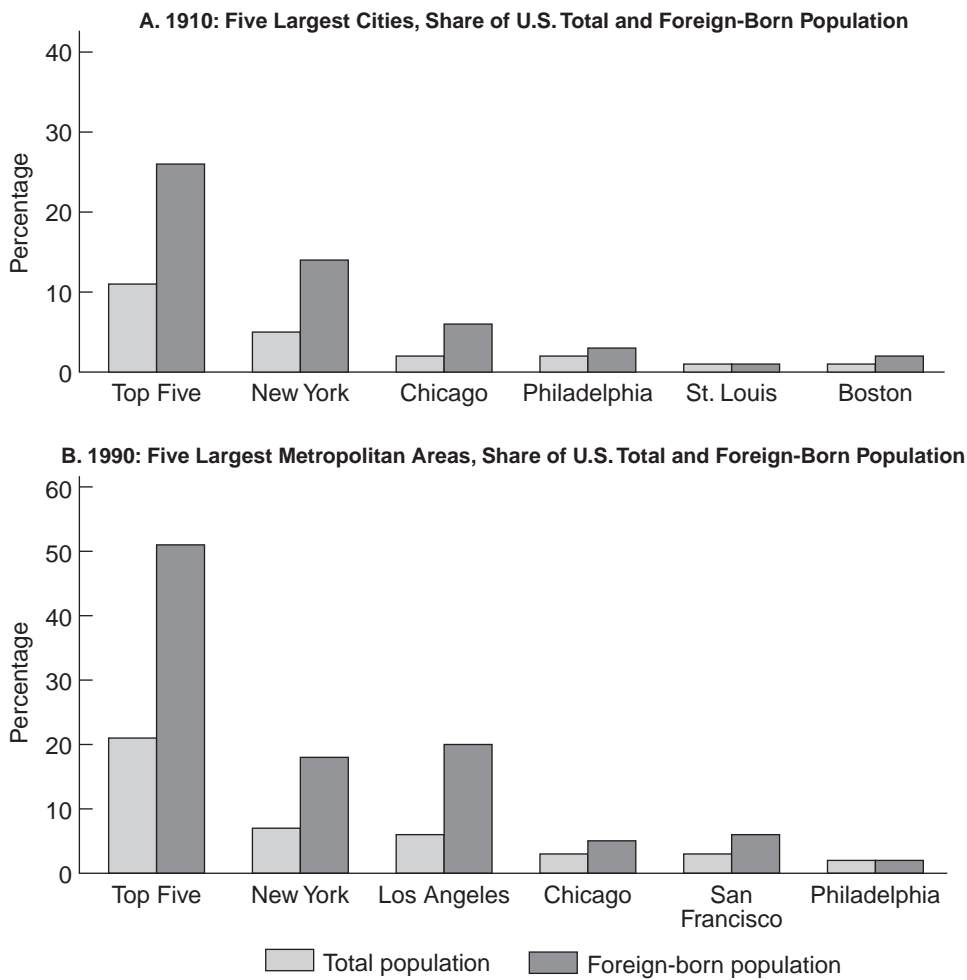
Los Angeles and Its Immigrants

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.

