

The Changing Face of the San Fernando Valley

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"In tackling these challenges, the Valley's leadership must work not only to address these issues but do so in a way that stresses the common challenges an increasingly diverse population faces. There is no Latino housing crisis, or Armenian crime problem, or Vietnamese education deficit. These are common problems faced by all Valleyites; they can only be solved by this community acting as one."

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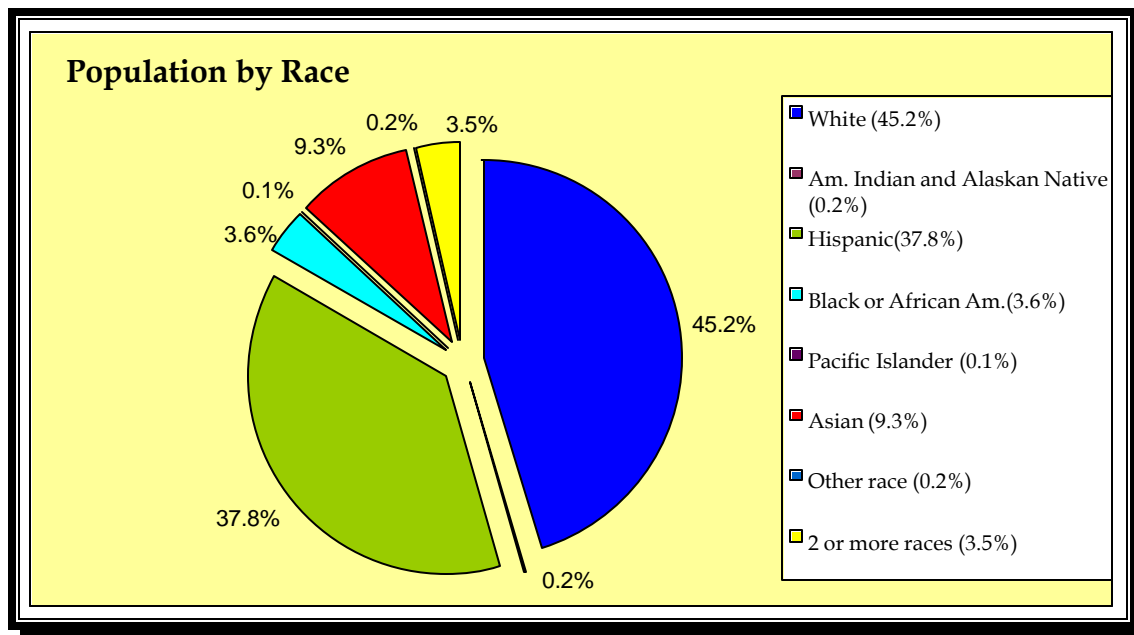


The Changing Face of the San Fernando Valley

INTRODUCTION

Few places in America over the past quarter century have undergone as profound a change in its ethnic character than the San Fernando Valley. Back in the 1970s, the region was perceived - and rightly so - as a bastion of predominately Anglo, middle class residents living adjacent the most cosmopolitan society of Los Angeles.

Today that reality has drastically changed. Since the 1970s, the Valley has itself become increasingly multi-racial largely as the result of migration of immigrants from such diverse places as Mexico, El Salvador, Iran, Israel, Armenia, Vietnam, Korea, India and China. By 1990, this pattern was already well-formed; a decade later, the evidence is incontrovertible. One-third of the Valley's 1.7 million residents are foreign born¹; only half are Anglo, and many themselves recent immigrants.



Source: U.S. Census 2000

Indeed today, the Valley is not only as diverse as the rest of Los Angeles, but in some ways more so, with higher rates of Hispanic, Asian and Latino growth, but also less 'white flight' than the city south of Mulholland. In the process, the Valley has become the epicenter for much of ethnic Southern California.² Glendale, for example, now boasts the largest concentration of ethnic Armenians outside Armenia itself. The Los Angeles portions of the Valley contain not only the city's most heavily Latino district, but also those that have the largest percentages of mixed race households.³ The Valley today is an ethnic kaleidoscope of a new Los Angeles and new America - melting pot, 'salad bowl', home to both ethnic mobility and pockets of deep-seated poverty.



Source: San Fernando Valley Almanac 2000; Economic Alliance of the San Fernando Valley

Yet, to many from outside the region, and some within, the Valley still remains a prisoner of old stereotypes. Attempts by Valley residents to assert their political will - including that of self-determination - often are characterized by media, academic and even political leaders as inherently divisive expressions of exclusionist Anglo sentiments. Two UCLA researchers, for example, recently caricatured the drive for Valley independence as a "class-based, strongly racialized, movement of social separation."⁴



Source: CivicCenter Group

As the Valley, both the Los Angeles portion and the independent cities, work to achieve a vision for the new century, such characterizations are both unrealistic and totally self-defeating. The Valley today is not a bland homogenized middle class suburb; it is an increasingly cosmopolitan, diverse and racially intermixed region united by a common geography, economy and, to a large extent, middle class aspirations. It is upon these grounds, not notions of racial exclusivity or competition, that residents of the Valley, no matter their background, can best build a new kind of commonwealth that could become a model for 21st Century Southern California.

HISTORICAL EVOLUTION: FROM THE CHUMASH AND RANCLAND TO 'AMERICA'S SUBURB'

For the most part, the demographic history of the Valley is dominated by the recent past. The Valley's population quintupled between 1945 and 1960. By the 1980s, more than one million people called the Valley home. By 2000, 1.6 million people lived there.⁵ More than three quarters (78.4 percent) of the Valley's population lives in twenty-seven "named" communities in the City of Los Angeles. The remainder lives in four independent cities: Burbank (106,480 people), Calabasas (20,455 people), Glendale (203,734 people), and San Fernando (24,722 people).⁶ One-third of the City of Los Angeles's population lives in the San Fernando Valley.

Yet, despite the relatively recent arrival of most Valley residents, the area has a long, and significant, history of settlement. As in every habitable portion of North America, the San Fernando Valley's original residents were Native Americans. For thousands of years two indigenous people, the Tongva and Chuman, inhabited the region. Like much of California, the area was, comparatively speaking, densely populated, with as many as 5,000 people settled among its various villages. Huwam, a Chumash village, rested in the low hills of Canoga Park for as many as 1500 years.⁷



Source: California State University Northridge San Fernando Valley History Digital Library <http://digital-library.csun.edu/Copyright.html>

The arrival of Spanish settlers and missionaries in the region, starting with

the establishment of the San Fernando Mission in 1797, brought about a gradual decline in this population and an effective end to the Native American culture. Diseases, killings by soldiers, rape and intermarriage all effectively wiped out the purely native population by the time of the American conquest a century and a half later.⁸

Many Native Americans at first resisted acculturation; one historian has asserted that mixed race children among them were "secretly strangled and buried" for several generations.⁹ But by 1900, according to historian Lawrence Jorgensen, the Native American population in California had been reduced ninety-five percent to its estimated "pre-discovery" level.



Source: California State University Northridge San Fernando Valley History Digital Library <http://digital-library.csun.edu/Copyright.html>

The Valley's period under Church domination ended in 1834 when California, now under the rule of the independent Republic of Mexico, secularized the missions. The Native American population, already drastically diminished, was once again dispossessed as land and power now transferred from the at least somewhat beneficent *padres* to the more profit-oriented Dons.

