From Boom Crash Injustice to the New Maturity of Los Angeles:
Demographics and Perception in 1992, Today, and the Future

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Forward LA: Race, Arts, and Inclusive Placemaking after the 1992 Civil Unrest

Executive Summary

Reflecting on the 25th anniversary of the 1992 civil unrest, and then analyzing how much has changed today and for the future, leads to a substantial reassessment of both past and future. The period from 1985 to 1995 was one of acute demographic and economic pressures that were heightened by the abrupt reversal from boom to bust in 1990. All Angelenos took this period negatively, but it likely bore most acutely on young African Americans whose numbers remained constant while others were doubling their growth pressure. With the onset of the deep local recession, their unemployment was twice all others, reaching 23 percent or greater.

This economic setback coincided with March 1991 incidents involving Latasha Harlins, a school girl shot by a Korean storeowner, and Rodney King, a speeding motorist in a Hyundai, beaten by 4 white police. Their attackers’ escape from jail time in court trials in fall 1991 and spring 1992 was challenged by the newfound power of video showing the attacks, generating a deep sense of injustice. What started as a rebellion by African Americans snowballed into a 6-day series of riots that swept up many others in multiethnic participation. Korean store owners bore the brunt of the damages during the events they call Sa-I-Gu.

Population growth later returned to normal levels that preceded the explosive boom of the 1980s, which was tied to events in Washington, D.C. and the Soviet Union. Immigration and racial change also slowed substantially, and the majority of young adults are now California born. What has been quietly building is a new maturity of diversity in Los Angeles and a new culture of integrated identity among homegrown Angelenos. Looking to the decade ahead, we foresee continued aging in place, with today’s multiethnic, homegrown generation growing into major economic roles that can help support the large generation of aging baby boomers. In turn, the older generation has a great opportunity of leadership in making Los Angeles flourish.
I. INTRODUCTION

The occasion of the 25th anniversary of the LA Civil Unrest, variously termed the Riots, Uprising or Rebellion, or Sa-i-Gu, is an opportunity to take stock about how much has changed in Los Angeles, both now and for the future. How much have the demographic forces shifted compared to what prevailed in 1992? And what is the interplay of demographics with other forces, both then and for the future?

Our answer must assess both past and future. That requires us to assess the neglected backdrop of the explosive 1980s, as well as certain unique events leading up to the six days of violent outburst that began on April 29, 1992, immediately following announcement of the jury verdict exonerating four white Los Angeles police officers who had been charged in the videotaped beating of motorist Rodney King.

Rioting may have started that afternoon, but the civil unrest was a product of long-festering resentments that did not commence with this single jury verdict or with the contemporaneous case of Latasha Harlins, shot and killed by a Korean store owner and captured on security video. Those acts of visible, apparent justice-denied were the trigger for a rebellion against accumulated police and court injustices felt acutely by black Angelenos.

Longstanding economic injustice was amplified by the extremity of key demographic and economic trends, together with their sharp reversal, from the late 1980s to the early 1990s. Those pressures surely added to the deep frustration that primed African Americans for revolt. As will be described, this Southern California fallout, ironically, was tied to some of the greatest successes of Ronald Reagan in the White House and the impacts of defense spending on the local economy in what proved to be the aberrant decade of the 1980s.

Public opinion prior to the outbreak of civil disorder had grown almost universally negative about conditions in Los Angeles. UCLA survey researchers found that “overwhelming majorities, 70 percent or greater in each of the four major ethnic groups” believed Los Angeles had become a worse place to live in the last five years. That is an extraordinarily skewed statistic, given that even in an unfavorable time a sizable share typically would state things had remained about the same, and, contrary to consensus, an additional small share would even state that conditions actually had improved. The breadth of this negative sentiment was tied, no doubt, to the region’s rapid growth and economic boom of the 1980s, followed by a sudden and deep crash in 1991 that sent unemployment soaring and home prices plunging, along with other dismal trends.

