

# 8. Conclusion

The ethnic transformation of Southern California that began in the late 1960s continues to this day. Just as the faces of Southern Californians have been changing, so have the places. The tendency of many members of all ethnic groups to live in some places much more than others demonstrates the role of ethnicity in people's residential decisions. Ethnic spatial patterning is a significant dimension of society.

Because of our geographical emphasis on places, the details of our maps and interpretations are at least as important as our more general findings. Nevertheless, *Changing Faces, Changing Places* does present results for the region as a whole, which we develop in the next sections.

## Suburbanization of all Ethnic Groups

All ethnic groups have been deconcentrating residentially. Whites, having abandoned central city locations decades ago, tended to leave older suburban neighborhoods during the 1990s. Some settled in newer and more affluent suburbs, and others moved out of Southern California entirely. Because the numbers of Whites in Southern California declined by 10 percent during the 1990s, much housing became available for members of other groups.

The large and fast-growing Latino population represented the greatest component of change in the 1990s. Latinos typically occupy less costly housing in older neighborhoods and have been moving into both older White suburbs and formerly Black areas of central cities. Blacks, at a much later stage of suburbanization, have been leaving older, more central neighborhoods during the last two or three decades. Many Asians, with their above-average incomes, dispersed into more expensive and mostly White suburbs. Others, particularly immigrants, settled in Asian enclaves. Asian increases were most pronounced in upscale suburban Asian concentrations, some of which have become attractive to several Asian groups, resulting in multiethnic Asian or pan-Asian enclaves. Although our maps have tend-

ed to emphasize the various ethnic concentrations, it is important to realize that many business, cultural, and political leaders of all ethnic groups live outside such concentrations or on their fringes.

The maps demonstrate that many thousands of households in all groups have moved closer to the metropolitan fringe. For this reason, ethnic diversity tends to be high in these outer suburban areas. Diversity is also high in some older suburbs. Diversity is lowest at both economic extremes—in the strongly Latino areas, which are poor and from which other groups have left, and strongly White areas, where houses are extremely expensive.

## Ethnic Residential Separation and Enclaves

The tendency of Whites to live in more affluent, strongly White enclaves diminished during the 1990s. Other groups are entering those neighborhoods to some extent. Research has shown that Whites in Southern California are less residentially isolated than Whites in the comparable metropolitan areas (CMSAs) of New York or Chicago.<sup>1</sup> As of 2000, only 22 percent of Whites in Los Angeles lived in census tracts that were over 80 percent White, whereas in Chicago and New York just over 60 percent of Whites lived in tracts that were over 80 percent White.

**Black-White separation.** This is still high in Los Angeles County but has been diminishing steadily for more than three decades. Moreover, Blacks and Whites are much less separated residentially in Southern California than in other large metropolitan areas in the East and Midwest. New York, Chicago, Detroit, and Milwaukee are the most highly segregated large metropolitan areas in the United States. When this relatively lower level of Black-White separation in Los Angeles County is combined with the much lower levels in the four outlying suburban counties, it is clear that in Southern California

Blacks are much less separated residentially from Whites than in the other very large metropolitan areas.

Nevertheless, some people believe that housing discrimination in Southern California remains as powerful as it was thirty or forty years ago and that Black-White segregation continues at a very high level in Los Angeles. We suspect some such opinions are based on the assumption that racist practices continue at the same level indefinitely and on generalization from Eastern and Midwestern metropolitan areas, with which some scholars may be more familiar. In contrast, our perception—as residents of Southern California—is that such assessments for Southern California are twenty years behind the times. Race, racism, and race-based discrimination are still significant here, but they have diminished substantially.

**Latino-White separation.** On the average Latinos and Whites in Southern California are about as separated residentially as are Blacks and Whites, but the five counties differ as to the most highly separated group. Some Americans may have assumed that Blacks and Whites would remain more separated than any other groups, but in 2000 Latinos were the group most residentially separated from Whites in Orange, San Bernardino, and Ventura Counties.