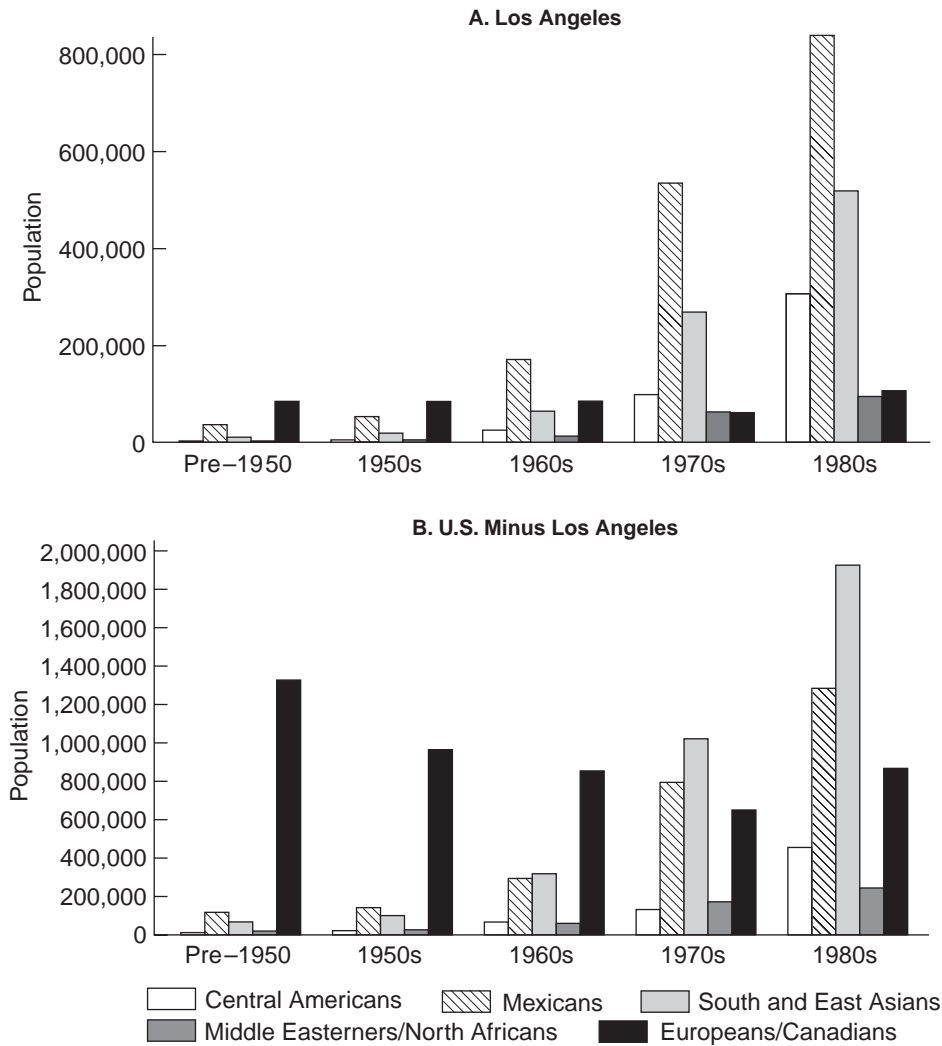
Impressive in these retrospective comparisons, contemporary Los Angeles also stands out from today's other major immigrant areas in more ways than one. In 1990, Los Angeles was home to 3.9 million immigrants, 400,000 more than New York, which stood in second place. In foreign-born proportion, its population 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.

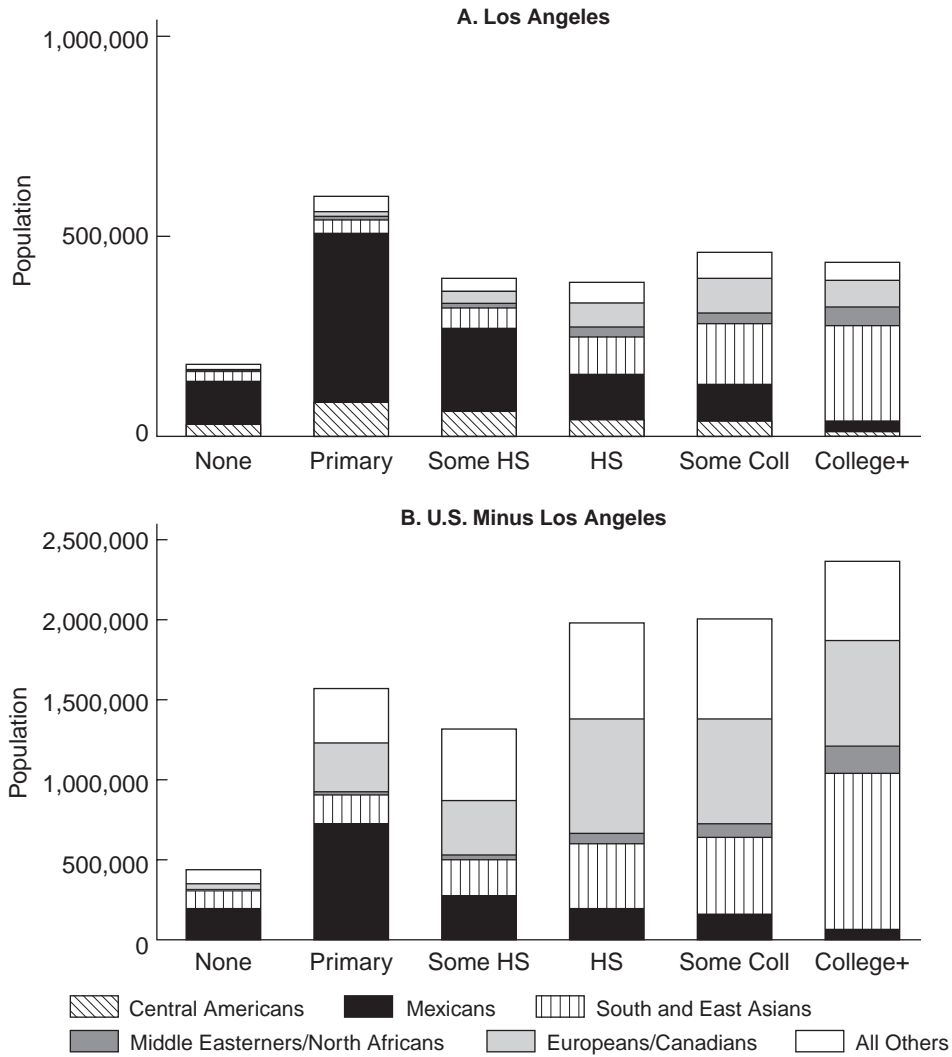
The newcomers to L.A. come from all walks of life, but the very distinctive national origins of L.A.'s immigrants means that its foreign-born mix is characterized not by diversity but by socioeconomic polarization. Elsewhere in the United States, as figure 1.4 shows, the educational profile of the foreign-born 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.¹⁷