A demographic analysis is inadequate if it simply looks at social changes in isolation from this volatile economic and political backdrop, or in the absence of residents’ sentiments and experiences from riding the roller coaster of California’s economy and demographic change. The analysis in the present study follows an approach of “integrated demography,” connecting
together these different elements. We seek to apply this perspective to not only the past, but also the present and future of Los Angeles.

The most detailed and astute demographic analysis following the 1992 civil unrest, “A Riot of Color: The Demographic Setting,” described its rationale aptly: “Although demographic factors cannot “explain” riots, they are one salient, quantifiable facet of the tensions and processes that fuel them.” Peter Morrison and Ira “Jack” Lowry, long-time researchers with the Rand Corporation, placed great emphasis on the availability of young males “with time on their hands” and relatively free of family constraints. This assessment applied most directly to African-American men who were unemployed, not in school, and not married. They also emphasized how the disparate growth rates and ethnic succession in neighborhoods set the stage for competition and conflict. All this led to Morrison and Lowry’s conclusion that the area was ripe for unrest.

In fact, young Blacks, but also Latinos, ages 18 to 24, were substantially overrepresented among arrestees relative to their numbers living in the South Central area. Overall, because of their greater population numbers, Latinos accounted for 51 percent of arrests, blacks 36 percent, and whites 11 percent. Television footage of looters leaving stores also appeared to show primarily Latinos and whites. One limitation is that there is no record of who were the arsonists, the armed shooters, or who broke open the stores, acts that occurred before the police or cameras arrived.

How this six-day period of civil unrest is to be labeled is a continuing debate, and the multiethnic participation in the looting aspect of the riots is a key source of confusion. The interpretation adopted here is that this period of intense “civil unrest” featured “riots” that grew to attract a broad participation of looters, but it was commenced as an outbreak of “rebellion” or an “uprising” by African-Americans acting against the perceived injustices suffered at the hands of the police and the courts. A clear majority of African-American scholars who have studied the events term them a rebellion, and the evidence addressed in following sections is consistent with that view. However, the weight of the damages from the riots fell disproportionately on Korean store owners, and their term for this unrest, “Sa-I-Gu,” Korean for the numbers in the date of its beginning, 4-2-9, suggests the deep significance they feel about this time of their collective misfortune.

What the present study reveals is how greatly the demographic precursors for the 1992 civil unrest have changed since 2000 and how much further they are likely to change in the next 15 years. Population growth has been reduced to a small fraction of its past changes, and the pace of racial or ethnic transition has sharply slowed. Conditions for cooperative progress are now strongly enhanced. In fact, both African American and Latino residents are now deeply settled, with the young born and raised as Californians and Angelenos, so that a growing cultural accommodation and integration is underway in South Los Angeles.

The greatest changes facing Los Angeles for the future are driven by the aging of the large baby boom generation. In fact, the well-being of that group, and of the city and region, is heavily
dependent on the successes of the young generation of color. This generation of Angelenos, largely homegrown Californians, is destined to provide the majority of new workers, taxpayers, and home buyers who will support the property values of future home sellers. It is this shared destiny that should help unite all the different strands in LA’s diverse communities.

II. THE DEMORALIZING WHIPSAW OF BOOM AND CRASH

During the 1980s, Los Angeles county experienced the most extraordinary boom. After WWII the county had grown dramatically, its population climbing by 1.9 million in the single decade of the 1950s. After that, however, growth slowed progressively, declining by half to “only” 1.0 million in the 1960s, and then by half again to 445 thousand in the 1970s (Exhibit 1). In the 1980s, however, population growth sharply rebounded, exploding upward by 1.4 million, only to fall again to 656 thousand in the 1990s and less than half of that, 299 thousand, in the 2000s. In the longer view of things, the 1980s boom was quite the exception.