In Los Angeles County the level of Latino-White residential separation is among the highest in the United States. Separation is slightly higher in the comparable metropolitan area of New York and slightly lower in Chicago, but all other large metropolitan areas have lower indexes of separation.

White-Latino separation is unusually high in Los Angeles County and moderately high in Orange and Ventura Counties because of two key factors: the very large numbers of Latino immigrants who arrived recently and the large and growing Latino-White income gap. Most immigrants from Mexico have settled in neighborhoods with other Mexicans, where housing costs are lower and where they are more comfortable. Also, most arrive here lacking much money, good English-language skills, or

the advanced education that could lead to better jobs and higher incomes, which could prompt relocation outside strongly Mexican neighborhoods.

In contrast, Latino-White separation is less in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties because Latinos in these counties tend not to be immigrants themselves. Rather, they are more likely to be the assimilated and economically successful children and grandchildren of earlier immigrants.

**Asian-White separation.** In Los Angeles County Asians are as separated residentially from Whites as they are in San Francisco, New York, and Houston. These four places have the highest levels of White-Asian separation of any large metropolitan areas in the United States.

Because the average income level of Asians approximates that of Whites, their residential separation from Whites cannot be explained by insufficient economic resources. The slightly increased separation from Whites during the 1990s and the growth of Asian enclaves are due primarily to a preference by Asian immigrants for living near other members of their nationality.

**Explaining metropolitan differences in ethnic separation.** The relative levels of separation measured in different metropolitan areas do not fit any simple explanation. Nevertheless, our findings for different Southern California counties, in combination with other research across the United States, suggest that ethnic populations in smaller and more rapidly growing metropolitan areas in the Western states tend to be less separated residentially. Conversely, large numbers and high proportions of recent immigrants appear to increase group residential separation. Because differences among metropolitan areas in racial attitudes and ethnic group income disparities are probably small, we expect that relative levels of ethnic residential separation in different places can be best explained by basic demographic factors—the numbers and proportions of groups and the relative timing of their arrival.

### The Meaning of Ethnic Enclaves Today

**Strength and growth of enclaves.** The maps and enclave percentage tables in this book make it clear that ethnic areal concentrations or enclaves remain strong in Southern California. Half of all Latinos and more than half of all Whites live in census tracts in which 60 percent of the residents are members of those respective groups. Among the smaller groups, the percentage living in enclaves ranges from 30 to 60 percent. Enclave settlement has been growing in importance for Latinos, Mexicans, and most Asian groups but diminishing for Whites, Filipinos, Central Americans, and Blacks.

Some scholars have imagined that the ease of transportation and communication within a modern metropolis should make enclave settlement of little importance for upper- and middle-class immigrants.<sup>2</sup> According to this view, immigrants are able to stay well connected with their ethnic communities without having to live in a residential concentration. Although this situation applies to the many immigrants and children of immigrants who choose to live outside ethnic enclaves, the evidence of Asian enclave growth presented in this book demonstrates that enclaves remain important for large numbers of people.<sup>3</sup>

**Explaining contemporary enclaves.** Because of the heritage of racism and enforced racial segregation in this country, some Americans may assume that present-day ethnic concentrations or enclaves represent a malignancy—a pernicious vestige of the past that should no longer exist. However, over the last few decades, the factors explaining enclave formation and persistence in Southern California have changed. Although ethnic enclaves in poor neighborhoods do reflect the economic limitations of their residents, the fact that they are ethnic concentrations and not just poverty concentrations suggests that people's decisions as to residential location are based on both economic constraints and shared ethnic identity. Moreover, the existence and growth of Asian enclaves in high-status suburbs demonstrates the importance of ethnic concentrations for many immigrants who have sufficient resources to live elsewhere.