The Valley, like much of Southern California, became the province of vast *ranchos* based on an economy of cattle-raising. Most of the land fell under the control of Eulogio de Celis, a Spaniard living in Los Angeles. Gradually, as the Native American population diminished, the work

on the ranches, as well as in the growing nearby pueblo of Los Angeles, was done by immigrants from Mexico.¹⁰

Even after the American seizure of California in 1848, the land ownership of the Valley remained largely in the hands of Spanish-speaking Dons.¹¹ But as “boom times” came to California, the ethnic ownership, as well as the overall demographics, began to change. Newcomers from both Mexico proper and the predominately Anglo-Saxon United States poured in to seek out gold and other minerals, but, for the most part, it was the *gringos* who prevailed.

Much of what took place was outside the law: the lynching of Mexicans was accompanied by the appearance of vengeance-seeking bandits, *vengadores*, among the increasingly displaced population of Spanish speakers throughout the period from the 1850s to the 1870s. The Dons, who had continued to prosper, began to lose control of their holdings, particularly after the severe drought of the 1860s made them incapable of paying off their often-extravagant debts.¹²

The new owners were, for the most part, northern Europeans - German, English, and French - who picked up the land from increasingly destitute *Californios*. Isaac Lankershim, a Prussian Jew who converted to Christianity, his son in law, Isaac Newton van Nuys, a Protestant preacher, “Charles Maclay” and Benjamin Porter, a San Francisco real estate investor was an important part of the core group that would soon market the Valley’s farmland, and ultimately begin its sub-division into housing developments.¹³

With the arrival of the railroads in the 1870s and 1880s, the region became accessible to Los Angeles and the east coast. Communities such as Pacoima, Burbank, Chatsworth, and San Fernando came into existence.¹⁴ Vast wheat fields filled much of the expanse, reflecting the economic orientation of the new owners. Many larger holdings were further broken down into smaller ranches, and then into homes. Although they did much to build the tunnels for the railroads, pick the crops and do the hard jobs - along with Chinese and Indian workers - by 1900, the Latino presence in the Valley had faded into obscurity as English-speaking settlers now took all but complete control of the area.¹⁵

The Anglo demographic tide became a veritable *tsunami* as the Valley was transformed by two linked events - the absorption of most of the region into the City of Los Angeles and the introduction of water supplies from the newly completed Los Angeles aqueduct. Even before the annexation of the valley in 1915, Los Angeles powerbrokers - led by the Chandler family - were already assembling parcels in the region. As the water spigot was turned on, the opportunity for massive development had become a reality.¹⁶

The exclusivist tendency, characteristic of Southern California, and much of the nation of the time, now extended even to building aqueduct. In the past Latinos, Asians and other non-whites had done much of the “dirty work” in the Valley and the region in general. But the aqueduct was built largely by largely transient whites who now migrated to California in large numbers. Notes historian Kevin Starr:¹⁷

“... Mexicans, blacks, Asians or conspicuously ethnic immigrants were rarely in evidence on the line. Like so much else in Los Angeles, the aqueduct was the prerogative of white America.”¹⁷

At the time of annexation, the Valley supported barely more than 3,000 people, a fraction of the 500,000 who already considered Los Angeles County home at the time.¹⁸ But backed by the city and enabled by the prospect of access to both water and power, local real estate speculators and developers, with such names as Moses H. Sherman, Eli Clark, and William Paul Whitsett scrambled to create new communities.¹⁹ "We build a city a month here," boasted developer Whitsett.²⁰

The Valley, like much of the Los Angeles at the time, was designed to be a community of homeowners, overwhelmingly white and middle class.²¹ By 1920, the once heavily Latino Valley had grown to over 21,000 and within two decades had passed 112,000. It was still largely rural and a bedroom community but a more diverse economy - including some manufacturing enterprises and entertainment - was beginning to emerge.²²



Source: California State University Northridge San Fernando Valley History Digital Library <http://digital-library.csun.edu/Copyright.html>

As for much of Southern California, the Second World War transformed the Valley and vastly accelerated its growth. One small ethnic pocket, the 3,000 member Japanese community, suffered grievously their lands taken and their people exiled to relocation camps far in the interior. Their jobs were taken largely by housewives, high school girls and, in a development that would foreshadow future events, Mexican nationals.²³

The post-war Valley took on the physical shape we know today. Vast tracks of suburb housing stretched on for miles from one end of the region to another. The now familiar pattern of shopping centers, strip development and industrial parks, much of it tied to the booming aerospace industry, now rose up where the chicken ranches, dairy farms, orchards and, formerly, cattle ranches and wheat fields had extended.



Photographer: Fontana, Mark; California State University Northridge San Fernando Valley History Digital Library <http://digital-library.csun.edu/Copyright.html>

By the late 1940s, the Valley had become the fastest growing urban area in the nation, with over 400,000 people. Even as Los Angeles became more diverse - with its growing Latino barrio on the eastside and growing African-American communities on the south side - the Valley remained largely white. By 1950, Anglos accounted for at least ninety percent of the total population. The population tilted towards married families: there were much fewer elderly and more children than the rest of the county and the country.²⁴

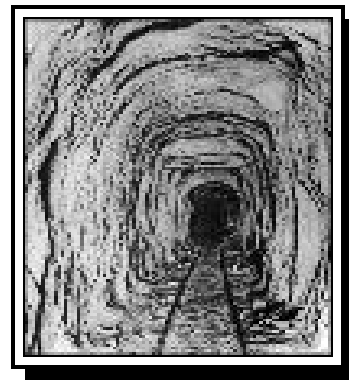
"The Valley became the swimming pool and sports car capital of the country, and grew the biggest shopping centers in Los Angeles."²⁵

These demographics epitomized the Valley described by Valley native and writer Kevin Roderick as "America's suburb". The Valley was not so much a

part of Los Angeles as the epitome of everything that we associate with the great demographic dispersion of the post-war era:²⁵

By the early 1950s, the northeast of the San Fernando Valley, notes UCLA's Allan Scott, boasted one of the most important concentrations of aerospace and high-technology industries in the region. Development pressures began to whittle away at the last vestiges of the Valley's bucolic past.²⁶ As the population doubled in that decade, the pattern of life changed, although the outwardly suburban form remained. Most of the growth came not from Los Angeles, but directly from the rest of the country. It was no longer bucolic; densities had grown from 350 people a square mile in 1930 to over 3,900 in 1962. One observer returning home noticed the change: "It's all rush, rush, rush."²⁷

As the need for service, industrial and other workers increased, there also came an abrupt end to the Valley's ethnic isolation, and its separation from Los Angeles' changing demography. Although only a few pockets of the region for



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generations had been heavily minority - such as San Fernando City and Pacoima - there began in the 1970s the extension of largely immigrant communities into places like Canoga Park, Panorama City and Van Nuys.