A series of quirks seem to have played a role in the 1980s population explosion. Much of the rest of the nation was languishing in that decade. The Midwest entered into its “rustbelt” status as a consequence of economic restructuring and the decline of old industries. New York City was facing bankruptcy, and other east coast cities also were struggling. Meanwhile Texas and other southwestern states were mired in an oil bust that deflected both domestic migrants and immigrants to other destinations. In this national context, California was the one bright light shining a beacon to would-be migrants. The potential pool to attract was also very deep,
because the younger half of the large baby boom generation was still in the prime migration ages of 20 to 30 in 1984. Immigration to the U.S. also was on the rise, particularly from Mexico, whose own baby boom was reaching age 20, and California, not Texas, was the preferred destination.

The big attractor for this exceptional population growth was a remarkable employment boom that lasted from 1984 until 1990. At the base of it, aerospace employment was surging in Los Angeles county because defense spending was on the upswing in Washington, D.C. It helped that a Californian, Ronald Reagan, was in the White House, and he was engaged in an arms race that outspent the capacity of the smaller economy of the Soviet Union, adding strains that hastened its eventual breakup in 1991. As well summarized by one political scientist and international observer:

A central instrument for putting pressure on the Soviet Union was Reagan’s massive defense build-up, which raised defense spending from $134 billion in 1980 to $253 billion in 1989. This raised American defense spending to 7 percent of GDP, dramatically increasing the federal deficit. Yet in its efforts to keep up with the American defense build-up, the Soviet Union was compelled in the first half of the 1980s to raise the share of its defense spending from 22 percent to 27 percent of GDP, while it froze the production of civilian goods at 1980 levels.8

The important point for California was that a sizable share of the increased defense spending stimulated employment gains in the aerospace and related industries of southern California, driving upward the region’s total employment growth.

Every employment boom must end, and the downturn in Los Angeles was more extreme than most. A national recession commenced in July of 1990, with the contraction continuing to March of 1991. In addition, with the beginnings of collapse of the Soviet Union, eventually completed in 1991, defense spending was being scaled back. The combination of general recession and reduced defense spending led to a much deeper and more prolonged recession in California, particularly Los Angeles.

As shown in Exhibit 2,9 Los Angeles county’s employment trend reversed from seven consecutive years of high growth to three years of deep losses in employment. The pivot between 1990 and 1991 was especially sharp, reversing from an 80,000 job gain to losses of more than 150,000 jobs the very next year. Essentially, the bottom fell out of the job market, especially impacting young people without any job seniority. That certainly increased the number of young men “with time on their hands.”

Los Angeles county fared much worse than California as a whole, and far worse than the nation. Unemployment rates in the U.S. and Los Angeles county had been virtually equal in April 1990 at 6 percent, but by 1992 unemployment rose to 10 percent in Los Angeles but only 7.5 percent in the U.S. (Differences by race are discussed later in this section.) This differential drove many young adults out of Los Angeles in search of jobs.
Population growth continued in the 1990s (babies were still being born, after all, about 170 thousand per year) but total growth was half the rate of the previous decade, falling in Los Angeles county from 135 to 67 thousand per year. The city and suburban portions of the county declined by equal proportions (Exhibit 3). The numbers of young adults, ages 20 to 34, actually declined in the 1990s, because of the outmigration of job seekers and also because the smaller Generation X moved into this age range as the baby boomers grew older.
During the boom of the 1980s most of the growth among young adults had occurred among Latino residents, adding 46 thousand per year county-wide, followed by 12 thousand growth in Asian young adults. The number of young adults who were white actually fell by 10 thousand, while African Americans slightly increased (1,500). So much greater was the Latino growth, that whereas in 1980 there were twice as many young Latinos as African Americans, by 1990 that ratio had doubled to four times the number.

Subsequently, in the economic downturn of the 1990s, growth in number of young adults sharply declined. Latino growth fell to less than one-quarter of its previous number, Asians managed to grow by only about 1,000 per year, whites sustained an average loss of 38 thousand per year, and African Americans fell by 7 thousand per year (Exhibit 8). This slowdown (but without the deep losses) has continued into the recent decade, when none of the major race or Latino groups showed appreciable change.

