

## ONE

# Introduction to Los Angeles

## City and Region

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### SETTING THE SCENE

For close to a century now, Southern California has been the magnet for enormous population movements both from other parts of the United States and from other parts of the world. In an ever-widening orbit of attraction, a series of migratory waves have given rise to a net population growth averaging close to two million per decade, or over five hundred every day for almost one hundred years.<sup>1</sup> Anchoring this phenomenal growth has been a process of urban and regional development that has engendered one of the world's largest metropolitan agglomerations. The regional metropolis of Los Angeles, centered around the original settlement of El Pueblo de Nuestra Señora la Reina de los Angeles de Porciúncula but now stretching outward for sixty miles in almost every direction, encompasses more than 160 separate municipalities in five counties, with a current population of fifteen million. It is the sixth or seventh largest of the world's "megacities."<sup>2</sup>

The emergence of Los Angeles out of a scattered collection of towns and villages as one of the major metropolitan regions of the contemporary world gives it a special place in the history and geography of city building. Just what this "place" represents, however, has always been a controversial issue, perhaps never more so than today. It is still an open question, for example, whether to view Los Angeles as an exceptional case, a persistently peculiar and unreproducible type of city, or as an exemplary, if not paradigmatic, illustration of the essential and generalizable features of late-twentieth-century urbanization. Similarly, the historical geography of Los Angeles invites continuing debate between those who see in it the achievement of a sort of urban utopia and the American Dream and those who see

little more than the dystopian nightmares of a “Hell Town”<sup>3</sup> grown to gargantuan proportions.

In the essays contained in this volume, a diversity of views on these—and other—issues is represented. By maintaining this multiplicity of positions, we hope to dissolve the either/or logic that has commonly characterized debates about the region and to foster, as a means of understanding and interpreting late-twentieth-century Los Angeles, a more encompassing purview capable of holding several different standpoints simultaneously in perspective. In every urban space one can find liberating and oppressive forces, the unique and the general, the utopian and dystopian, mixed together in complex ways. Recognition of the stubborn coexistence of these conflicting circumstances and their often revealing interdependence and inseparability is the starting point for making sense of the urbanization of Los Angeles—or, for that matter, any other contemporary metropolis.

This multisided approach to understanding Los Angeles does not mean that there is no common ground to the chapters that follow, other than one of simple context. All of the chapters are imbued with a strong geographic or spatial perspective, a point of view that focuses our attention on the regional development and built environment of Los Angeles, that is, on what can be described as the social and spatial construction of the metropolis. This emphasis is complemented by a shared concern for policy issues and the political challenges posed in Los Angeles by the tasks of creating more progressive forms of urban and regional planning, architecture and urban design, community development, and environmental regulation. In one way or another, every contributor to this book has been or is actively involved in public policy debates in Southern California, giving the collection a unifying sense of immediacy and of commitment to social justice and the improvement of urban life.

The essays focus primarily on the dramatic changes that have been occurring in Los Angeles over the past thirty years. Making practical sense of this broadly defined urban *restructuring* as it has unfolded in the period marked by the two most disruptive urban insurrections in twentieth-century America, in 1965 and then again in 1992, is an insistently recurrent theme. It influences how far back into the past each contributor delves and how far into broader theoretical debates and discourses each essay extends. In this attempt to make practical sense of the restructuring of Los Angeles, some but not all authors link their essays to wider debates on contemporary social change, particularly on issues of modernity and postmodernity. What is being suggested by this linkage is that the restructuring of Los Angeles is part of a more global restructuring process affecting everyone, everywhere in the world, albeit unevenly, during the closing decades of the twentieth century. Moreover, there is an additional inflexion to this argument, an implied presentation of Los Angeles as a particularly revealing place

from which to understand and interpret global phenomena of urbanization and regional development in relation to broadly based transformations of contemporary capitalist society.

THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF LOS ANGELES:  
A BRIEF HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY

*Every city has had its boom, but the history of Los Angeles is the history of booms. Actually, the growth of Southern California since 1870 should be regarded as one continuous boom punctuated at intervals with major explosions.*

CAREY MCWILLIAMS, *SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA: AN ISLAND ON THE LAND*

Taking our cue from Carey McWilliams, one of the finest critical historians of Southern California, a panoramic picture of the historical and geographic growth of the regional metropolis of Los Angeles can be described in terms of a virtually continuous boom periodically slowed by national and global economic recession and punctuated by some of the most violent urban social upheavals in American history. This rhythm can be broadly seen in the array of decennial census figures presented in table 1.1. Starting in 1870, five surges of urban expansion can be identified, peaking first in the 1880s and then in the 1900s during the Progressive Era, the Roaring Twenties, the two decades following the end of the Second World War, and finally

TABLE 1.1 Population Growth in the Five-County Region of Los Angeles (000s)

Census Year	Los Angeles (*)		San				Five-County Region
			Orange	Bernardino	Riverside	Ventura	
1870	15	(79)	—	4	—	—	19
1880	33	(72)	—	8	—	5	46
1890	101	(67)	14	25	—	10	151
1900	170	(68)	20	28	18	14	250
1910	504	(78)	34	57	35	18	648
1920	936	(81)	61	73	50	28	1,150
1930	2,209	(85)	119	134	81	55	2,597
1940	2,786	(86)	131	161	106	70	3,253
1950	4,152	(84)	216	282	170	115	4,934
1960	6,011	(78)	709	501	303	199	7,724
1970	7,042	(71)	1,421	682	457	378	9,981
1980	7,478	(65)	1,932	893	664	530	11,496
1990	8,863	(61)	2,411	1,418	1,170	669	14,531

(\*) = Los Angeles County as percentage of total regional population.

the contemporary period of restructuring, which seems clearly to have reached its crest some time in the late 1980s.