**Mobility out of poor enclaves.** Members of ethnic groups do make economic progress, enabling them to move out of older, central city neighborhoods into better areas. Their places in those enclaves then become occupied by new poor people, usually recent immigrants. Because the census reports the characteristics of neighborhoods every ten years as opposed to tracking the original residents and their changing fortunes, comparing the characteristics of places like poor enclaves over time easily misses the progress that individuals and families make.<sup>4</sup>

This progress is illustrated by the upward and outward movement of Mexicans from Boyle Heights and East Los Angeles toward newer suburbs farther east, as well as the residential shift of members of all ethnic groups out of Los Angeles City.<sup>5</sup> Homeownership gives 40 percent of Black households and 33 percent of Latino households in South Central Los Angeles the means to leave that area by selling their homes if they wish. Also, Maya Indians from Guatemala have found ways to move out of their poor enclave in Pico-Union, although many at the time of their arrival had lacked language skills in both English and Spanish.

Because of the turnover and potential turnover of population in poorer enclaves and the existence of higher-status Asian enclaves, contemporary enclaves in Southern California should be thought of as essentially voluntary or self-selected rather than imposed as a result of discrimination or prejudice. This is the reason why urban scholars Peter Marcuse and Ronald van Kempen assess modern-day enclaves as follows. "In principle, there is no reason why public policy should interfere with enclave formation, so long as it is truly voluntary, that is, that anyone resident in an enclave has the realistic possibility of moving out."<sup>6</sup>

### Reduced assimilation in large enclaves?

Although we have emphasized the choices of individuals in explaining contemporary enclaves, enclaves may have another meaning for the larger Southern California society. In this different perspective, the presence and growth of enclaves may retard the development of English-language skills, education, and general cultural and economic assimilation that should be available for newcomers. Moreover, as some ethnic groups are found in increasing proportions in enclaves, ethnic group isolation and divisions between groups can be expected to increase. Although factors other than enclave residence are probably more important influences on the adaptation of immigrants, we do caution that enclave growth probably tends to heighten social and cultural divisions between ethnic groups.<sup>7</sup>

The high and growing percentage of Latinos in enclaves is particularly noteworthy. Such an ethnic geographical divide would appear to reinforce the growing White-Mexican gap in median income. Because Asian enclaves are more mixed ethnically and average Asian incomes are much higher, the potential for isolation of Asians seems much less than for Latinos, particularly Mexicans.

### Improvements with Local Residential Mobility

Many of the patterns of ethnic change that are mapped in this book were interpreted as residential shifts into higher-status neighborhoods. For Whites, Blacks, and Asians, the most common change during the 1990s involved movement into newer, higher-priced suburbs. Although the pattern of Latino increase was strongest in and near enclaves (barrios) in central cities and older suburbs, Latinos also settled in newer and somewhat more expensive suburbs. From the point of view of individual households, the net result of these changes seems positive in that it reflects an improved economic or housing status. All major ethnic groups participated strongly in these shifts into newer suburbs. This suggests that past constraints on inequality of opportunity have been substantially weakened, at least among a major portion of each group's population.

**Table 8.1. Ratings of Present Residence Compared to Previous Residence among Recent Movers, 1999: Los Angeles County**

	Percent of Householders of Each Ethnic Group		
	White/ Asian	Black	Latino
<b>Better home</b>	51.6	55.4	61.0
<b>Worse home</b>	21.7	21.3	13.4
<b>Better neighborhood</b>	38.5	57.7	47.4
<b>Worse neighborhood</b>	20.4	18.1	13.7

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2001a.

Notes: This table is based on the 18 percent of householders who moved within the previous year. Percentages for each group for either home or neighborhood do not sum to 100 because the columns do not include those that rate their present home and neighborhood about the same as their previous one. The Whites/Asians category also includes Non-Hispanic American Indians. For the complete survey in Los Angeles County, 2851 householders were interviewed.

**Table 8.2. Ratings of Present Residence Compared to Previous Residence among Recent Movers, 1994: Riverside and San Bernardino Counties**

	Percent of Householders of Each Ethnic Group		
	White/ Asian	Black	Latino
<b>Better home</b>	55.9	61.9	64.3
<b>Worse home</b>	17.0	20.1	14.9
<b>Better neighborhood</b>	51.6	48.0	56.2
<b>Worse neighborhood</b>	18.4	19.0	13.3

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (1996).