The sharp reversal of fortunes for young adults is reflected in the trend of LA County unemployment rates, which soared sharply upward immediately after 1990 (Exhibit 5). The level of unemployment was already higher in the 1980s for African Americans than other groups, and it was already rising between 1980 and 1990, but immediately after 1990 unemployment spiked to an exceptionally high level in 1992 and 1993.
The exceptionally poor economic prospects for African Americans is reflected in migration data that are addressed more fully in a later section. In 1980, over half of young black adults (55 percent), had been born elsewhere in the U.S. and moved to California. By 1990 that share had fallen to 37 percent, and in 2000 it reached 25 percent. This reflects the falling attractiveness of Los Angeles as a good place for African Americans to live and work in the 1980s and 90s. Other groups in this time period also experienced declines in their shares that had been born out of state but those declines were much smaller. For example, the out-of-state share among young whites fell only one-third as much, from 43 to 33 percent.

In sum, the competitive position of African Americans was becoming much more pressured during the 1980s boom, and when 150,000 jobs were lost between 1990 and 1991 the bottom completely fell out of their job prospects. This rapid reversal of economic fortunes was a whipsaw on the psyches of all residents in the region, including homeowners who saw their house values sharply decline after the previous decade’s optimistic gains. The great majority of every racial or ethnic group saw life in Los Angeles turning for the worse. But it is likely that the downturn for young African Americans left them feeling most despairing and abandoned.
III. INJUSTICES OF 1991 AND 1992

Thus we find that the crucial backdrop to the riots of 1992 was the explosive growth of the 1980s, followed by the crushing reversal that began with the recession in 1990. The African American population was maintaining a fairly constant size but they were facing the mounting pressure of other groups’ growth, principally from Latinos, both in the county-wide labor market and also in their neighborhoods. Unemployment increased for African Americans throughout the 1980s, unlike for most other groups, and the black unemployment rate stood nearly twice as high as that of others. And all this was to describe conditions before the onset of the deep recession. After that point, as job growth turned sharply negative, we estimate the black unemployment rate (men ages 20 o 34) spiked upward to 23 percent, if not higher. Surely this created a sense of economic injustice that formed a crucial backdrop to events of 1992.

Added to economic misfortune of African Americans was an acute perception of oppression by the police and the courts. Complaints about police brutality and lack of protection in the courts were longstanding in the black community. What was different in 1991 were two events captured on videotape that provided graphic evidence. Incidents with 15 year-old school-girl Latasha Harlins and the 29 year-old motorist Rodney King occurred two weeks apart. Their subsequent chronologies of trial and justice were then interlaced over the next 14 months. Emphasized here is the timing of these events, juxtaposed against each other, and in the context of the rapidly deepening recession.

Sequence of Events and Court Proceedings

The bare facts of the sequence of events are the following.

March 3, 1991
Rodney King, an African American motorist driving a Korean-made Hyundai, was arrested for speeding by LAPD. He was shown in a prolonged beating on the ground by a group of police in a videotape by a nearby resident, George Holliday, who grabbed his new videocamera when he was awakened shortly before 1 am. The resulting video was shown on local station KTLA two days later and then nationwide, around the clock, by CNN.

March 16, 1991
Latasha Harlins, a convenience store patron, a 15-year-old African American carrying her school backpack, was shot in the back of the head, after a brief altercation, by Soon Ja Du, a 51-year-old female store owner from South Korea. The owner thought the girl was stealing some orange juice when she put it in her backpack and came toward the counter and doorway beyond.

November 15, 1991
Charges were brought against the store owner and tried in court before the trial of police officers in the Rodney King beating. Store security video showed two dollar bills clutched in Harlins’s hand, after the altercation by the store owner, which was also described by two eye
witnesses. The verdict was manslaughter, but the penalty was 400 hours of community service, a $500 fine, and no jail time.