*Surge 1, 1870–1900*

The inaugural punctuation point in the urbanization of Los Angeles was the Chinese Massacre of 1871, perhaps the first time the Americanized pueblo made headline news all around the world. The event took place in and around the Calle de los Negros (called “Nigger Alley” at the time), for several decades the multiethnic main street of violent Hell Town, located not far from present-day Union Station. It resulted in the murders of about twenty Chinese (out of a total Chinese population of 200) by an angry mob of Anglo vigilantes, police officers (apparently led by the chief of police), and a few Mexicans seeking revenge for the accidental killing of a white man. The shocked citizenry responded with something very much like the Rebuild LA Committee that was set up in the immediate aftermath of the riots of 1992, representing (in both cases) an effort to reestablish social order and to improve the severely tarnished external image of the city. This first burst of boosterism in the late 1800s contributed significantly to an urban boom that would last from the 1880s to the national depression years of the mid-1890s.

Despite continued anti-Asian hysteria along the entire Pacific Coast, the Chinese were to play a significant role, as merchants, laborers, fishermen, and vegetable farmers, in the 1880s surge of urban expansion. Thriving Chinatowns grew up in almost every urban center in Southern California. By the end of the century, however, racial discrimination, exacerbated by an influx of Mexican labor and Japanese farmers, effectively squeezed the Chinese population into the small Chinatown that still exists adjoining the old pueblo. A pattern was set by the Chinese Massacre and the subsequent social disciplining of the “troublesome” minority. The massacre exposed an undercurrent of racism and xenophobia that would periodically burst to the surface, briefly interrupting as well as redirecting the urbanization process. In the aftermath of riot and social upheaval, private interests would gather in force to plan and promote their visions of an idealized urban future, often in the absence of effective public leadership and at the expense of a perceived “problem minority.”

The first surge of urban growth saw the addition of over 230,000 people to the tiny regional population of about 20,000 in 1870. The long-resident Mexican “Californio” population, the primary target for Protestant racial purification after the American conquest of the Mexican Southwest, dwindled in relative size and absolute importance over this period, as the region was flooded with WASP migrants mainly from small-town mid-America who were attracted to the sunny subtropical vineyards, orange groves, and south-

ern comforts of such new towns as Pasadena, Santa Monica, Anaheim, Santa Ana, Pomona, Riverside, and Redlands. Key rail connections broke the region's isolation from the national economy, and local boosters effectively began to promote the image of healthy and bountiful Southern California, the imminent home place for the first truly American city.

Twenty new municipalities were created in this period, adding to the three established cities of Los Angeles (incorporated in 1850), San Buenaventura (1866), and San Bernardino (1869). The region was on its way to becoming the richest agricultural area in the country, a position it would maintain well into the twentieth century. So intense was its self-advertisement and dependency on land development and speculation that as early as 1886 local observers were claiming that there were more real estate agents per acre than in any other city in the world. The economic development and urbanization of Southern California had begun.

### *Surge 2, 1900–1920*

The first surge sold an idyllic Los Angeles to Protestant America and created a regional economy based in agriculture, land speculation, real estate boosterism, and the provision of specialized health and leisure services, particularly to wealthy white retirees.<sup>4</sup> The depression of the mid-1890s, however, demonstrated the weaknesses of this economic base for further urban growth. In the next surge, the public and private promoters of Los Angeles turned increasingly to industrial development and succeeded in plugging the city into the dynamo of the American Manufacturing Belt in the northeastern states. In 1920, Los Angeles was still behind most other major American cities in manufacturing employment but had clearly begun the trajectory that would make it the country's leading industrial metropolis seventy years later.

Rapid economic development between 1900 and 1920 helped to quadruple the regional population to well over one million. There were many key developments in this expansion. By 1920, Los Angeles had become one of the major petroleum-producing regions in the world and its leadership in motion picture production was firmly established. A budding aircraft industry was born from the talents of local entrepreneurs like Donald Douglas and the Loughhead (Lockheed) brothers. An expanded port complex in San Pedro (annexed to the City of Los Angeles in 1906) and in Long Beach (by this time well established as the region's "second city") had already surpassed nearly all its Pacific Coast competitors, and the completion of the California Aqueduct in 1913 (which triggered many other annexations to the city, including Hollywood in 1910) assured a sufficient water supply for large-scale urban growth.

Significant migration streams from southern and central Europe, Japan,

and especially Mexico created a highly diverse industrial labor force. In 1920, Mexicans had become the largest immigrant group in Los Angeles and were for the first time since the late nineteenth century more numerous than African-Americans. These trends reinforced the character of Los Angeles as the most racially diverse—and racially segregated—of Pacific Coast cities.<sup>5</sup> Finally, the booming regional complex was effectively forged into a single functional unit by the automobile (in 1920, Los Angeles was already ahead of all other major American cities in automobile registration and use) and by what was probably the most extensive network of metropolitan mass transit in the world, dominated by the Red Cars of the Pacific Electric Railway Company.

Over forty new cities were incorporated in this period in the five-county region, reinforcing the sprawling, polycentric character of the urban built environment. Many were “black gold suburbs” built on the scattered pools of petroleum underlying the region, while others grew at new industrial sites, as the interplay of urbanization and industrialization began its forceful impact on the regional landscape. A very different kind of American metropolis was now taking shape, one in which the oil derrick, the automobile, the airfield, the movie studio, the beach and mountain community, the immigrant labor camp and factory town, and the all-purpose tourist resort both stretched the urban fabric and pinned it down in an extensive multiplicity of urban places and experiences.

At the same time, the City of Los Angeles was taking on its peculiar shape, spreading into the San Fernando Valley to the north, extending an annexed ribbon of land south to the port at San Pedro, and gobbling up most of the communities in its western march to the Pacific (leaving a series of “holes” as represented by the independent municipalities of Beverly Hills and Culver City, where local movie moguls and real estate developers were powerful enough to resist annexation and incorporate on their own). Anchoring this expansion was the new central city of Los Angeles, just south of the old pueblo, a bustling downtown clogged with automobiles and the worst traffic jams of any major American city. The Progressive movement was particularly successful in Los Angeles, introducing such populist local government reforms as the initiative, the referendum, and the recall; and by the end of the century’s first decade, Los Angeles had become a vital center of the American labor movement and seemed ready to elect a socialist mayor.

