

10. Conclusion

Our goal has been to understand the varying spatial and status positions of ethnic groups in the larger social structure of Southern California. To help us in this quest, we explicitly compared the largest groups in terms of their socioeconomic positions and geographical locations. We also examined the extent of acculturation, overrepresentation and underrepresentation in different types of work, and social integration among the various ethnic groups. In the process, we charted major trends since 1960 and were able to explain most of the changes and patterns we observed.

Our method made it possible to interweave the various ethnic populations and their class positions and distributions together into a three-dimensional description of Southern California's population structure—an ethnic quilt, so to speak.

The maps in this book demonstrate that profound differences exist among many of the localities and neighborhoods of Southern California. Variations from place to place in environment, land use, housing, social class, and age characteristics are significant and are interrelated with the settlement patterns of the various ethnic groups.

Distributions

Although the maps and text regarding distributions lend themselves more to local details than general statements, we can describe some broad patterns and processes of settlement and change.

Persistence of ethnic enclaves. Ethnic distributions and the location of residential enclaves are usually slow to change. Although new housing opportunities may prompt resi-

dents to leave their neighborhoods, other members of the ethnic group usually remain, and still others move in. All of this means that most features of the 1990 distributions shown in our book should be valid for twenty or more years.

The oldest distinctive concentrations we uncovered were those of blacks in Los Angeles, Pasadena, and Monrovia, all of which were established before 1890. In the first few years of the twentieth century, Armenians settled in Pasadena, and a Japanese presence was established in Little Tokyo, Boyle Heights, and Gardena. All these areas retain some of their ethnic populations today.

The foundations of the present-day Mexican distribution were laid in the nineteenth century near Los Angeles' plaza. Today Olvera Street and Our Lady the Queen of the Angels church (La Placita) commemorate this heritage. In the early twentieth century urban renewal near the plaza displaced Mexicans eastward across the Los Angeles River to locations like Belvedere and Boyle Heights. These later expanded and coalesced into the large Mexican Eastside barrio. Today this is still the best known Mexican American enclave.

In rural Southern California the expansion of irrigated agriculture at the time of World War I and the increasing use of Mexican immigrants as farmworkers led to the appearance of new Mexican colonias. Although later urbanization destroyed the continuity of some of these, contemporary barrios in Orange County, San Fernando, Canoga Park, and the Santa Clara Valley had their origins in those farmworker villages more than seventy years ago.

In the 1930s modern Chinatown was built. During the next decade the Filipino enclaves of Temple-Alvarado and West Long

Beach appeared, and Russian Armenian refugees settled in Montebello. Soon after World War II, blacks found homes for the first time in Pacoima, and Jews moved into their present area of concentration on the Westside. All these enclaves persist today.

From the early 1920s until the late 1940s, blacks, Mexicans, Filipinos, Japanese, and Chinese were usually not permitted to buy or rent apartments or houses in most parts of Southern California. At that time whites were legally able to keep those minorities out of white neighborhoods, and minorities were forced to live in less attractive areas. Some minority settlements from those days have persisted to the present—geographical reminders of the blatant racism of a half-century ago. During the 1960s exclusion based on race became illegal, and rapid suburbanization led to the elaboration of older distributions and the creation of new ones.

Changes since the mid-1960s. The distribution of ethnic populations arriving since the mid-1960s is most clearly related to their socioeconomic status, their relative acculturation, and special locations of employment. Groups that settled here in both the early decades of the twentieth century and after the mid-1960s have mixed distributions, with the new distribution typically grafted onto the older one. This combination of old and new patterns can be seen among Filipinos, Japanese, Chinese, Koreans, people of Russian and Armenian ancestry, and people of Mexican origin.

Competition for low-cost housing has meant that certain older enclaves near city centers have shifted somewhat. This occurred because the numbers of new arrivals who sought housing in the low-rent areas were often so large that the new group displaced earlier inhabitants. Cambodians in Long Beach, Salvadorans in Westlake, Koreans in Koreatown, Armenians in East Hollywood, and Chinese in areas near Chinatown have produced such displacements.