April 29, 1992
The trial of four LAPD police officers in the Rodney King beating was moved out of LA County to the suburb of Simi Valley, known as a residential retreat popular with police officers. The locally assembled jury, consisting of 10 whites, 1 Latino and 1 Asian, failed to convict on any of the charges, sharply contradicting public opinion formed from the widely aired videotape.

The New Power of Video Evidence

The videotaped police beating of Rodney King foreshadowed by some 20 years the kinds of visual evidence that supported the birth of the Black Lives Matter movement. Today we have a cell phone video recorder in every pocket, but that was not the case in 1991 when police pulled over Rodney King’s car after midnight but within view of an apartment building. George Holliday, owner of a small plumbing business, was a resident with a newly purchased videocamera, a Sony Handycam. When he was awakened by sirens and other commotion, he sought an opportunity to try out the camera in a nighttime recording.

So new was the idea of video evidence that it took two days of inquiries for Holliday to convince a local news station that his camera footage might hold some interest. Once KTLA put this on the air, Holliday says others called seeking their own copies, and when CNN obtained a copy it went national on a round the clock basis.

The broad coverage granted this video evidence, as well as a change in the presiding judge, delayed the trial of four white police officers from the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), and the ensuing verdict of acquittal was met with widespread disbelief. One prime example of this was the reaction by Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley, an African American who had himself served a long career in the LAPD: “The jury’s verdict will not blind us to what we saw on that videotape. The men who beat Rodney King do not deserve to wear the uniform of the LAPD.”

Even President George H. W. Bush weighed in on the matter: “Viewed from outside the trial, it was hard to understand how the verdict could possibly square with the video. Those civil rights leaders with whom I met were stunned. And so was I and so was Barbara and so were my kids.”

In contrast, the store security video in the death of Latasha Harlins was not widely circulated, although a snippet was shown on KTLA and other local stations. The Harlins video simply was very short, unlike the King video that lasted for two minutes and showed a protracted series of blows committed by multiple officers. Accordingly, the Harlins video could not command the same popular attention, although the security video served its purpose of documenting the crime.
Los Angeles Public Opinion on Criminal Justice in 1992

The Los Angeles County Social Survey of public opinion conducted by UCLA yielded important evidence on how exposure to the George Holliday videotape may have affected Los Angeles residents of different races. One question asked in general whether blacks usually get fair treatment in the courts and criminal justice system, while another question asked whether subjects agreed with the verdict acquitting the four police officers accused of beating Rodney King? The answers to these questions are juxtaposed in two adjoining graphs (Exhibit 6).

Exhibit 6 Slide 15

As might be expected, African Americans were more negative about treatment of their own group than were non-blacks. Nonetheless, nearly one-third (30 percent) of whites disagreed that blacks were treated fairly in the courts and criminal justice system. However, when asked about agreement with the verdict in the King beating, two-thirds of whites (65 percent) disagreed with the verdict. Surely this reflects the impact of viewing the video evidence, as expressed above by Mayor Bradley and President Bush.

For African Americans, the impact of the verdict was extremely jarring. Fully 96 percent of African Americans disagreed with the verdict, and 76 percent strongly disagreed. Only 33 percent of Latinos or whites (39 percent of Asians) disagreed strongly.
Aftermath

Announcement of the jury verdict exonerating the 4 police officers, shortly after 3 pm on April 29, triggered a release of outrage that snowballed into 6 days of rioting that swept in many more participants than African Americans. Yet the immediate court decision commenced a rebellion of African Americans against pent-up frustrations of injustice on top of injustice. Damage estimates approached $1 billion, with 51 deaths, as rioting spread northward from South LA into Koreatown and other locales. Reflecting the outrage over the Latasha Harlins case and proximity of Korean commercial establishments, Korean store owners were the victims of 46 percent of all business losses where there was a 100 percent loss (187 out of 403), the largest categories of which were small grocery markets, apparel stores, and liquor stores. In the Korean community the days of devastation became known as Sa-I-Gu, signifying the numeric date 4-2-9 when the rioting commenced and disaster began to fall upon them.