At the same time, the imposition of school busing in the late 1970s brought the problems of inner city Los Angeles into the Valley. Many observers trace the beginnings of today's secession movement to parental objections to busing. The dispute over busing and the increasingly poor performance of Los Angeles public schools, in addition to rising crime rates, also led to an exodus of middle class families, many of them to the outlying suburbs to the north. Much of the high tech infrastructure also migrated northwards, towards the Ventura County line.²⁸

Clearly the homogeneous, isolated Valley of the post-war era was now passing, much as the world of the Dons and rancheros had before. The *Economist* magazine might still refer to the Valley as "its own world, the quintessential suburban enclave", but in reality it has been changing dramatically into something quite different. Rapid population growth, which had characterized the area for much of the last century, began to slow to a crawl in the late 1960s and 1980s. Some communities, such as Burbank, actually lost population in the 1970s and, increasingly, the once young-oriented Valley had become increasingly elderly.²⁹

By the 1980s, the Valley increasingly resembled not so much "America's suburb" but a community in economic and demographic decline. It might not have been on its way to becoming what one Marxist writer gleefully described as "crabgrass slum", but it was beginning to resemble other "older suburbs." There, author Mike Davis suggests, in the east and Midwest, whose time appeared to have passed as affluent populations migrated to the tech-rich, more pristine and well-planned outer suburbs, they could re-create "a museum society of suburban nostalgia."³⁰

Clearly the Valley's epoch as "America's suburb" was coming to an end, both in reality and in the eyes of its residents. The challenge from its periphery, particularly the rapidly growing 101 Corridor stretching into Ventura and Santa Barbara Counties as well as north into Santa Clarita, was drawing off middle class people, not necessarily for racist or nostalgic reasons, as radicals like Davis suggest, but for such basic things as better education for their children, excellent parks and other amenities. Indeed, a 1999 *Los Angeles Times* poll found considerably less satisfaction among Valley residents than those living in more peripheral areas such as Ventura and Orange Counties.³¹

THE MESTIZO VALLEY

Clearly many residents, and some businesses, have been upset with the changes within the Valley. Traffic, crowding, more intensive development are themselves unsettling but perhaps the most radical shifts have been those associated with demographics. Once virtually all-white, and overwhelmingly native born, the San Fernando Valley has become increasingly a mixed area—*mestizo* in Spanish—that challenges many of the traditional assumptions still held about the region.

These changes are not viewed by local residents as an unalloyed benefit. Local residents, according to a recent survey by the Economic Alliance of the San Fernando Valley, are equally divided between those who think that immigration has been “good” for the community and those who feel it has made life worse. These changes also accompanied a rising concern among Valley residents about crime, although most Valley residents considered the area safer than the rest of Los Angeles.³²

Part of the problem lies with the relative suddenness of the change. As recently as the 1960s, about nine out of ten Valley residents were Caucasian. By 1980, however, as much as twenty-five percent of the population was a racial or ethnic minority. Change in the 1980s was even more rapid, with the most dramatic decreases in white population taking place in the central parts of the Valley. Some areas that had been over eighty percent white at the beginning of the decade were now forty percent or less by the end.³³

Across America, particularly in the sunbelt, formerly white suburbs have become favorite places of settlement for new immigrants, as well as native born minorities. This is true in the Chinese and Asian, the Vietnamese enclave as well as the new immigrant communities emerging in Houston, Dallas and Atlanta. As in the Valley, these newcomers are often replacing predominately Anglo populations, who are moving further out to the periphery or back to the countryside.

This marks a sharp contrast to the immediate post-war era when these suburbs, like their workforces, remained highly segregated. Between 1950 and 1970, a period of intense suburban development, ninety-five percent of suburbanites were Caucasian.³⁴ The demographic shift in the Midopolis, or older ring of suburbs, started in the 1970s, when African-Americans began moving out of the inner city.

In the ensuing two decades, middle-class minorities and upwardly mobile, recent immigrants have shown a marked tendency to replace Caucasians in the suburbs, particularly in the inner ring, increasing their numbers far more rapidly than their Anglo counterparts. This is the case for the San Fernando Valley.³⁵ Today, nearly fifty-one percent of Asians, forty-three percent of all Latinos and thirty-two percent of African-Americans live in the suburbs.³⁶ The tendency towards greater diversity in the older suburbs can be seen across the country. The immediate suburbs around Denver, for example, experienced a fifty percent increase in their Latino populations during the 1990s.³⁷

This development is particularly notable in those regions - such as Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco, Washington, Houston, and Miami - where immigration has been the heaviest. The decline of aging suburbs, such as Upper Darby near Philadelphia and Harvey outside Chicago, are more a product of inner-city groups moving outward than new immigration.³⁸ Midopolitan regions that lack immigrants - New Orleans, Cleveland, St. Louis, and Indianapolis - now struggle to retain their attractiveness as Caucasians and affluent African-Americans flee to the outer suburbs.³⁹

Often immigrant migration is seen by pundits as a sign of decline. However, in many cases, immigrant migration is really a reflection of a renewal of middle-class aspirations. The Spanish-speaking son of Mexican immigrants, Alex Padilla, today, LA City Council President, moved to Pacoima when he was young. His father was a short order cook and his mother a

house cleaner. Yet their aspirations, Padilla recalls, were very much middle class; and their reasons for leaving an older section of Los Angeles for Pacoima would have been familiar to earlier generations of Valleyites:

"We moved to the Valley for two reasons. We could afford it and we could have a backyard. That was it. That's what we were looking for."

The key to understanding is in the changing needs of the immigrants. In contrast to the early 20th century, when proximity to inner-city services and infrastructure was critical, many of today's newcomers are more dispersed due to our auto-oriented society. They need to stop only briefly, if at all, in the inner cities. Their immediate destination after arrival is more likely the San Gabriel Valley than Chinatown or the East Los Angeles barrios, Fort Lee (New Jersey) rather than Manhattan. California State University/Northridge demographer James Allen notes: "The immigrants often don't bother with the inner city anymore. Most Iranians don't ever go to the center city and few Chinese ever touch Chinatown at all."⁴⁰

Allen points to changes in his own community, the San Fernando Valley.⁴¹ By 1990, the region, he found in his landmark study, had among Southern California's largest concentrations of significant groups oddly categorized as "Anglo" such as Iranians and Armenians as well as Soviet Jews. The West San Fernando Valley, in particular, also began to develop significant pockets of Asian, particularly Vietnamese and Asian Indian, immigrants. The East Valley had also replaced East Hollywood as the center for the region's Thai community.⁴²

Moreover, recent demographic trends in the Valley suggest it is becoming even more diverse. During the 1990s, the Valley's Caucasian population fell by 5.3 percent, while the Latino population increased by 43 percent, and the Asian population increased by 25.8 percent.⁴³ The growth in both these populations, as well as that of African Americans, was considerably higher in the Valley than in the city as a whole.⁴⁴

Population and Race or Ethnicity Percent Changes in City of Community for 1990-2000

City/Community	Population % Change	Hispanic % Change	White % Change	Black/Afr. American % Change	Asian - Pac. Islander % Change
LA County	7.4%	26.5%	-7.9%	-6.2%	22.0%
Valley Total	10.7%	43.3%	-5.3%	16.5%	25.8%
Arleta	13.6%	48.7%	-15.4%	-13.8%	-11.4%
Burbank	7.1%	17.8%	-6.4%	26.1%	47.2%
Calabasas/Hidden Hills	25.2%	29.0%	21.8%	90.5%	16.8%
Canoga Park	15.1%	59.1%	-3.7%	47.9%	31.2%
Chatsworth	6.5%	81.1%	-11.1%	60.1%	45.5%
Encino	3.5%	20.3%	-3.9%	68.7%	27.3%
Glendale	8.3%	1.8%	-6.9%	5.7%	23.1%
Granada Hills	9.0%	35.1%	-6.4%	56.0%	41.0%
Lake View Terrace	11.8%	39.8%	13.6%	-21.3%	-4.6%
Mission Hills	11.2%	38.5%	-0.7%	45.2%	21.0%
North Hills	22.0%	73.7%	-5.4%	-3.7%	52.6%
North Hollywood	12.3%	34.0%	-3.0%	21.9%	1.9%
Northridge	5.0%	47.4%	-14.5%	78.4%	43.8%
Pacoima	8.9%	16.4%	48.4%	-34.5%	-25.0%
Panorama City	26.6%	86.1%	-5.8%	-33.6%	16.7%
Reseda	14.2%	82.2%	-8.4%	90.0%	31.6%
San Fernando	4.5%	12.9%	15.5%	-22.7%	-10.5%
Sherman Oaks	3.6%	35.6%	-7.1%	72.1%	55.7%
Studio City	5.0%	21.4%	-2.3%	42.9%	49.4%
Sun Valley	11.7%	32.3%	9.9%	-34.1%	-16.6%
Sunland	2.6%	47.6%	-9.8%	18.7%	38.8%
Sylmar	17.4%	64.2%	2.1%	14.3%	-11.0%
Tarzana	6.7%	38.7%	-4.7%	50.2%	42.6%
Toluca Lake	6.2%	32.8%	-1.3%	126.8%	43.6%
Tujunga	7.7%	54.4%	-10.8%	134.5%	31.2%
Universal City	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Valley Glen	16.8%	63.4%	-9.4%	15.5%	0.6%
Valley Village	7.0%	58.0%	-6.9%	57.3%	19.4%
Van Nuys	17.1%	63.9%	-10.1%	28.0%	15.6%
West Hills	1.9%	31.0%	-7.5%	37.6%	34.1%
Winnetka	19.0%	106.6%	-14.0%	79.7%	40.7%
Woodland Hills	7.6%	56.4%	-4.3%	70.7%	44.3%