The punctuating explosion of this growth surge was the bombing of the *Los Angeles Times* building in late 1910, in retrospect a key turning point in the Progressive Era, the labor movement, and the development of socialism in America. Over the next few years, not only were the alleged “radical anarchist” perpetrators thrown in jail and the socialist candidate for mayor defeated (he retreated to the desert to found the short-lived socialist com-

munity of Llano del Rio) but the local labor movement was decimated, the “open shop” was given new life (it would last for another three decades), and the industrialization of Los Angeles was placed even more firmly in the hands of business interests linked to the triumphant *Los Angeles Times* and the powerful Merchants and Manufacturers Association. After this brief but volatile interruption, the regional metropolis was prepared to boom again.

### *Surge 3, 1920–1940*

The 1920s may have roared more loudly in Los Angeles than anywhere else in America. The regional population more than doubled over the decade to 2.6 million. Although population growth would slow down dramatically following the stock market crash in 1929, the persistence of the “continuous boom” softened the impact of the Great Depression, at least in relation to other American metropolitan areas. The most powerful engines of the regional economy recovered rapidly in the 1930s, and, as occurred after key turning point explosions in the past, Los Angeles seemed on the edge of yet another growth surge as the era ended in the global explosions of the Second World War.

In addition to a renewed land boom, petroleum production and refining experienced a resurgence, especially in southern Los Angeles County, stimulating the growth of the ports of Los Angeles-Long Beach and the emergence of a vast urban industrial zone stretching northward from the ports to downtown. The motion picture industry grew more rapidly than ever as it moved beyond the silent era. It was the leading industry throughout this period and employed between thirty and forty thousand workers. Still centered in Hollywood, “the industry,” as it came to be called, developed in a band stretching from North Hollywood through the central axis of Hollywood to Culver City. The Los Angeles aircraft industry also boomed in the interwar years, although it required the impetus of the Second World War before it assumed unquestioned national leadership, and it became the conduit through which the main high-technology industrial base of the regional metropolis would be established in later years.

The 1920s and 1930s marked the peak period of growth of Los Angeles County. A map of the built-up area in 1940 would show an almost complete filling in of the county’s southwest quadrant, that is, virtually all of the City of Los Angeles and the array of working-class suburbs attached to the industrial zone stretching from downtown to Long Beach. The population of Los Angeles County in 1940 was 86 percent of the total for the five-county region, the highest percentage it would ever reach. Municipal incorporations between 1920 and 1940 slowed significantly to only nineteen, but the majority were in Los Angeles County in and around the industrial zone:

Torrance, Signal Hill, South Gate, Maywood, Lynwood, Bell, Hawthorne, Gardena, Montebello, West Covina. Only Detroit compared with Los Angeles in the net increase of manufacturing workers over this period, and Los Angeles would continue to lead all other metropolitan areas decade by decade for the next fifty years as well. By 1935, Los Angeles was the fifth-largest industrial county in the United States; it led the country in motion picture production, oil refining, aircraft manufacturing, and secondary automobile assembly; it was second in tires and fourth in furniture and apparel.

Despite this industrial growth, there has been little appreciation until recently that Los Angeles has for a long time been a major manufacturing center. In part, this was due to the triumphant character of industrial development in the Northeast during the Fordist era, with its enormous corporate power and giant manufacturing plants. Perhaps even more important, however, was the enveloping imagery that had developed which proclaimed the “exceptionalism” of Los Angeles, its representation as Hollywood, a bizarre Babylon by the sea, a unique and inimitable city of dreams. But beneath this thickly layered imagery there was a fulsome industrial job machine that had begun rolling in the 1920s. What has turned out to be the largest internal migration in U.S. history focused geographically on Los Angeles County starting in the 1920s, increasing with the dust bowl migration of poor white farmers in the 1930s and climaxing with the great black migrations during the three decades following the Second World War.

#### *Surge 4, 1940–1970*

As in the Roaring Twenties, the long postwar economic boom in America was nowhere more intense than in the Los Angeles metropolis. Between 1940 and 1970, the regional population tripled in size to nearly 10 million, a net addition of almost 7 million new residents. Los Angeles County grew from a population of 2.8 million to over 7 million, and the rate of population growth in the peripheral counties was even greater. Starting the surge at under half a million, the four outer counties’ population reached nearly 3 million in 1970. The largest growth took place in Orange County, which increased more than tenfold to 1.4 million, about equal to the other three peripheral counties combined. What was occurring in the regional metropolis of Los Angeles was mass suburbanization on a scale never before encountered.

An unprecedented housing boom resulted in a proliferation of suburban tracts that quickly grew into independent municipalities. Nearly sixty cities were incorporated between 1940 and 1960 as the built-up area of the metropolis expanded ever more insistently outward. Lakewood (incorporated in 1954) was the exemplary model—Los Angeles’s Levittown—of the new,



primarily white and largely working-class suburban municipality. A “city by contract,” it purchased its basic services from the county in a scheme that would stimulate an “incorporation game” of unusual intensity and creativity. New municipalities sprouted to serve highly specialized local constituencies: the City of Industry (incorporated in 1957), the City of Commerce (1960), a city zoned for the horse set (Bradbury, 1957), and others gated, walled, and protected by armed guards (Rolling Hills and Rolling Hills Estates, 1957). There was an incorporated place for everyone, it seemed, except for those in the black ghetto inside the City of Los Angeles and the major Mexican barrio, concentrated on county land in what is still unincorporated East Los Angeles. Here, housing problems were compounded until they became stubborn community crises beyond the pale of private development solutions.