By far the most important such displacement and distributional change has involved the historic black concentrations in South Central and in outlying areas—Pasadena, Pacoima, Pomona, Long Beach, and Santa Ana. Because these areas usually had the lowest-cost housing available, they were particularly attractive to

low-income groups. As poor Mexican immigrants arrived in the 1970s and 1980s, different families often pooled their earnings to rent or purchase a house. The result was that many blacks were displaced. By 1990 these areas had become mostly Hispanic, and the large black concentration of South Central had shifted westward from the historic Central Avenue area to a new focus around Leimert Park and the Crenshaw district.

The importance of social networks which interconnect members of ethnic groups is demonstrated indirectly by the substantial differences in group distributions. If ethnic identity and its social networks were not significant, ethnic groups of similar income would have similar distributions. However, this is not the case. Groups with a high median household income (Japanese, Filipinos, Asian Indians, people of Russian ancestry, and people of English ancestry) have very different distributions. Similarly, the ethnic concentrations of the lowest-income groups (Cambodians and Salvadorans) are spatially far apart. These distinctive settlement patterns would not have occurred without a tendency for many of the people who share an ethnic identity to stick together residentially.

The large size of the white, black, and Mexican-origin populations, the separate locations of their settlements, and the much greater affluence of whites compared to the other two groups are powerful features of Southern California's ethnic geography.

Ethnic Work Niches

Ethnic populations vary substantially in their representation in different types of employment. The work specializations of low-skilled immigrants are probably even more concentrated than U.S. census data show because many illegal or undocumented residents were working in those niches but did not fill out the census questionnaires.

Because the purpose of our research on this topic was to establish an empirical basis for comparing groups, the details of work niches are more important than any generalization. For instance, Korean men are six times more likely than Filipino men to be self-employed, and black women are six times more likely than Salvadoran women to work for the government. Similarly,

the fact that 22 percent of Israeli men are employed in construction and that Armenian men are five times more likely than the average employed man to be working in gasoline stations helps characterize the position of these groups in the Southern California economy. The particular niches which groups have created are usually new adaptations to Southern California, but in some cases the group's niche reflects aspects of its traditional culture.

There are substantial variations in work specialization between various ethnic groups of similar educational or income status. When the groups are equal in socioeconomic status, the explanation of work niches must involve ethnically defined social networks that guide members toward certain types of work and not others.

Gaps or Differentials in Socioeconomic Status

Educational attainment. Because white men and white women increased their educational attainment substantially between 1960 and 1990, it has been difficult for minorities to increase their attainment at an even faster rate. Nevertheless, our examination of Los Angeles and Orange Counties in 1960 and 1990 showed a clear narrowing of the educational-attainment differential for black men and for Mexican Americans. For Filipino men the gap has been eliminated. With respect to high-school graduation, black men and black women have cut the 1960 differential with whites in half, and progress has been almost as great among U.S.-born men of Mexican origin. These are major accomplishments.

Nevertheless, rates of college graduation are more important today than rates of high-school graduation. Japanese, Chinese, and Filipino men and women are now more likely than whites to be college graduates. However, a very large differential in college-graduation rates remains between whites and both blacks and Mexican Americans. Blacks are college graduates at about half the rate of whites, and the rate for Mexican Americans is less than a third that of whites. These gaps retard the efforts of many people to improve the occupational and income status of blacks and Mexican Americans in Southern California.

Occupational status. This is where affirmative-action programs have presumably played their greatest role. The gap has narrowed substantially for blacks. The 1960 black-white differential in percentage of managers and professionals had been reduced by 30 percent for black men and 60 percent for black women as of 1990. Among Mexican American women the progress was similar: the 1960 differential was reduced by 33 percent. For Mexican American men, however, the gap was reduced by only 12 percent during the 1960–1990 years, and for immigrant Mexicans the differential with whites widened.

Men in all three Asian groups have shown much progress in narrowing the occupational gap, with Japanese and Chinese by 1990 exceeding whites in percentage in managerial and professional occupations. Among women, convergence has been less, and the lower educational attainment of recently arrived Chinese women compared with those who arrived in the 1950s probably explains much of the wider occupational status gap for them.