Source: U.S. Census 1990 and 2000; Report of Findings on the San Fernando Valley Economy; San Fernando Research Center; California State University Northridge - College of Business Administration & Economics

ARE WE ON THE ROAD TO GHETTOIZATION?

Allen and other observers have looked at these developments with particular emphasis on the interplay of geography, race and income. Clearly, one concern for the long-term future of the Valley lies in the prospect that some regions might become “unmeltable” ethnic pockets with insoluble, long-term social and economic problems.

And to be sure the “ghettoization” of some areas, particularly in the North Valley, has brought with it some degree of urban decay, such as in older industrial neighborhoods in Pacoima.⁴⁵ In certain areas, dilapidated houses, crime, drugs, and gangs rival the worst conditions seen in more traditional inner-city areas of Los Angeles.⁴⁶

Within the Valley, however, exist a wide range of communities, some ethnically diverse while others are ethnically homogenous. Ten communities are at least two-thirds Caucasian, and all except two (Tujunga and Valley Village) have poverty rates significantly below the region’s average (17.8 percent).⁴⁷ The City of San Fernando and the community of Pacoima, on the other hand, are almost completely Latino. Only one community, Lake View Terrace, has a large African-American population (20 percent), although its Latino population is sixty-one percent. A closer examination of Valley neighborhoods reveals a complex demography.

To develop a better understanding of the San Fernando Valley’s demographic diversity, the thirty-one communities that make up the San Fernando Valley (including the independent cities) were separated into high- and low-poverty communities based on whether their poverty rates were above or below the regional median of 15.9 percent. These communities were then classified by whether they were characterized by a relatively higher or lower concentration of a particular ethnic group. The results for relatively poor communities are reported in Table 10.

Twenty-five percent of the communities with high concentrations of Caucasian residents were in poor communities. Meanwhile, eighty-one percent of the communities with high concentrations of Latino residents were in higher-poverty communities. More than two-thirds of the communities with African-American populations greater than the median (3 percent) were in low poverty areas. Asian communities were split evenly between the high poverty and low poverty areas of the city. These data seem to support the concern that communities tend to be highly segregated, and that segregation is closely correlated with economic status.

Table 10: Distribution of High Poverty San Fernando Valley Neighborhoods

(N=16)	Community Ethnicity		Ethnic Diversity Compared to Valley Median	
	(Mean)	(Median)	> median	< median
Race				
Caucasian	48.1%	45.6%	25.0%	75.0%
Hispanic	39.1%	29.4%	81.3%	18.8%
Black	3.0%	2.4%	31.3%	68.8%
Asian	9.1%	7.0%	50.0%	50.0%

Median poverty rate = 15.9% Source: Distribution based on the number of communities with poverty rates higher than the median for the San Fernando Valley. Calculated from San Fernando Valley Research Center, *Report of Findings on the San Fernando Valley Economy 2000–2007* (Northridge, California: California State University, n.d.), p. 48.

This conclusion ignores a very important deviation from the statistical average: some neighborhoods are relatively affluent despite high concentrations of minority residents. For example, almost eighty-five percent of Arleta’s residents are minority, but the community is still below the median poverty rate for the San Fernando Valley (Table 11). Three quarters of the population in Mission Hills is minority, but it ranks among the lowest poverty communities in the Valley. Similarly, more than one-third of the residents in Granada Hills are Latino, Asian, or African-American, but its poverty rate is less than nine percent.

San Fernando Valley Communities with Poverty Rates below the Regional Median and Relatively High Concentrations of Minority Residents

<i>Community</i>	<i>Minority Share*</i>	<i>Poverty Rate</i>
Arleta	84.2%	14.9%
Northridge	39.5%	13.8%
Burbank	40.6%	13.1%
Mission Hills	76.2%	12.0%
Granada Hills	38.6%	8.5%
Woodland Hills	21.8%	8.2%
West Hills	25.0%	5.1%
Chatsworth	31.6%	4.2%

Source: Total Asian, African-American, Latino, and Native American populations reported in San Fernando Valley Research Center, *Report of Findings on the San Fernando Valley Economy 2000-2001* (Northridge, California: California State University, n.d.), p. 48.

For the most part, residential segregation is less extreme than on the south side of the Santa Monica Mountains. This may have something to do with the improving economic picture experienced by most Valley residents. When asked, eighty-three percent of Valley residents said they were “financially better off” in 2000 than they were five years ago.⁴⁸

Rather than being made up of distinct ethnic pockets, much of the Valley is cross-quilted, with middle class and working class pockets often in close proximity, a nuance lost in statistical averages and medians. In many neighborhoods, unremarkable and even decrepit-looking boulevards surround tree-lined residential neighborhoods that are often quite comfortably bourgeois and exceptionally close-knit. In addition, much of the statistical decline in household incomes reflects neighborhood “filtering,” where immigrants with families move into neighborhoods and replace older couples, many of them “empty nesters.”⁴⁹

Recent analyses by demographers at California State University at Northridge shed light on the uniquely dispersed nature of the Valley’s ethnic evolution. The highest increases in Asian population, for example, took place in such stolidly, once overwhelmingly white communities as Burbank, Chatsworth, Granada Hills, Northridge, Sherman Oaks, Tarzana, Toluca Lake and Woodland Hills. Latino population growth was heaviest in the Northeast Valley but over forty percent in communities like Valley Village, Valley Glen and Woodland Hills, which have long been bastions of white middle class communities. African-American growth, although overall smaller in scale, was similarly dispersed.⁵⁰