Sustaining this surge of growth was the series of Pacific wars—the Second World War, the Korean War, Vietnam—that propelled the Los Angeles region into a primary position within what President Dwight D. Eisenhower would call, warning the people of its power, the American “military-industrial complex.” While all the other engines of the regional economy continued to expand through this period, the aerospace industry emerged as by far the leading local sector, accompanied by an extensive network of components manufacturers, service providers, research centers, and a growing electronics industry. After a brief lull following the Second World War, the outbreak of fighting in Korea gave renewed vigor to the aerospace-defense-electronics industry and initiated the unfolding over the following decades of a series of generations of technopoles, or high-technology industrial districts. Each new generation shifted farther outward from the central industrial core of Los Angeles, the most pronounced expansion in this period occurring in the northern half of Orange County.<sup>6</sup>

The Second World War and the Korean War were periods of intensified social tensions that brought back to the surface the long history of white American racism and xenophobia in Los Angeles. In the war years of the 1940s, the long-standing anti-Mexican tradition exploded again after the so-called Zoot Suit riots of 1943, while the equally long-standing anti-Asian tradition reached another low point in the confinement of more than thirty thousand Japanese-Americans from Los Angeles in concentration camps following Executive Order 9066 of 1942. In the early 1950s, after forty years of relative quiescence, socialism and militant unionism again entered the local political agenda, especially in two important areas of the booming regional economy: housing and Hollywood.

In the years following the Second World War, the City of Los Angeles was poised to become a national center for the provision of public housing. In a counteroffensive reminiscent of the events of 1910–1911, the *Los Angeles Times* and a cohort of probusiness organizations crushed these initia-

tives under the guise of American resistance to a socialist plot. No significant public housing for the poor has been built since the early 1950s. Hollywood provided another target. By the late 1940s, unions and guilds associated with the motion picture industry had become perhaps the most militant in the region. Large numbers of European intellectuals and others fleeing Fascism had moved to Los Angeles, and their growing influence intensified fear of a Socialist/Communist takeover of the movie industry, which had a powerful capacity for the mass propagation of social and political ideas and imagery. Aside from federal government officials and members of Congress, the Joseph McCarthy-led House Un-American Activities Committee inquisitions of the time focused primarily on Los Angeles, in a fierce and locally supported eradication of the Left that was also, as in the Progressive Era, accompanied by a reinforcement of private business control over the economic development of Los Angeles.

Hollywood and the housing market, however, were only two of the key sectors leading the postwar boom. A major new ingredient in this surge of economic expansion was the net addition of about 600,000 African-Americans to the Los Angeles growth machine. Attracted in part by federal legislation that reduced racial discrimination in the aerospace-defense industries and some local changes in discriminatory building codes and contracts, African-Americans succeeded in creating the country's first large suburban ghetto in what has come to be called South Central Los Angeles and began to play an increasingly important role in the regional economy and in urban politics. This expansion of black Los Angeles intensified white flight, sprawling suburbanization, and new forms of racial discrimination in industrial employment and housing.

The increasingly peripheralized technopoles in western Los Angeles County, in Orange County, and in the San Fernando Valley employed almost entirely white workers, often pooled into large, new, white-flight suburbs such as Simi Valley, incorporated in 1969 in Ventura County just over the Los Angeles County border. African-American blue-collar workers were relatively few in number even in the older industrial zones, which coincided throughout this period with overwhelmingly white working-class communities. To previous clusters populated by dust bowl Arkies and Okies, new incorporated municipalities were added, filling in southeastern Los Angeles County (Artesia, Baldwin Park, Bellflower, Bell Gardens, Cerritos, Cudahy, Downey, Hawaiian Gardens, La Mirada, Lakewood, Norwalk, Paramount, Pico Rivera, Santa Fe Springs) and pushing the continuously built-up area into the northern half of Orange County (Buena Park, Costa Mesa, Cypress, Fountain Valley, Garden Grove, La Palma, Los Alamitos, Stanton, Westminster, Yorba Linda). By 1970, sociological studies were beginning to show that Los Angeles now rivaled Chicago as the most racially segregated of all American cities.

The primary punctuating explosion of this period was the Watts rebellion in 1965, the most violent urban upheaval in American history up to that time. The continuous boom was interrupted again by racial and economic tensions, but this time the interruption was much less localized in its causes and consequences and the regional metropolis took a much longer time to recover. In the next surge, the rates of growth in population and industry would be lower than in previous periods, but in the Great U-Turn experienced by the national and world economies over the 1970s, the regional metropolis of Los Angeles would continue (relative to most other U.S. metropolitan areas) its century of boom.

*Surge 5, 1970–1990*

Although rates of population growth in the contemporary period are much lower than in earlier surges, the absolute growth of the regional metropolis has been greater than that of any other metropolitan area in the country. For the first time, the outer four counties surpassed Los Angeles County in total population growth, adding 2.7 million compared to Los Angeles's still very substantial increase of 1.8 million. Postsuburban Orange County<sup>7</sup> continued to grow into a protometropolis in its own right, by far the largest metropolitan area in the country with no central city of more than 350,000 residents, and San Bernardino and Riverside were at the top of the list of America's fastest-growing counties. More than thirty new municipalities were incorporated, mainly in the regional periphery. Among them were the fastest-growing small cities in the United States: Irvine, Mission Viejo, Lancaster, Moreno Valley, Santa Clarita.

With the growth of the outer cities of the greater Los Angeles region, the metropolis as a whole moved from a period of mass suburbanization to one of, for want of a better term, mass regional urbanization. This shift was accompanied by a growing sense that the late-twentieth-century urbanization process was being redirected into new forms and expressions. The notion of postsuburbanization was assimilated into discussions of the emergence in Los Angeles of a postmodern political culture and a post-Fordist political economy, each maintaining some continuity with the past but nevertheless raising new issues and new challenges to contemporary urban and regional studies. Reinforcing these views has been a series of profound changes in the economy and demography of the regional metropolis.