IV. NEW MATURITY OF DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE AFTER 2000

Dramatic demographic and economic changes of the late 1980s and early 1990s may have created a tense backdrop to 1992, but that pace of change has greatly moderated in recent years, the Great Recession notwithstanding. By 2015, unemployment rates had returned to their level of 1990, or of 2000 and 2006, but these were still much too high for African Americans. The greatest changes are found with regard to demographics in Los Angeles city and county. Population growth has slowed to a remarkably low level, resembling the quiet 1970s that preceded the explosive boom of the 1980s, and this reduces the population pressure on established communities. As part of that, immigration has subsided to a surprising degree, and the pace of racial change has also slowed to a more moderate pace.

We describe these recent changes in the present section, and following that we will turn to the question of what are the implications for the future that features aging baby boomers and a new homegrown majority of native Californians in the population.

The Population Slowdown

Previous exhibits have already highlighted the extreme contrast between population growth of 140,000 per year in the 1980s, falling to 67,000 in the 1990s and 43,000 per year since 2000. Growth among young adults has slowed even more precipitously (Exhibit 3 above), particularly among the segment that is Latino (Exhibit 4 above). African American population growth has been very slow throughout the decades since 1980.

Immigration Slowdown and Settlement

The diminishment of the flow of new immigrants is most surprising, but that decline is tied to the sharply lower (even negative) employment growth after 1990 which weakened the
attraction of immigrants. As shown in Exhibit 7, the inflow reached its fastest pace in California and Los Angeles in the years preceding the 1990 census. Meanwhile, the inflow to the nation as a whole continued to accelerate up to about 2000. Los Angeles has experienced an especially sharp slowdown in the influx of immigrants, beginning with the deep recession of the early 1990s, and continuing to slow during both the bubble of the early 2000s and the high unemployment of the Great Recession.

Exhibit 7 Slide 17

![Annual Immigrant Arrivals](image)

The total number of immigrants hasn’t declined, just the inflow of new immigrants. As seen in Exhibit 8, the share of the total population in Los Angeles county that is foreign born has leveled off at about 36 percent. What is changed beneath the surface of the stable foreign-born share is that immigrants are much longer settled than before. Back in 1990, half of all immigrants had arrived in just the last 10 years, whereas by 2010 the new arrivals were dwarfed by the much longer settled share of the population (Exhibit 9). These long settled immigrants are both older and much more deeply rooted than when the same individuals were newcomers. They are more proficient in speaking English, more likely to be voters, and much more likely to be homeowners. This is all part of the “new maturity” of population settlement growing in Los Angeles after 2010.17
Racial Change Slower than Expected

A less widely discussed change in Los Angeles that accompanied the slower population growth is the slower pace of racial change. The sharp trends of earlier decades led to extrapolations of continued change that escalated in wildly different ways. But population shares are always
bounded by a floor of 0 and a ceiling of 100 percent, so that trends will tend to level off the further they progress. This transition is illustrated with a combination of census data and projections produced in the Pitkin-Myers Generational Future for Los Angeles.18

The steep decline in the white share of the population might have been imagined in a straight-line plunge, but it had begun to level off by 2010 and is expected to slow more in the future. Conversely the steep rise in the Latino share of the population might have been imagined to continue ever upward, but that also was more moderated by 2010 and likely for the future (Exhibit 10). Meanwhile the black share of the population slowly declines across decades while that of Asians is growing.