Population and Race or Ethnicity Percentages by City or Community for 2000

City/Community	Population	Hispanic	White	Black/Afr. American	Asian – Pac. Islander	Other	More than One Race
Arleta	27,426	75.8%	37.8%	2.0%	9.0%	45.4%	4.7%
Burbank	100,316	24.9%	72.2%	2.1%	9.3%	9.9%	6.0%
Calabasas/Hidden Hills	22,208	4.5%	88.6%	1.1%	6.6%	1.1%	2.5%
Canoga Park	41,268	53.0%	52.2%	4.3%	10.4%	26.7%	5.6%
Chatsworth	67,470	18.2%	68.2%	3.2%	16.6%	7.1%	4.3%
Encino	46,316	8.8%	84.5%	2.4%	5.1%	3.2%	4.6%
Glendale	194,973	19.8%	63.6%	1.3%	16.1%	8.6%	10.1%
Granada Hills	38,371	32.1%	59.8%	3.9%	14.7%	16.3%	4.8%
Lake View Terrace	17,466	64.1%	36.9%	18.4%	5.1%	33.6%	5.0%
Mission Hills	17,609	64.8%	49.0%	3.4%	8.8%	33.7%	4.1%
North Hills	52,333	57.2%	48.7%	5.1%	12.1%	28.2%	5.2%
North Hollywood	144,188	55.2%	51.2%	5.0%	7.3%	28.8%	6.9%
Northridge	84,084	22.0%	63.5%	4.6%	16.5%	9.9%	5.1%
Pacoima	63,847	87.2%	36.3%	6.5%	1.5%	49.7%	4.6%
Panorama City	69,901	68.5%	35.9%	7.5%	20.9%	40.1%	5.6%
Reseda	59,583	44.3%	55.6%	0.9%	2.5%	21.4%	6.1%
San Fernando	23,564	89.3%	42.9%	1.0%	1.2%	49.2%	4.0%
Sherman Oaks	53,501	10.5%	81.0%	4.5%	5.8%	4.2%	4.3%
Studio City	39,247	7.8%	84.8%	3.7%	5.3%	2.6%	3.4%
Sun Valley	51,279	68.4%	50.5%	1.7%	6.4%	35.3%	5.2%
Sunland	22,504	20.2%	77.0%	2.4%	6.6%	8.2%	4.9%
Sylmar	58,959	68.8%	50.8%	4.7%	3.0%	35.6%	4.7%
Tarzana	33,242	14.9%	77.4%	3.7%	5.9%	6.3%	6.3%
Toluca Lake	5,907	9.3%	85.3%	4.3%	4.6%	2.5%	3.0%
Tujunga	24,608	26.4%	71.8%	2.5%	6.3%	12.7%	5.9%
Universal City	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Valley Glen	46,107	46.8%	57.0%	4.8%	5.3%	24.6%	7.6%
Valley Village	19,460	21.1%	73.1%	6.1%	5.0%	10.4%	5.0%
Van Nuys	117,954	54.4%	52.6%	6.0%	7.0%	27.3%	6.3%
West Hills	41,303	10.3%	78.5%	2.3%	11.8%	3.2%	4.0%
Winnetka	46,746	42.7%	50.2%	4.9%	15.8%	22.4%	5.8%
Woodland Hills	66,695	12.4%	79.6%	3.4%	6.9%	5.1%	4.6%
Valley Total	1,698,435	39.1%	60.2%	3.9%	9.6%	19.7%	5.9%
LA County	9,519,388	44.6%	52.8%	10.5%	13.6%	16.7%	4.9%

Source: U.S. Census 2000; Report of Findings on the San Fernando Valley Economy; San Fernando Research Center; California State University Northridge- College of Business Administration & Economics

RETHINKING THE VALLEY AS A 'MELTING POT SUBURB'

A University of Southern California study into immigrant migration patterns in both Los Angeles and Washington, D.C. suggests that rising poverty in older ethnic suburbs reflects “the force of upward mobility” as newcomers move out of worse inner-city neighborhoods on their way towards a middle-class lifestyle.⁵¹ These areas have become what demographer William Frey of the Milken Institute calls “melting pot suburbs”, former bedroom communities, where newcomers have replaced older, predominately white populations.

In this sense, the older suburbs of the San Fernando Valley increasingly reflect the diversity of the American population more broadly, and often provide the widest range of housing and employment opportunities. Yet, although the newcomers may be different from the traditional denizens of “America’s suburb” their motivations, as discussed above, for coming to the Valley are remarkably similar. Much of this has to do with economics. Throughout much of the late 1990s, the economy of the Valley, measured by job creation, significantly outstripped that of the county.⁵²

Equally important, there were opportunities across a broad array of industries and at differing levels of employment. While the traditional functions of suburban communities have waned in the Valley, other factors have become more important as the economy has diversified. According to analysis by California State University/Northridge economist Shirley Svorny, the Valley boasts a sizable concentration of manufacturing employment and firms, ranging from high-technology electronics to garments.⁵³ Although the Valley is not the preferred locale of the Hollywood elite, it remains the highly chosen locale for the working class people of the entertainment industry and the digital age—the specialized suppliers, lesser known actors, producers, and directors.

Ultimately, for the immigrants, as for earlier migrants to the area, the Valley fundamentally is about middle class aspirations. While Los Angeles south of the Santa Monica Mountains is increasingly a city divided between Westside rich and Eastside poor, the Valley remains predominantly middle class. Only four of Los Angeles’ fifty richest people live in the Valley (nineteen live in Beverly Hills). The Valley also has lower unemployment and a relatively small fraction of the city’s poor.⁵⁴

The relative affordability of the Valley is critical to immigrant populations. Although an increasing percentage of residents live in apartments and condominiums, the Valley still epitomizes for many the great middle-class ideal of owning a home in a sunny, safe, comfortable community. At a time when real estate prices on the Westside are out of the range of all, but the very wealthy (\$650,000 and above) and the average home in the Conejo Valley (north of the Valley) sells for nearly \$400,000, the San Fernando Valley has houses in the relatively modest \$200,000 and \$300,000 range, contributing to the Valley’s above-average levels of home-ownership.⁵⁵

Housing, too, has been impacted by immigrants, not only in the Valley but throughout Los Angeles County, where housing prices have continued to surge amidst the recession. Today, of the ten most common names for new homebuyers, seven are clearly Latino-Garcia, Rodriguez, Hernandez, Lopez, Gonzalez, Martinez and Perez-and two, Kim and Lee, are Asian.

Not surprisingly, the residential market is strong. Apartment vacancy rates have fallen from double digits for most communities in 1996 to under five percent by March 2000.⁵⁶ Median home sale prices have increased steadily since 1996, and median prices range from \$130,000 in the northeast and central portions of the Valley to \$665,000 along the southern fringes at the foothills of the Santa Monica Mountains.⁵⁷ Although the area is approaching complete build-out, new residential construction topped \$500 million in 2000.⁵⁸

Brian Paul, a spokesman for the San Fernando Valley Board of Realtors, claims that much of the impetus for the Valley's strong residential market lies in the immigrant communities. Some, such as the Northeast Valley, he claims, have among the highest rates of home ownership in the region, more than more affluent and still predominately Anglo, Sherman Oaks. "Asians and Latinos are heavily into home ownership," notes realtor Paul:

Top 10 Home Buyer Surnames Los Angeles County (2000)

1. Garcia
2. Lee
3. Rodriguez
4. Kim
5. Hernandez
6. Lopez
7. Gonzalez
8. Martinez
9. Smith
10. Perez

Source: California Association of REALTORS®

"...The immigrants are fueling growth here that contradicts most of the negative forces."

This marks a major change in the pattern of growth for the Valley. As late as the 1970s, notes Barbara Zeidman, director of the Los Angeles office of Fannie Mae, predominately white baby boomers drove the residential real estate market. Today it is the immigrants, she notes, who propel the market, and will do so for the foreseeable future.⁵⁹

Immigrants are critical to the resilience of not only the residential but the commercial portions of the Valley economy, particularly the retail sector. Rents in the heavily Latino-dominated districts around Van Nuys Boulevard, for example, have grown over the past five years from \$1.25 psf - \$1.75 psf to as high as \$3.00 psf. Developer Jose Legaspi points out that these rents can be as much as fifty percent higher than in predominately Anglo areas such as Sherman Oaks or Studio City.

Legaspi, who has been active in developments in communities such as Arleta and Panorama City, suggests that much of the economic future in older suburbs such as in the San Fernando Valley lies with the buying power of immigrants.