By 1990, Los Angeles had developed an extremely varied economy based on a diversity of high- and low-technology industries, as well as a thriving business and financial services sector. The growth of the latter dates mainly from the late 1970s and is expressed in a large downtown business complex with a major appendage extending westward along the Wilshire Boulevard corridor to Century City (built on part of the old Twentieth Century-Fox

movie lot) and a series of outlying satellite complexes, the largest being in Orange County. Much of this growth has been the result of the increasing internationalization of the Los Angeles regional economy and its insertion into the expanding development of the Pacific Rim. These global ties have confirmed the emergence of Los Angeles as a World City, a major nodal point in the ebb and flow of the new global economy.

Over this period of economic restructuring, and running parallel to deeply rooted processes of deindustrialization in America at large, the relatively small Fordist manufacturing sectors in Los Angeles (automobile assembly, tires, glass, steel, consumer durables) have virtually disappeared, whereas those based either on labor-intensive forms of craft production (including motion pictures, clothing, furniture, jewelry, leather-working) or on flexible high-technology production systems (led by electronics and aerospace) continued to expand, at least until the late 1980s. Today, the contemporary industrial landscape consists of a set of specialized craft industrial districts or agglomerations, mainly concentrated in the center of the region, a group of technopoles located outside the old industrial core, and a spatially extended complex of small metallurgical and machinery industries, mostly in and around the older central industrial zones (see fig. 1.1). While metropolitan areas in the northeastern states were losing manufacturing industries and employment at a rapid rate, Los Angeles continued to grow.

The economic vitality of the Los Angeles region after the turbulent late 1960s and early 1970s was accompanied by an intensified bifurcation of regional labor markets. On the one hand, there has been a growing high-wage, high-skill group of workers (managers, business executives, scientists, engineers, designers, and celebrities and many others in the entertainment industry); on the other hand, there has been an even more rapidly expanding mass of marginalized, low-wage, low-skill workers, the majority of whom are women and often undocumented Latino and Asian immigrants, who find employment throughout the service sector and in a widening pool of manufacturing sweatshops, from the garment industry to electronics assembly. Between these two strata is the traditional skilled and semiskilled blue-collar working class, which has been shrinking with such rapidity that it is now commonly referred to as the disappearing middle stratum of Southern California society. Many industrial sectors have based their main competitive strategies over this period on labor cost reductions rather than on re-skilling workers or on product and process quality improvements, thus capturing much of the labor force in a vicious circle of cost squeezing. This has been made easier by the dramatic decline of industrial unionization throughout the region. As a result, the wages of production workers have declined in real terms since the 1970s, even as the overall economy boomed.

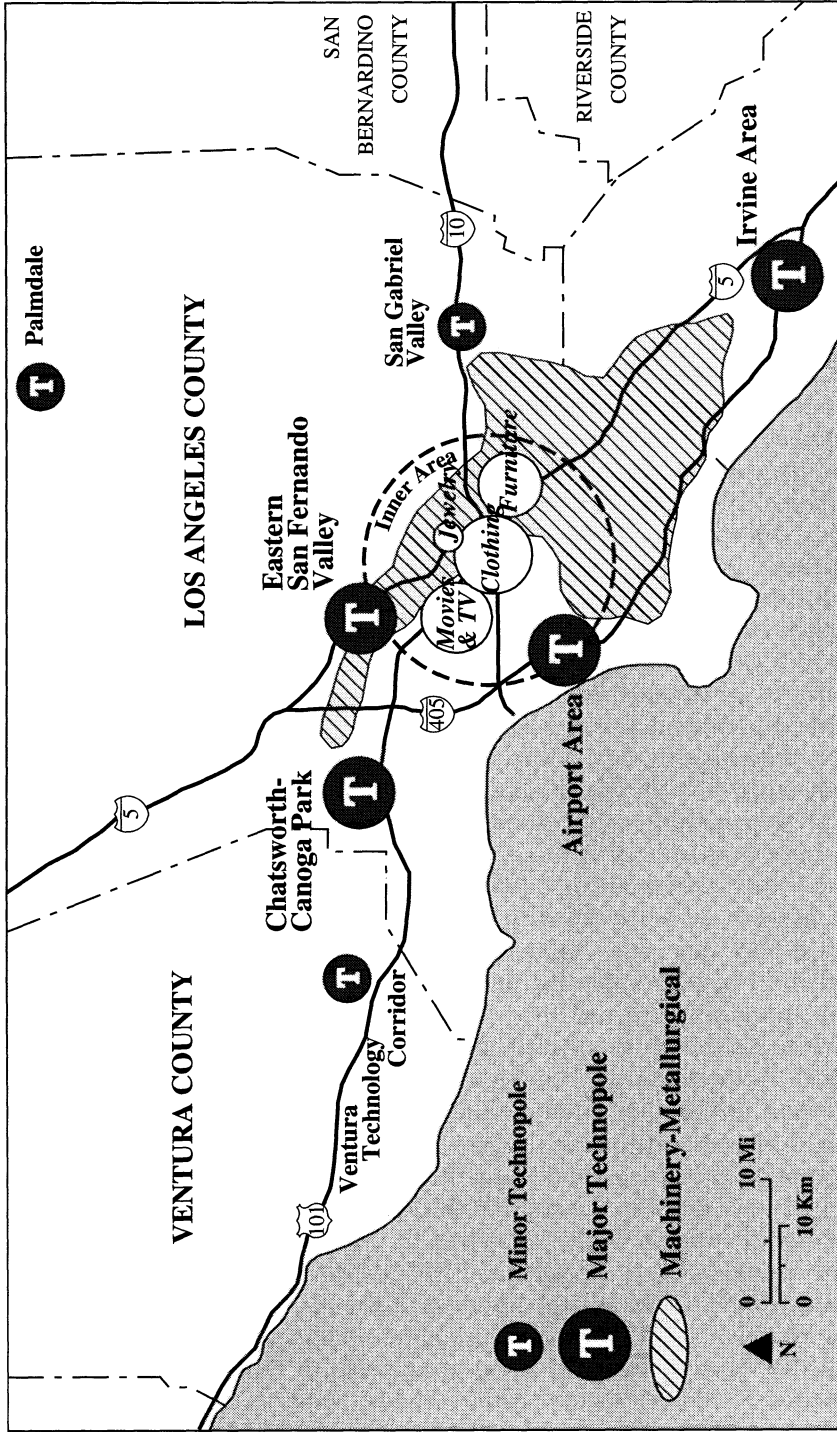


Figure 1.1. Schematic view of the industrial geography of metropolitan Los Angeles. Major freeways are shown.