Several positive implications follow from a slower pace of change in racial makeup. One is that this could lessen old fears of racial replacement. It also implies a longer period ahead in the 21st century of relative racial balance. There is no one group that dominates, and multiethnic coalition politics that emerged long ago in Los Angeles will be sustained for the future.19

This trend also holds implications for the sustained diversity in local communities. Los Angeles county is home to a large number of diverse communities among its 88 municipalities, with a wide array of different ethnic mixes, most of which have large representation from both of the two largest ethnic groups (white and Latino) as well as from at least one more of the two smaller groups (Asian and black).20 It bears mentioning that the pace of change in smaller cities or neighborhoods is always more volatile than in larger areas where the peculiarities of changes in subareas average out. Nonetheless, because local racial change feeds off the growth available in the region as a whole, racial change in smaller cities or neighborhoods is likely to
also be slowing, preserving existing diverse mixes into the future. Accordingly, we can expect to maintain more racially balanced cities for the future.

**Police Reform**

At the heart of the 1992 civil unrest was police abuse. Others can address the degree of improvement in building a more community-based culture in the Los Angeles Police Department. A recent, striking sign of progress was the 2014 endorsement of Charlie Beck for reappointment as police chief by longtime police-reform activist, attorney Connie Rice.\(^\text{21}\) Ms. Rice detailed her 12 years of partnering with Beck in police reform, where she witnessed his progress in advancing “public trust” and “relationship-based policing.” We might add that police accountability has been tremendously aided by the installation of cameras mounted on cruiser dashboards and body worn cameras, as well as the proliferation of cell-phone video and social media access in the pocket of so many citizens. The video power of George Holliday is now omnipresent.

**The New Crisis of Housing Shortage**

It would be remiss to end discussion of the current period without acknowledging the severe effects of housing shortages for spurring competition over this essential resource that is so scarce, resulting in gentrification and other ill effects now creating tensions in neighborhoods. Despite the very slow rate of population growth, housing construction has been even slower. This problem is now being recognized at all levels of government and deserves concerted efforts at resolution.

**V. THE OUTLOOK TO 2030: AGING BABY BOOMERS AND HOMEGROWN CALIFORNIANS**

Looking into the future, one thing is certain—aging. Our existing residents are aging in place, which creates new opportunities as well as challenges. The slower pace of growth and reduced influx of immigrants will put even more emphasis on our existing residents.

**The Aging Population**

So often we look at changes in the last 10 or 20 years as a template for imagining the period to come. With regard to aging we have a fairly reliable method for checking those assumptions. In general people will grow a decade or two older, but we must adjust also for the migration in and out of people in similar numbers as in the past, while also accounting for the likely number of births and deaths. In fact, by these projections, the growth we saw in the last 20 years has little resemblance to what is expected in the next 20 years (Exhibit 11).
Between 1990 and 2010, LA county experienced massive growth in the late middle age range because the large baby boom cohorts (born 1946 to 1964) moved up from younger age slots. Above age 65 very little growth was observed. Meanwhile in young adult ages large losses were recorded, both because the large baby boom cohorts had advanced to older ages, and also because the Generation X who replaced them was undersized because of their birth in years with very low birth rates (born 1965 to 1979). Among teenagers we see a little upward bump from the young Millennial generation (born 1980 to 2000, roughly). We also see net losses of children occurred.

In contrast, in the next 20 years, measured between 2010 and 2030, the changes to be expected are virtually the opposite of before (Exhibit 11, bottom half). What is to come is explosive growth in elderly years because all of the baby boomers will have aged past 65 by 2030. And in the late middle age years, where once there had been strong growth, now we see relatively little growth. Even in young adult ages there is only weak expected growth, and from ages 15 to 29 there is actually substantial losses. In short, there really isn’t much growth anywhere to offset that among the elderly.

A simple measure for showing this growing age imbalance between older and younger populations is the “senior ratio.” This is the ratio of population ages 65 and over per 100 working age (defined as ages 25 to 64). California has had a senior ratio that was virtually constant for three or more decades, but between 2010 and 2030 the senior ratio is expected to rise from 24 seniors per 100 working age to 38 (Exhibit 12). Los Angeles county begins with a slightly younger population, but it will experience a proportional change similar to the state as a
whole, with its senior ratio rising from 20 in 2010 to 36 in 2030, an 80 percent increase. Orange county is more extreme, rising from 17 in 1990 to 22 in 2010, and then to 41 in 2030. Essentially, Orange county is transitioning from a group of suburban communities with many children and few elderly to a group that has many elderly and few children.