"I don't think anyone realizes that the Latino and Asian markets are now predominately suburban. You can't stick three million Latinos into one neighborhood. The pressures are too great," Legaspi, a native of Zacatecas, Mexico suggests. "Back in the 1980s, these areas had lots of vacancies. Now it's getting hard to assemble space for these kinds of developments."

Similarly, much of the Valley's present - and future - economic vitality lies with the newcomers. Overall immigrant populations, along with their offspring, are one of the surest growth markets in early 21st Century America. Immigrants, in the San Fernando Valley, as elsewhere, tend to be younger, have more children and are more likely to spend locally for goods and services. Latino and Asian buying power, according to a recent study by the Selig Center for Economic Growth at the University of Georgia, is growing at roughly twice the rate for the rest of the population. Today, fully twenty five percent of buying power in California,

according to the study, lies within these two groups, which are growing rapidly throughout the Valley. Simply defined, buying power is the total personal (after-tax) income that residents have to spend on goods and services—that is, the disposable personal income of the residents of a specified geographic area.⁶¹

Buying Power by Race in the State of California for 1990, 1997-2001						
Race or Ethnicity	1990	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
White	476,953,910	612,963,597	644,811,357	685,480,272	726,602,717	768,462,069
Hispanic	68,064,227	99,913,716	107,220,006	117,098,755	125,517,123	137,609,480
Asian	42,282,890	64,205,494	67,643,903	74,205,408	81,167,510	87,974,546
Black	27,631,425	36,294,613	38,020,574	40,370,001	42,740,404	45,147,755

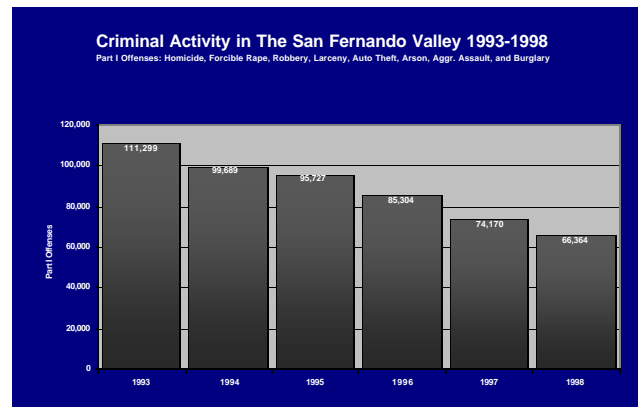
Source: Selig Center for Economic Growth, Terry College of Business, The University of Georgia, August 2000.

Finally, there are the contributions of the newcomers to the entrepreneurial health of the economy. Several of the fastest growing ethnic groups in the Valley - notably Russian Jews, Koreans, Iranians and Armenians - boast among the highest rates of entrepreneurship in Southern California.⁶² At the same time, many of the newcomers, including Vietnamese and Latinos, make up the bulk of the industrial workforce, from aerospace subcontracting to garments and other diversified manufacturing.

LOOKING FORWARD: PROSPECTS FOR THE MESTIZO VALLEY

As assuredly as the pastoral epoch ended with the passing of the 19th Century, so now has the era of Anglo demographic dominance which characterized the Valley's 20th Century emergence as "America's suburb" Less clear is the question of the ultimate future of the Valley as it becomes increasingly diverse, not only in its demographic but also in its cultural and economic life.

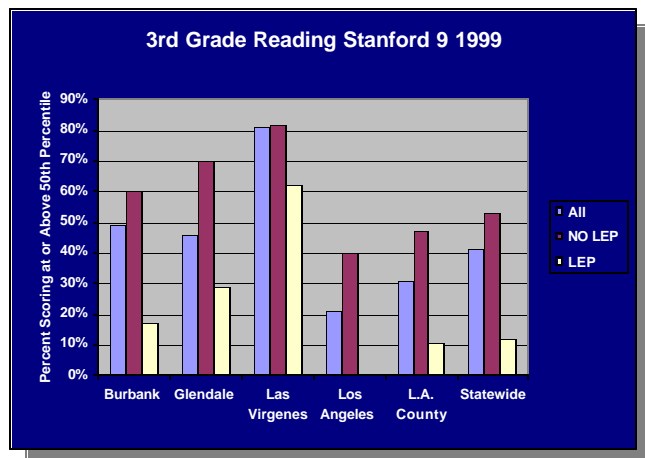
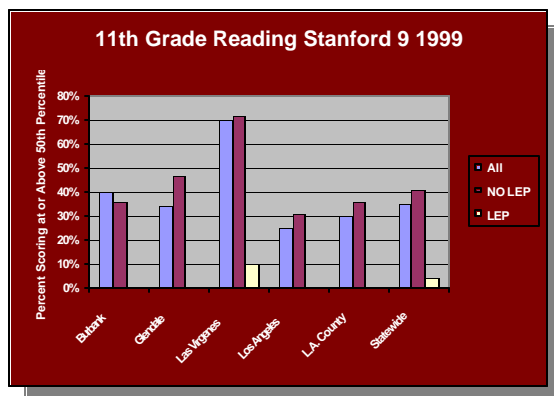
To many observers, right and left, the prospects for such a multi-racial Valley are not particularly good. Some observers, such as USC's Michael Dear, see immigrants in Southern California as creating a permanent "ghettoization" in which "the status of people of color will remain compromised." ⁶³ Perhaps more importantly, there are significant numbers of ordinary middle class Valley residents - including minorities - who also see a less than bright future for the region and have, or are planning, to move to other, more agreeable areas.



Such negative perceptions are not without some justification. As the Valley has changed, and become more diverse, major problems have emerged. Serious crime, which has fallen in the late 1990s, had begun to rise, although only a fraction of the rates on the eastside and southside of Los Angeles. Similarly, the Valley, although far less so than South-Central of Los Angeles, now has a serious gang problem.

Some areas, notably the Foothill division, have seen a marked increase in gang-related violence over the past five years. ⁶⁴

Perhaps an even greater problem revolves around schools, particularly those located within the jurisdiction of the Los Angeles Unified School District. Simply put, the Los Angeles school district not only performs poorly, but its dysfunction affects the

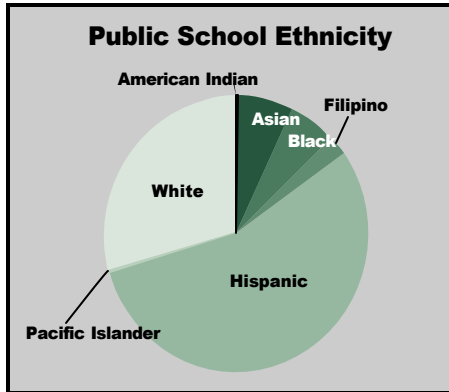


demographics of the region by forcing many parents to leave the Valley for other regions, often to the Coñejo and beyond. Results on reading tests tell the sad tale; only twenty-nine percent of the second grade students in the L.A.

Sources for charts Indicators 2000; Economic Alliance of the San Fernando Valley

portions of the Valley performed at the 50th percentile, only slightly better than the twenty-six percent for the rest of the district.