Income. This book contains findings that can be used to show the economic success of many blacks, Mexican Americans, and immigrants. The fact that all groups contain men who in 1989 earned incomes over \$50,000 demonstrates this achievement. It is useful to realize that some people in most ethnic groups have “made it.”

Nevertheless, more penetrating analyses are possible by comparing medians of income distributions. Ethnic differences in economic status are dramatic. Asian Indians, Filipinos, Japanese, whites, and people of Russian ancestry have usually attained very high median incomes. At the other extreme, Cambodians and Salvadorans have the lowest.

Whereas there has been some narrowing of education and occupation differentials between whites and both blacks and Mexican Americans, the income gaps have not narrowed significantly. Considering the lower percentage of black men with income in 1989 compared with 1959, the actual black-white income gap among men has probably widened somewhat since 1959. Moreover, the nature of the median as a statistical measure, the greater undercount of lower-status minorities, and the underreporting of certain types of incomes mean that differences

between whites and lower-status groups are probably greater than what is revealed in U.S. census data.

Some may assume that improved access to education and better occupations on the part of minorities would result in income convergence with whites. But that has not been the case in Southern California. These minorities were farther from whites in 1989 than they were in 1959. The situation is better described as the continued layering or stratification of Mexican Americans and blacks compared to whites.

We believe that it is especially important for whites to recognize the widening of income gaps between themselves and both blacks and Mexican Americans in Southern California. Awareness of this trend may help whites to better understand one source of resentment on the part of lower-income minorities, who probably expected that improved civil rights and the passage of time would bring them closer to whites in income levels.

Why Has the Income Gap Become Wider?

In the United States as a whole, the gap in median incomes between whites and both blacks and Hispanics narrowed between 1959 and 1979, and the divergence during the 1980s did not negate the general nationwide trend toward greater income equality over the past thirty years. However, the income convergence that the nation experienced since 1959 was not found in Southern California. The fact that income gaps in this region did not follow the U.S. trend but instead grew wider indicates that regional factors must have been especially significant in Southern California.

Employment restructuring and immigration. The exceptional growth of high-level service-sector employment in Southern California since the 1960s has raised the incomes of whites compared to less educated minorities in this region. The loss of high-wage blue-collar manufacturing jobs had a negligible effect on the gaps. On the other hand, expansion of low-wage manufacturing and service-sector employment has been an important factor behind the increased gaps in 1989 compared to 1959.

It is likely that new, low-wage service and manufacturing jobs were created only after it was clear to entrepreneurs that immigrants were arriving in such numbers that new jobs could be filled at low wages. In other words, the presence in Southern California of a large supply of eager workers was probably a necessary factor behind the increase of low-wage jobs.

Several different sources of evidence reveal that the lack of income convergence in Southern California between whites and both Mexican Americans and blacks is best explained by the unusually large number of low-skilled and low-wage workers who settled here in the 1970s and 1980s. Most of these are immigrants from Mexico, although many are from El Salvador or Guatemala and some are from Asian countries, such as Vietnam and China.

Large numbers of immigrants who are willing to work for low wages have driven down the incomes of Mexican Americans (the U.S.-born) compared with whites. The detailed mechanisms by which this divergence has taken place are not known, but they involve processes of matching a surplus of poorly educated workers with jobs.

Relative sizes of income gaps. After controlling for education, age, full-time employment, and U.S. birth within three broad categories of occupation, we found that substantial differences remain between the median incomes of white men and both black men and Mexican American men. In occupations other than professional specialties, black men average about 75 percent of the income of white men, and Mexican American men earn about 80 percent of the income of white men. The gaps are smaller among professionals.

These income differentials are not due to ethnic differences in specific occupations. Even within the same occupations, black men and Mexican-origin men earn only about four-fifths of the incomes of white men. Because white workers tend to be older than Hispanic workers and, to a lesser extent, black workers, the explanation of the income gaps in specific occupations must acknowledge the greater years of experience of the average white worker. However, apart from this, the sizes of the gaps that remain seem to point toward wage and salary discrimination as the most likely explanation.