In the 1980s, manufacturing employment began to decline in Los Angeles County, ending its century of virtually continuous expansion, and by the end of the decade, it had started to drop in the four outer counties as well. The end of the cold war and the major cuts in Department of Defense prime contracts sparked a new economic crisis in the region as it entered the 1990s. Employment in Los Angeles County aerospace-defense industries fell from 312,500 in 1987 to 259,600 in 1990 (a result of a more than 20% cut in real terms in prime contracts over the same years) and declined again to 234,800 in 1991. As it is assumed that one job in the defense sector generates through multiplier effects 1.5 to 2.5 jobs in other local sectors, the impact of these declines is far-reaching indeed. Waves of decline have also spread in the early 1990s to the FIRE (finance, insurance, real estate) sector, the construction industry, and much of the region's low-technology, low-wage, craft industries, which are now feeling the pinch of cheap foreign competition more than ever before.

The restructuring of the regional economy of Los Angeles was associated with a dramatically changing demographic pattern. As in earlier surges of urban development, waves of new immigration provided abundant cheap labor to fuel economic expansion and control labor costs, typically at the expense of established working-class communities. After the late 1960s, however, the migration waves reached unprecedented heights, transforming Los Angeles into the country's major port of entry for immigrants and making it probably the world's most ethnically and racially diverse metropolis. This demographic and cultural transformation and diversification has been most pronounced in Los Angeles County. The county's population shifted from 70 percent Anglo to 60 percent non-Anglo between 1970 and 1990, as what was once the most white and Protestant of American cities changed into what some commentators now call America's leading Third World city. The geographic distribution of the region's major ethnic groupings is shown in figure 1.2.

African-Americans numbered close to one million in 1990, an increase of about 230,000 over the two decades, but their rate of growth and their proportion of the total county population has been declining, and there are signs of an actual decrease in total numbers of African-Americans in the 1990s. Between 1970 and 1990, the old core of African-American Los Angeles was reduced in density and shifted to the west, with its once-rigid eastern black-white boundary dissolved by new Latino migrations.

The census category of Asian and Pacific Islander has experienced the highest rate of growth, as large numbers of Koreans, Chinese, Vietnamese, Thais, Filipinos, and Cambodians moved into the metropolitan region and raised the representation of these groups within Los Angeles County's population to more than 10 percent, almost equal to the percentage of African-Americans. Several new Asian neighborhoods have emerged since