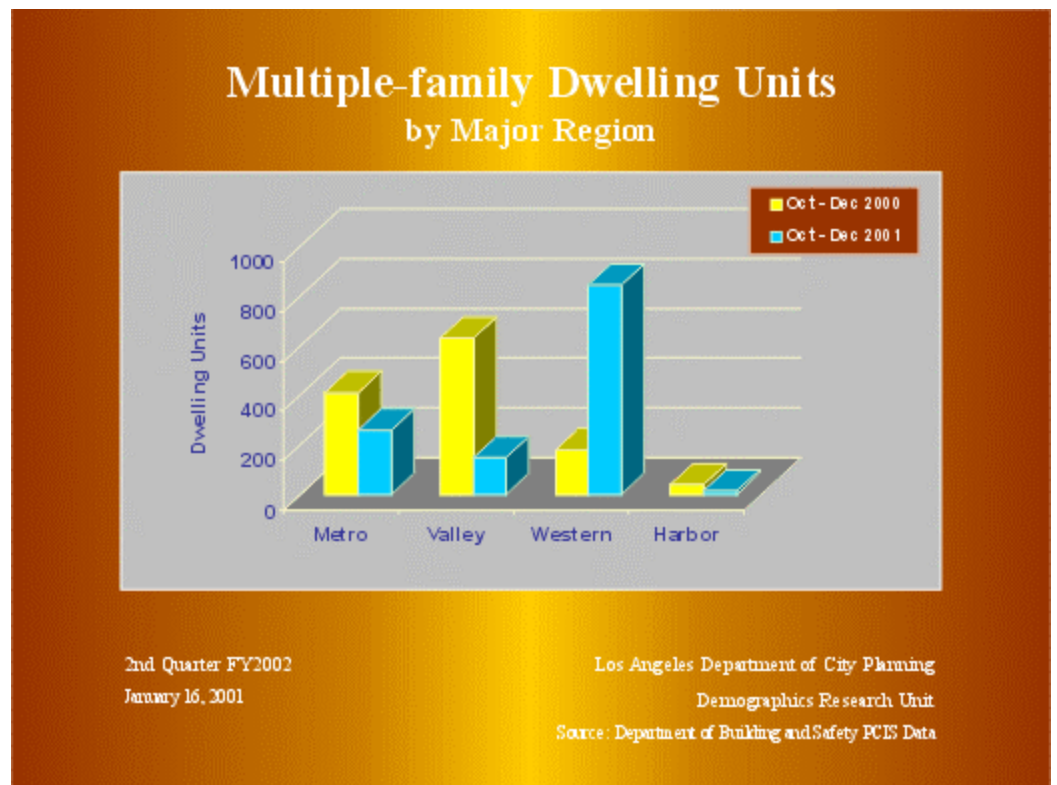
In contrast, other districts, particularly the Las Virgenes unified, did vastly better, but so too did schools in Burbank and Glendale, which also have high percentages of minority and immigrant students. ⁶⁵ Clearly a region where so many students are falling behind stands at a distinct economic and cultural disadvantage which the growing numbers of private schools will be unable to fulfill. ⁶⁶



Finally, the Valley, like the rest of California, faces severe shortages in housing, particularly for the low and middle income markets. Unlike schools, where perhaps a breakup of the L.A. school district might facilitate improvement, this problem is largely based on supply and demand. Housing prices have been rising because relatively little new construction has taken place and much of that is oriented to more affluent consumers.

Source: Almanac 2000; Economic Alliance of the San Fernando Valley

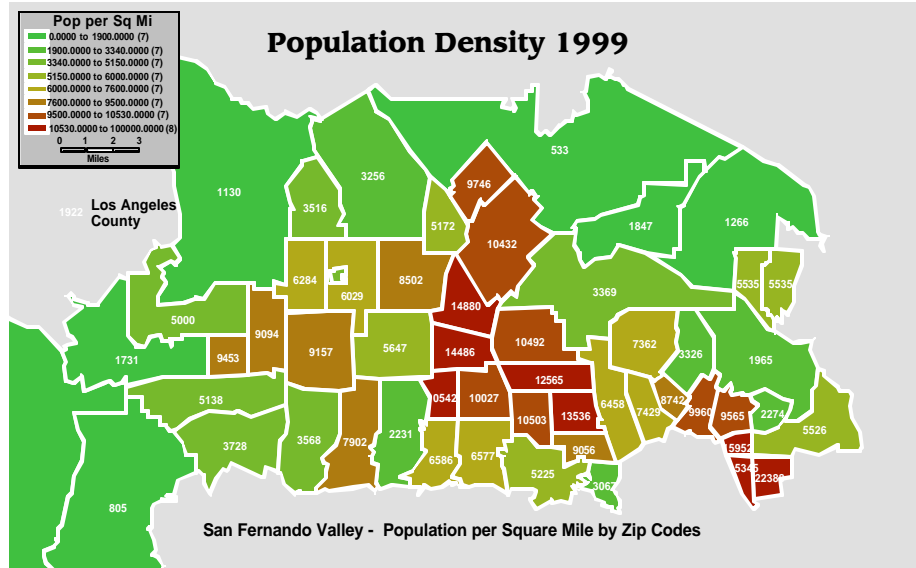
Many of the fastest growing elements in the Valley's demography - immigrant families, young singles and the elderly - are often without feasible housing options. ⁶⁷ Overcrowded conditions are particularly rife in heavily immigrant areas such as the Northeast Valley and in Glendale, where densities have been rising steadily since the 1980s with little new supply to reduce pressure on the markets. ⁶⁸



"When I was first running for office, I would look for a voter and they would say look in the back," Councilman Alex Padilla recalls. "Then I would go to house in the back and they would say go further back to the shed in the backyard. A lot of my district is like that." ⁶⁸

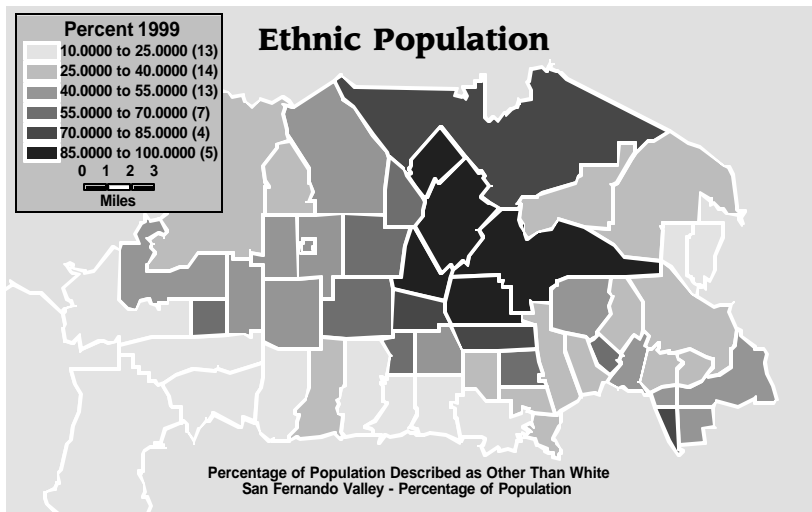
Given these and other problems, Valley residents, whether in the City of Los Angeles or not, face many great challenges. Yet these are not unprecedented. The rapid growth of the region in the 20th Century also required massive changes; a shift from a quasi-pastoral to a dense suburban region took place in less than three decades.

Leadership was required to build the schools, roads, offices and houses to accommodate that growth.



Source: Indicators 2000; Economic Alliance of the San Fernando Valley

Today, the Valley faces a similar challenge, but one that is not beyond the resources of this region to reach. This time growth *per se* is not so much the main challenge, but the quality of that growth. The Valley now is neither part of the urban periphery or a homogeneous community as in the past. It boasts a sophisticated and diverse economy; its peoples reflect, as much as any region, the enormous diversity of Southern California.



Source: Almanac 2000; Economic Alliance of the San Fernando Valley

What is ultimately needed then is a new conceptualization of what the Valley is and what holds us together. Some proponents, particularly in academic and media circles, see the Valley becoming ever more fragmented, divided into racial and ethnic enclaves. Some believe this is inevitable, as immigrants, particularly Latinos, fall behind in their integration into the digital economy.