The size of the white–Asian income gap among men is much less than the white–black and white–Mexican American gaps. However, Japanese American managers earn only 81 percent of the income of U.S.-born white managers, which suggests a “glass ceiling”—an invisible barrier that excludes many Asian Americans from higher executive positions.

The incomes of Russian-ancestry (Jewish) men are about 20 percent above the median income of all white men in comparable occupational categories. Jews were once discriminated against by other whites, but by 1990 they were earning more than other whites. It is difficult to explain this reversal by anything other than aspects of Jewish ethnic culture and social networks which have resulted in enhanced earnings. Our methodology makes it impossible to zero in more closely on the explanation for the various income gaps, but the Jewish example suggests that cultural differences may be strong influences.

Income gaps between women in the different ethnic groups are much smaller than they are among men. They are quite minor compared with the great discrepancy in median incomes between men and women. Among U.S.-born whites who are employed full-time, women’s incomes are only 65 percent as high as men’s.

Prospects for narrowing the gaps. Progress in narrowing the occupational status and income gaps has been slow and is likely to be so in the future. Part of this is because employers—regardless of ethnic identity—are generally predisposed to hire and promote either members of their own ethnic group or those members of other groups who are not very different culturally. Because U.S.-born whites retain control of most hiring and promotional decisions in Southern California, members of their group and others who are highly acculturated to the culture of that group will tend to be favored.

The fact that this is a natural tendency does not imply that anti-discrimination laws should not be enforced. Indeed, because laws prohibiting discrimination have been only marginally effective, we favor still stronger enforcement and a search for new approaches toward reducing discrimination.

It is understandable and appropriate that many minority people wish to diminish or eliminate the economic dominance

of whites. Many work toward this goal by mobilizing politically, developing new businesses in the ethnic communities, and accumulating capital in order to gain control of a larger portion of the region’s wealth. We believe that a broader base of economic power among the region’s ethnic groups would narrow the income gaps and reduce interethnic tensions. At the same time, it is not surprising that many whites resist this effort in a competitive economic environment.

Another approach to narrowing the occupational and income gaps involves cultural change on the part of minorities. Blacks, Mexican Americans, and other minorities might consciously attempt to follow the examples of Jews, Japanese Americans, or other high-income ethnic groups. These two groups have become successful after earlier periods of low status and of discrimination. Both groups have placed great emphasis on achieving a superior education and business ownership as means to economic betterment. In the early years, the occupational and income benefits that Jews and Japanese hoped to gain were thwarted by discrimination, but they persisted in their efforts. Ultimately, these have been rewarded.

Ethnic Polarization in Southern California

The last thirty years have seen increased divisions between ethnic groups and social classes. The most important factor behind that trend has been the arrival of large numbers of immigrants willing to work for low wages. The social and economic gaps between poor immigrants and other residents are exacerbated by the many immigrants living here illegally.

The high proportion of immigrants coming from Mexico and the traditionally high birth rate among Mexican immigrants means that people of Mexican origin are by far the largest ethnic population apart from non-Hispanic whites. Contrasts between whites and people of Mexican origin have grown such that Southern California is being polarized by a combination of ethnicity and class. Thus, although one aspect of the ethnic transformation of Southern California is its greater diversity compared to the earlier dominance by whites, an equally important feature is its increasingly dichotomous character.

The shape of Southern California in the future depends in many ways on the size and characteristics of the immigrant flow. This, in turn, is dependent on three key factors: the region's opportunities compared to those in immigrant source countries, the trend of birth rates in source countries, and the nature of U.S. immigration policy and enforcement.

The first half of the 1990s showed a general continuation of the demographic trends of the 1980s. Southern California's economic recession resulted in a slightly lower rate of immigration and a sharply increased rate of net outmigration after about 1992.¹ As in the 1980s, less educated whites, blacks, and Hispanics have been overrepresented among those departing. Those replacing them include many well-trained and affluent people from many countries. However, the new immigrants are commonly less-educated people from Mexico. This means that social class differences between the remaining whites and people of Mexican origin are, if anything, becoming greater.