Notes: This table is based on the 22 percent of householders who moved within the previous year. For the complete survey in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties, 4,250 householders were interviewed. Also see notes for Table 8.1.

**Confirmation of improvement.** The fact that most people appear to have moved into better neighborhoods is also evident from the American Housing Surveys taken in 1994 and 1999 (Tables 8.1 and 8.2).

In all three ethnic categories in the tables, more than half of recent movers believed they had moved into better homes. Moreover, movers were two to four times more likely to say that they were in a better neighborhood. Other tables in the original sources make it clear that assessments of improvement were clearly higher among homeowners than among renters.

Differences in evaluation of their moves by householders of different groups and in different counties were not large. The fact that Latinos were most likely to believe their latest move resulted in both a better home and a better neighborhood demonstrates satisfaction with their progress during the 1990s.

Thus, evidence from *Changing Faces*, *Changing Places* and independent surveys are in agreement that residential mobility has, on the average, led to improved status and satisfaction for Southern Californians, regardless of their ethnic group.

### Final Comments

Several of our findings present a positive picture of trends in the 1990s. Increased settlements of all groups in outer suburbs and better neighborhoods, increased homeownership among Blacks and Latinos, and reduced residential separation of Whites, Blacks, and Central Americans are all encouraging. So is the lower level of White isolation and Black-White separation in Southern California compared to New York or Chicago. An important development in urban ethnic geography is that essentially voluntary processes maintain and expand modern ethnic enclaves, particularly those of Asians.

We recognize, however, that the ethnic transformation of Southern California and people's adjustment to a changing economy have not been as smooth as portrayed in our maps and tables. There have been interethnic tensions and resentments related to cultural differences and competition for jobs, housing, and political power. A great many people struggle to survive economically, particularly with the high cost of housing. Learning English is difficult for many people, and often schools are not given the resources to provide the education that children need.

Nevertheless, the arrival of immigrants has infused Southern California with tremendous dynamism, economically and culturally. In some aspects of life, particularly in food, music, and entertainment, there has been much mixing of talent, ideas, and traditions. Many people have found that getting to know individuals in other groups is exhilarating and rewarding. The flows of money and people back and forth between Southern California and about a hundred countries make our region one of the world's centers of both international trade and ethnic diversity.

Although these important and related facets of Southern California are not covered in this book, we hope that *Changing Faces*, *Changing Places* provides at least a better understanding of the ethnic geographical dimension of life in this region. Moreover, our findings may provide clues as to more general patterns and processes that are currently reshaping American metropolitan areas.

### Notes

1. Poulsen et al. (2002).
2. Zelinsky and Lee (1998).
3. Also, *The Ethnic Quilt* contains maps of Asian Indians, Thais, Armenians, Iranians, and Israelis that show middle-class and affluent ethnic enclaves as of 1990. The existence of suburban enclaves, in particular, may not be widely recognized by scholars because theory does not predict them and because many scholars have not mapped ethnic patterns in sufficient detail to discover them. In addition, enclaves may be present only where the ethnic group is large in size. In much smaller metropolitan areas, immigrants might prefer to live in an enclave but local ethnic populations are too small to create one.
4. Myers (1999a) has observed that scholars and politicians often tend to underestimate the mobility of people in and out of poorer neighborhoods because they tend to focus on the changing characteristics of places rather than people.
5. The departure of Mexicans from poorer barrios was shown by Clark and Muller (1988) and Navarro and Acuña (1990). Residential shifts from Los Angeles City to other, more suburban places in Los Angeles County were demonstrated by Myers (1999b), 142-144.
6. Marcuse and van Kempen, eds. (2000), 274.
7. We recognize that the same point could have been made about the divisive effects of White enclaves and White isolation over most decades of the twentieth century.