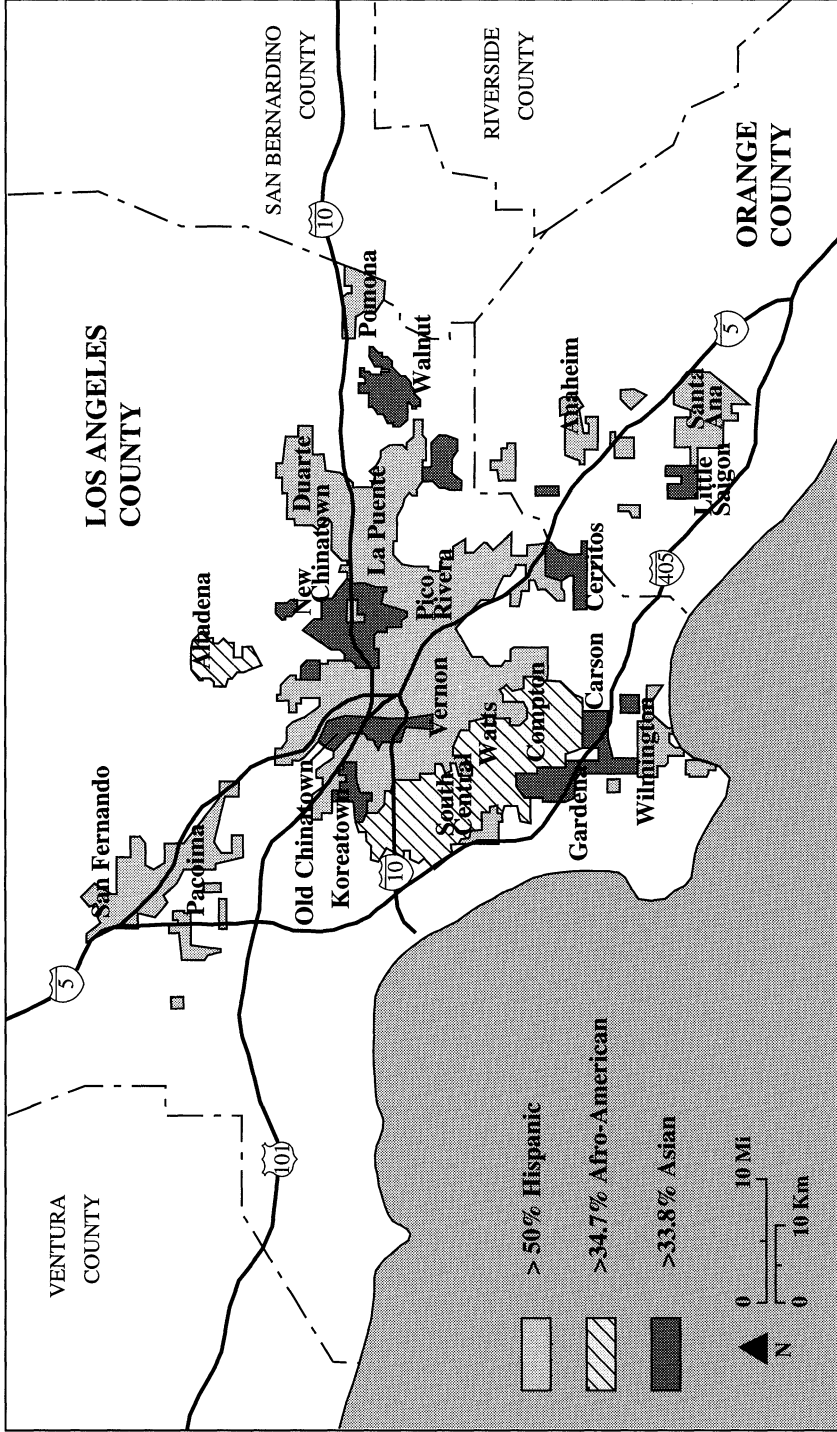


Figure 1.2. Afro-American, Hispanic, and Asian neighborhoods in Los Angeles and Orange counties. Major freeways are shown.

1970, including the large and expanding Koreatown west of the central city, the new “suburban Chinatown” centered in Monterey Park to the east, and a band of Vietnamese and Cambodian settlements to the south stretching from the older, predominantly Japanese community of Gardena to Long Beach and into Orange County, where a “Little Saigon” developed after the mid-1970s and now represents the largest concentration of Vietnamese people in the United States.

The greatest inward flow of population has led steadily to the re-Latinization of Los Angeles, more specifically, its re-Mexicanization. New migrants from Mexico, perhaps as many as two million, account for the vast majority of the increase in the Hispanic census category, with perhaps another half million coming from Guatemala, El Salvador, and other Central American countries. Probably undercounted in the 1990 census, the entire Latino population of Los Angeles County (including migrants from all countries south of the U.S. border as well as a resident Chicano population) is today approaching majority status. Population growth has been especially marked in the old Mexican barrio of East Los Angeles, and a new and largely Central American barrio has developed just west of downtown. In addition, a surge of growth has transformed some communities in southeastern Los Angeles County from more than 75 percent Anglo to over 90 percent Latino. While these areas of exceptional concentration have expanded, the Latino population has also spread broadly throughout the entire metropolitan region and into almost every economic sector.

This massive new wave of migration has been absorbed primarily into low-wage, low-skill service jobs in hotels, hospitals, restaurants, domestic service, and retail stores, as well as into the sweatshops that are now such an important part of the entire manufacturing system of Los Angeles. This has increasingly segmented local labor markets along ethnic lines. Latinos, for example, dominate in the furniture and clothing industries, and Asians are overrepresented in electronics assembly operations. At the same time, like immigrants throughout the history of the United States, many of the new arrivals to Los Angeles have moved out from these initial bases to become small entrepreneurs in their own right—ethnic restaurant owners, Korean clothing industry contractors, Mexican jewelry manufacturers—adding significantly to the continued entrepreneurial energies of the region and providing, for many contemporary observers, a key source for recovery from the current economic crisis.

The new urban landscape that has emerged since the early 1970s in many ways reflects earlier historical trends and trajectories. At the same time, it is filled with expressions of very different urbanization processes, much less susceptible to traditional forms of analysis and interpretation. This increasingly complex and volatile mix of the old and the new, the unique and the



paradigmatic, has rekindled interest in Los Angeles as an object of urban inquiry and has produced a great expansion of both academic and journalistic writing filled with new ways of looking at and making sense, through Los Angeles, of the urban experience at large. It has also produced more troublesome problems and challenges for local policy makers and planners than ever before, especially after the most recent of the many explosions that have punctuated the continuous boom of the last one hundred twenty years. We are referring here to the massive urban uprising of the poor and the dispossessed that occurred throughout Los Angeles—but above all in South Central Los Angeles—in the last days of April 1992.

#### POLITICS AND PLANNING IN CONTEMPORARY LOS ANGELES

Once again Los Angeles is facing the task of recovering from explosive social unrest and reigniting its flagging economy. Again it seems to be turning primarily to an alliance of private business interests to lead the way, a turn that has been reinforced by the recent election of a Republican mayor on the heels of Tom Bradley, a Democrat and an African-American who held the post for well over two decades. Whether there will be an opportunity in this new configuration of urban political forces for a significant role to be played by community leaders, labor activists, and representatives of the new ethnic minorities and the poor has important implications for the future trajectory of development of Los Angeles at the end of the second millennium. It seems evident at this point that the economy is going through a further major round of restructuring involving a significant shift away from aerospace-defense work and toward more flexible forms of industrial development in sectors such as financial services, civilian high-technology production (such as medical instruments, computers, and biotechnology), and a great expansion of the region's craft, fashion, and cultural products industries. The major political question is, will this restructuring be the centerpiece of a new right-wing version of the post-Fordist/postmodern metropolis? Or will it be a foundation for the growth of new kinds of local social democracy, a new vision of citizenship (literally, the quality of being a denizen of a city) and the responsibilities it entails, and a concern for the quality of life rather than for a narrowly defined notion of the business climate? To conclude this introductory chapter, we will identify some of the key issues likely to affect the future of Los Angeles and the political, public policy, and planning arenas in which they are most likely to be addressed.

First on the agenda is the need to mobilize the new urban majority of Latino, Asian, and African-American communities. Within the existing system of local government, this will mean in part increased representation

at the municipal (city council) and county (board of supervisors) levels, a process that has recently begun to be apparent in the case of Latino and Asian politicians. Changes in local election procedures will also be necessary to allow citizens without U.S. nationality to vote on issues that significantly affect their lives (e.g., school boards and local transportation), and new ways will have to be developed to promote neighborhood development and community planning, especially in building coalitions of community groups across ethnic and local government boundaries. These forms of political mobilization and empowerment will involve a major rethinking of state and local (and perhaps even federal) government institutions and procedures.