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.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹

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.²⁰ 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."²¹

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.²² 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.

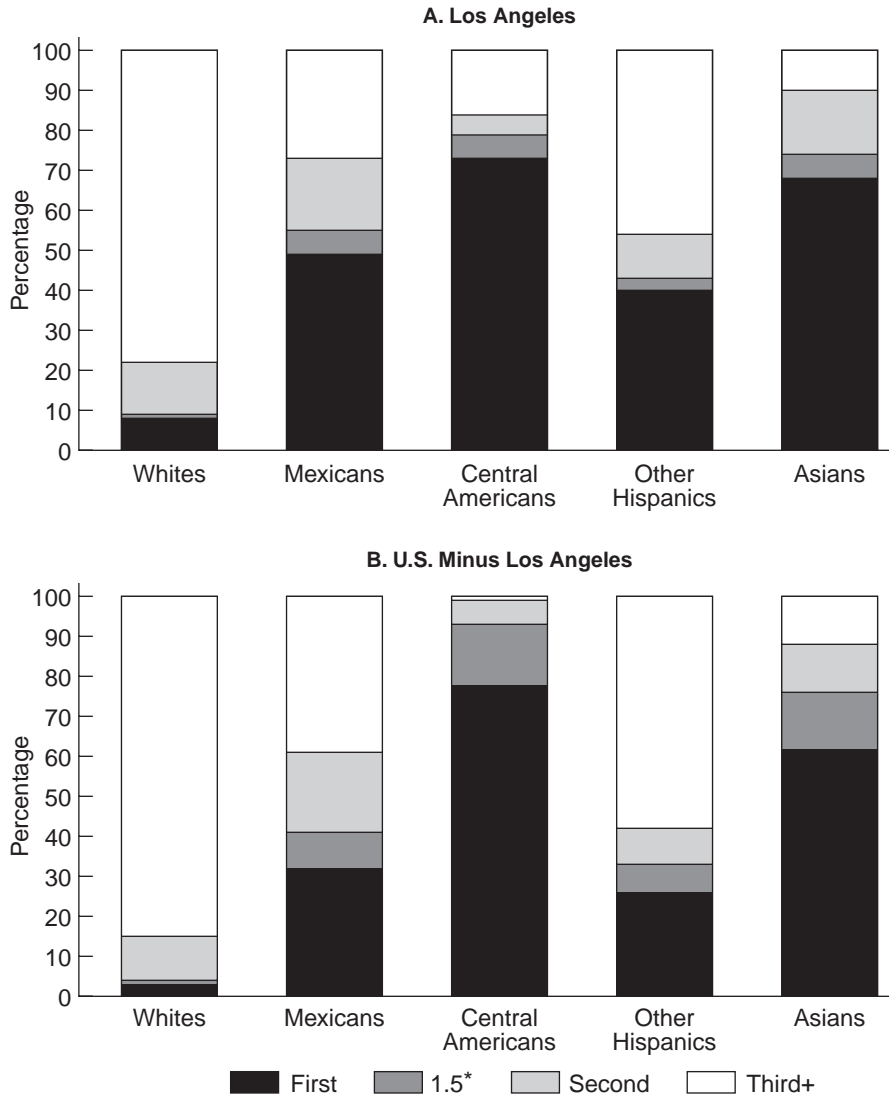
But the cessation of immigration, not its causes, is what counts for patterns of ethnic adaptation. Once the flow of newcomers stopped, old-country influences declined. As the immigrant presence weakened and diminished, the second generation moved to center stage, shifting out of the jobs, neighborhoods, 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.²³ 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."²⁴ 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."²⁵ 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.²⁶ 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.²⁷ 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.²⁸ 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"²⁹ 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.³⁰ 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., *Irangels: 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 Lieberson 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.