George Borjas, a leading critic of U.S. immigration policy and professor of public policy at the Kennedy Center at Harvard, suggests that recent immigration laws have tilted the pool of newcomers away from skilled workers to those with less skills, seriously depleting the quality of the labor pool and perhaps threatening the social stability of the immigration centers.⁶⁹

Many on the left, who believe that racism is endemic to American society, share the pessimism of Borjas, a political conservative. Thus, to them, ethnic separation and fragmentation are inevitable, if not even desirable. According to Robert Jiobu, upward mobility of an ethnic group is determined by its infrastructure and by the infrastructure of the situation that the group encounters.⁷⁰ The infrastructure includes demographic composition, intermarriage rates, residential segregation, and labor force characteristics. When viewed collectively, these factors can provide an idea of the group's assimilation level and success. Assimilation, or the blending of a culture and structure of an ethnic group with those of another, can lead to the minority becoming like the majority (Americanization), both groups changing and blending in (a melting pot), or coexisting, but maintaining their uniqueness (cultural pluralism).⁷¹

"The national economy is demanding more skilled workers and I don't see how bringing more unskilled workers is consistent with this trend...When you have a very large group of unskilled workers, and children of unskilled workers, you risk the danger of creating a social underclass in the next Century. "⁶⁹

Rather than the old ideal of the "melting pot" academics like Jiobu see a pattern of discrimination that is so entrenched that ethnic mobility is sharply curtailed. Although large gaps do exist, this is not the full reality - particularly in the San Fernando Valley. Many, if not most, immigrants regard the move to the Valley as a "step up" - from a smaller apartment to a larger one, from a large apartment to a rented house and ultimately to a home or condo of their own.

This middle class, along with the aspiring working class, as researcher Gregory Rodriguez pointed out in his 1996 Pepperdine landmark study, often does not exhibit the behaviors that many observers, both conservative and liberal, associate with immigrants. As Latino immigrants settle longer in Southern California, he notes, they tend to escape poverty; after thirty years barely one in ten are poor and three out of four are solidly middle class.

As they enter the middle class, the newcomers also tend to intermix and intermarry with other groups. In the Rodriguez study, more than one in three US born Latinas in the five county areas intermarry; the same is true for US born Asian women.⁷²This is likely even more prevalent in the Valley, including the city of Glendale, where the prevalence of mix raced households tends to be higher than in the rest of Los Angeles.⁷³

THE CHALLENGE TO LEADERSHIP

The road to building a successful Valley on a mestizo model will not be an easy one. The process of ethnic change is both dramatic in its effects and gradual in terms of overall integration into the general society. The first generation - whether Latino or Armenian, Vietnamese or Iranian - inevitably will be slower to adapt to the new reality than their children. Similarly, the children of Anglo Valley residents may be more amenable, and influenced, by the growing diversification of the region than many of their parents.

For these reasons, it is critical for the leadership of the Valley - religious, political and economic - to focus on those issues that will help ease the region's transition towards the mestizo model. In many ways churches, mosques, Buddhist temples and synagogues may have the most critical role in the early stages of the integrative process. There are at least 1,500 such institutions in the Valley, and many of them play an important role as providers of social services to immigrant and poor populations as well as to both elderly and youth. Notes Reverend Ronald J. Degges of the San Fernando Interfaith Council:⁷⁴

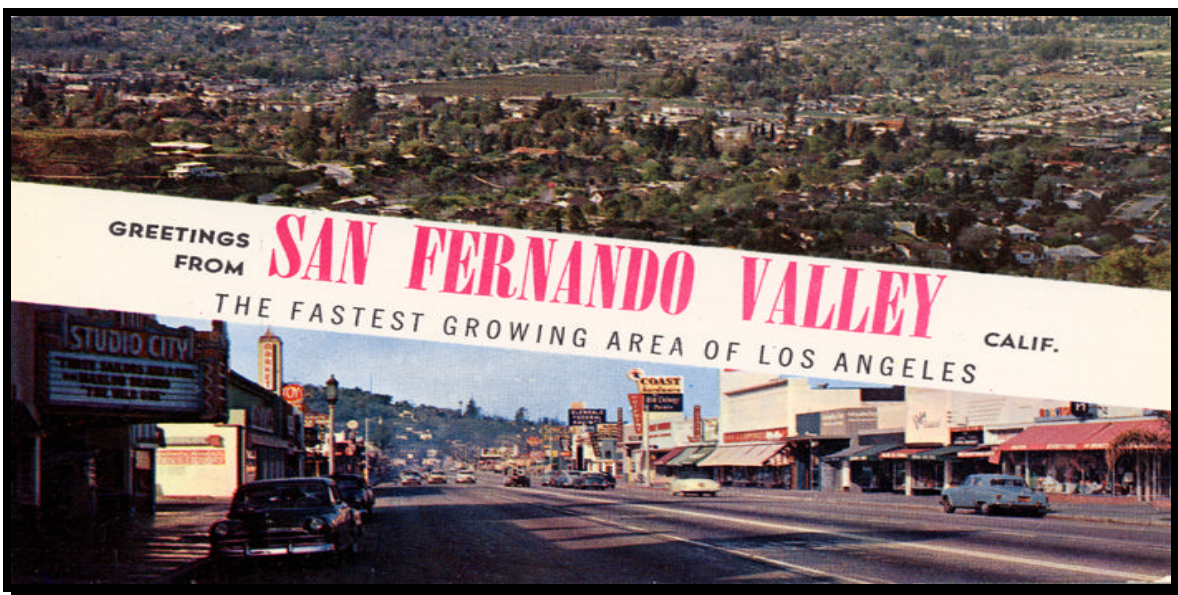
This focus on creating a greater sense of unity within diversity requires similar inspiration from the community and the political arena. Valley leadership, as can be expected in a sprawled, semi-suburban environment, tends to be very localized, with little focus on the broader issues impacting the community. There is a need, as Pepperdine graduate student Luci Stephens suggests in her study, to develop vehicles for celebrating the Valley's new identity as an increasingly diverse, cosmopolitan community.

"All across this Valley, there is great religious diversity. People are all over the spectrum. Change is the one constant that confronts us all. There are many stumbling blocks facing our religious leaders and their communities of faith. Tested daily by the pressures of their vocation and the external focus of culture, they continue to serve, give and celebrate."⁷⁴

This could take the form of Valley-wide festivals that would stress that the community's diverse segments are part of an encompassing commonwealth. It could be seen in the current drive to preserve and celebrate the Valley's history - including its ethnic past - as part of a general identity. The idea, as Ms. Stephens suggests, is to create a "loved tradition for many generations to come."⁷⁵

Ultimately, these initiatives also need to be supported by enlightened business and political efforts. The fundamental problems facing the Valley - education, housing, and crime - cannot be disassociated from the changing complexion of its population. They are essentially the same thing; just as the greater cultural vibrancy, economic and demographic economic and demographic dynamism are also reflective of these changes.

In tackling these challenges, the Valley's leadership must work not only to address these issues but do so in a way that stresses the common challenges an increasingly diverse population faces. There is no Latino housing crisis, or Armenian crime problem, or Vietnamese education deficit. These are common problems faced by all Valleyites; they can only be solved by this community acting as one.



Source: Photographic postcard Donor: Reilly, Tom; California State University Northridge San Fernando Valley History Digital Library <http://digital-library.csun.edu/Copyright.html>

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²² Roderick, *op. cit.*, p.74, 108

²³ Roderick, *op. cit.*, pp.110-114

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