Thus, these distinctive patterns of net migration into and out of Southern California have continued during periods of both economic expansion and contraction. Moreover, similar patterns are found in other metropolitan areas that are important immigrant destinations, but they are not found elsewhere. This confirms our conclusion that the numbers and characteristics of immigrants are the primary influences on the migration flows and on the increased ethnic and class polarization.

If the number of new arrivals willing to work at low wages is not substantially reduced in future years, the ethnic transformation will continue. Changes in tax laws or other political changes in the current patterns of income distribution could reduce class polarization, but no major change in this direction seems likely at this writing. Acculturation does diminish differences between people. However, education and the intermarriage of immigrants take place too slowly to counteract the growing polarization between more affluent whites and poorer people of Mexican origin. Trends of the recent past suggest that Southern California will see increased differentiation by class, a continued exodus of whites, and much greater proportions of immigrant Hispanics and their children.

There is also a strong geographical dimension to the ethnic and class polarization. Affluent whites tend to live in newer sub-

urbs and in scattered high-status enclaves. These are very different places from older, more central areas which house poor black, Mexican, Salvadoran, and Cambodian populations. This ethnic-class-spatial differentiation is epitomized in the contrast between Westside Los Angeles, southern Orange County, and Thousand Oaks on the one hand and the Mexican Eastside, South Central Los Angeles, Santa Ana, and Pico-Union on the other. Such powerful and disturbing differences between places remind us of the need to look at all three of the dimensions of structure outlined in chapter 1 and developed throughout the book.

Uncovering the Hidden Side of Ethnicity

Evidence for the continued geographical, social, and economic significance of ethnic identity in Southern California is overwhelming. There are natural tensions between ethnic groups which can be expected and which can be reduced but not completely eliminated. These tensions arise from differences in culture and social networks and from economic competition between both individuals and ethnic groups.

Thus, it seems unrealistic to expect that Southern California could be a "melting pot" or that all groups should live together with no tension between them. The cities that come closest to the metaphor of a melting pot are those which are the most ethnically diverse—Carson, Gardena, Hawthorne, Cerritos and Walnut.

A marked reduction in the rate at which immigrants have been arriving in Southern California would provide essential time for the acculturation of those who are already here and would probably reduce the separation between groups.

Rates of intermarriage measure patterns of very personal ties among people. In three-quarters of the sixteen ethnic groups we examined, fewer than 20 percent of the married people had selected a spouse from outside their group. These low rates mean that most ethnic groups are substantially separate from each other in terms of family matters. This is the most powerful evidence that Southern California is not a multiethnic society but rather a collection of ethnic societies. Intermarriage is least common among

Koreans, Cambodians, and Vietnamese and most common among American Indians, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans. Groups with higher rates of intermarriage tend to be those with greater English-language skills and lower proportions of recent immigrants. The degree of social separation between most groups is lessening, however. Higher rates of intermarriage among younger couples indicate that barriers are weakening slightly.

People's decisions about where they live are also highly personal. Although some people select a residence without regard to the general ethnic character of the neighborhood, the fact that the distributions of most groups are substantially different demonstrates that ethnic identity and the ethnic character of various places do play a role in these very private, family-based decisions. Moreover, lack of any direct contact means that residents of widely scattered neighborhoods and cities remain substantially separated.

Altogether, Southern California's social structure is a quilt—fascinating in its colors and arrangements but with a patchwork of ethnic blocks stitched together loosely and tentatively. Moreover, the essential character of the fabric of those different components is mostly hidden from those who are not close friends and family. This book has probed beneath the surface of Southern California, exposing and measuring patterns of an underlying social reality that is normally not very visible.

Uncovering the often-unacknowledged similarities and differences among groups in locations of settlement, work niches, acculturation, and socioeconomic status should make all of us more familiar with Southern California's ethnic diversity. It is our hope that this knowledge will help the inhabitants of this much loved but troubled region learn to treat each other with greater mutual respect and understanding.

Notes

1. Frey (1996); California Department of Finance (1996).