The provision of affordable housing must also be given high priority. The restructuring of the regional metropolis has directly and indirectly created one of the worst housing crises in urban America. Homelessness and overcrowding have risen to record levels, and an unresponsive private housing market and the federal government's almost complete withdrawal from providing new public housing have deepened the problems still further. Short of a revived public housing program, the future here is likely to revolve around public intervention via partnerships with community groups and private developers and the establishment of a system of community housing banks, fostering such innovations as limited equity affordable housing cooperatives.

The issues of housing and community development must be broadened into a regional and multisectoral planning process that deals systematically with employment, mass transit, land use, and environmental issues. Urban restructuring has had a turbulent effect on the jobs-housing balance, lengthening journeys to work in many outlying areas, clogging the freeways everywhere, and increasing pollution. Some way must be found to coordinate the many different sectoral agencies that deal with these issues to promote an integrated, yet flexible, approach to policy formulation and implementation in the larger metropolitan area, one that is responsive to local community needs. Transportation planning is likely to be a key to the success of such efforts, for a major investment of federal and local funds (up to \$180 billion) in mass transit development in Los Angeles is planned over the next thirty years—the largest direct public financial stimulus ever given to any metropolitan region. Ways to make this enormous investment benefit the entire region and to use it to stimulate local economic development, in particular by creating new kinds of advanced ground transportation equipment industries in the region, are now being considered.<sup>8</sup>

Important to this multisectoral planning process is the development of regional industrial and employment planning, first and foremost to guide the critical process of defense conversion. This will not only involve assis-

tance to management in promoting technology sharing, the development of new products (such as nonpolluting automobiles, buses, and other mass transit vehicles), and the creation of networks for industrial innovation but should also serve labor through job retraining, skills maintenance, a reinvigorated labor movement, and the encouragement of greater labor participation in decision making at all levels. Several complementary programs need to be developed to (1) bring industrial and environmental planning closer together so as to streamline environmental regulation procedures while at the same time generating more effective programs for smog control, water quality, and the disposal of hazardous waste; (2) build on the continuing strengths of the regional economy, especially in the craft, fashion, and cultural products industry (which includes the entertainment industry), and in all associated facets of design, from architecture to automobiles;<sup>9</sup> (3) focus new industrial development on job generation, especially for the core poverty areas; and (4) promote and sustain new institution building at the local level, from regional manufacturing networks to neighborhood self-help organizations.

Behind all these efforts looms the need to rethink and reorganize regional government and planning. None of the programs identified above is likely to be successful if the present highly fragmented governance structure of the region remains intact. For if there is any lesson to be learned from a study of the causes and consequences of urban restructuring in Los Angeles, it is that the new metropolis that has emerged over the past thirty years is regional in scale, scope, functioning, and patterns of daily life, much more than it ever was before. In particular, in view of the intricate interdependencies that run throughout the many different clusters of industrial activity within the local economy, some organizational structure for coordinating local economic development strategies and for seeking to build agreements between important and relevant local constituencies (e.g., industrial associations, banks, labor organizations, local government agencies) about ways of moving forward is highly desirable. Many regions in different parts of the world have now put into place systems of local economic coordination, such as regional economic councils or development consortia, and there is much that such a system might accomplish for the economy of Los Angeles. Indeed, the Southern California Association of Governments has recently proposed the formation of a regional economic strategies consortium to promote local economic development.<sup>10</sup>

In its most recent incarnation, Los Angeles is a major node within a worldwide network of urban and regional economies. It is at once an important actor within the new global economy and a dependent organism, subject to intense buffeting by currents that lie far beyond its control. The entire pattern of postwar economic growth and development in the region

has been seriously disturbed of late, and its social life—which has never in any case attained anything remotely approaching equilibrium—is now threatened by new rounds of intense turmoil and turbulence. The region seems to lie at a critical turning point in its history, as it did especially in the early years of the present century and immediately after the Second World War. The policy problems that it currently faces and the solutions that are brought to bear on them will provide crucial lessons and reference points for other localities in the United States as they, too, tackle the stresses and strains of the turn to post-Fordist/postmodern forms of urban development at the end of the twentieth century.

#### NOTES

1. What we will describe as the greater Los Angeles region is defined by the five counties of Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Ventura. In addition, the wider area of Southern California is defined as including San Diego and Imperial counties to the south and San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, and Kern counties to the north. In 1993, Southern California had a total population of close to 20 million.

2. A recent ranking of the largest metropolitan regions by Rand-McNally puts Los Angeles in sixth place, behind Tokyo-Yokohama, New York, Osaka-Kobe-Kyoto, São Paulo, and Seoul. Just behind Los Angeles is Mexico City.

3. Hell Town was the name given to Los Angeles in the period after the end of the Mexican-American War and the beginning of the great California gold rush. Reminiscent of the bloodiest Hollywood westerns, in the early 1850s there was an average of one murder every day in the newly established Los Angeles County (which had a total population of about 3,600) and even more frequent displays of racial hatred, violence, and Yankee vigilantism, a tradition that continues even to the present day.

4. Already in 1900, Los Angeles contained a higher proportion of elderly people than most comparable American cities.

5. For a detailed description of multiethnic Los Angeles in the 1920s, see Robert M. Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis: Los Angeles, 1850–1930* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967; reissued in 1993, Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Oxford: University of California Press).

6. See Allen J. Scott, *Technopolis: High Technology Industry and Regional Development in Southern California* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Oxford: University of California Press, 1993).

7. See R. Kling, S. Olin, and M. Poster, eds., *Postsuburban California: The Transformation of Orange County since World War II* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Oxford: University of California Press, 1991).

8. Allen J. Scott and David Bergman, *Advanced Ground Transportation Equipment Manufacturing and Local Economic Development: Lessons for Southern California*, University of California, Los Angeles, Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies, Working Paper no. 8, 1993.

9. Southern California is now one of the world's major centers of automobile design, with about twenty-five principal design studios belonging to car manufacturers from North America, Japan, and Europe.

10. *SCAG Regional Comprehensive Plan* (Los Angeles: Southern California Association of Governments, 1994).