Aging is found everywhere in the United States, and LA county is no exception, but the impacts on this county could be extreme. The expected changes will place 80 percent greater weight on today’s children when they become young adults. Older residents are counting on this, even if they do not acknowledge it.

Exhibit 12 Slide 25

**Senior Ratio Soars**

Seniors (65+) per 100 Working Age (25-64)

- California
- Los Angeles
- Orange

Source: Dowell Myers, Census Bureau decennial census of 1990 and 2010, and CA DOF vintage projections

*Dowell Myers, USC Price*

**Rise of the Homegrown Revolution**

One of the most striking changes underway is the transition in Los Angeles from a destination for migrants, either from other states or other countries, to a place where people live their entire lives. The best measure of this comes from the place of birth data collected by the Census Bureau. (This is limited to broad jurisdictions of states and countries, not individual cities.) The changes have been extraordinary for Los Angeles residents, and the trends are different for each of the four major race or Latino groups.

For our purposes, we wish to focus on young adults, ages 20 to 34, the principle ages for migration and also the key group that has been the focus of analysis in this study. In general, older residents reflect trends of the past, because migration is most common among young adults who then live the rest of their lives in their new destination. In this perspective, the trends for young adults provide the best guide to the future. Outlooks are extended to 2030 by use of the Pitkin-Myers projections on the generational future of Los Angeles.
Immigration contributed an extraordinarily high share of young adults in earlier decades in Los Angeles, from 1980 to 2000, but that was concentrated among Asians and Latinos (Exhibit 13). By 2015, the latest year with full data available, the Census Bureau reported roughly half the proportion foreign born in these two groups as before. Meanwhile there has been a slow rise in foreign born among non-Hispanic whites, a broad group the Census Bureau defines to include not only people of European origin (or from Canada and Australia) but also the Middle East and north Africa. Meanwhile, the black population has remained with a very low percentage foreign-born, although that could increase slightly in the future.

Exhibit 13 Slide 27

**Place of Birth Trends, Ages 20 to 34**

In Los Angeles County, by Race or Latino, 1980 to 2030

The percentage of young Angelenos who were born in another state was always higher for whites and blacks than for Asians and Latinos (Exhibit 13). The downward trend for blacks is most striking. Whereas in 1980 over half of young blacks were born outside California, that has plunged to 18 percent by 2015. Given that the African American population has not been growing over this time period, the declining share born out of state reflects a plunging attraction of new black residents. As mentioned in a previous section, we should view this declining attraction relative to the more modest decline among whites. This is an indication of how less favorably the opportunities for African Americans in Los Angeles compare to those elsewhere in the U.S.
The most significant portion of the place-of-birth trends pertains to the native Californians, the homegrown. Their share among whites has been holding constant at about 50 percent, but among African Americans this homegrown share has climbed steadily and in 2015 rose above 75 percent. The trend among young Latinos has exhibited the most extraordinary increase, reaching 65 percent homegrown in 2015 and rising to match African Americans by 2030. Asians also have seen an upward leap in their share of native Californians, more than doubling from 16 to 38 percent between 2000 and 2015. In total for young adults, summed across all races in Los Angeles county, 59 percent in 2015 were native Californian and this is destined to rise higher.

What does it mean to have so many young adults who are native Californian and how does that change the responsibilities of our public officials, elected leaders, and the voters themselves? In the past the majority of Los Angeles residents had been drawn from other states and countries. Not until 2014 did the majority, including all ages, arrive at the status of native Californians. We were accustomed to import our workers from other places, from Texas, New York, and Iowa, or from Mexico, the Philippines, and China.

Now and for the future, with a solid majority of young adults with birthplace in California, their educations from birth have been carried out in California schools, on California playgrounds, in California neighborhoods, and under the care of parents working at California jobs. For current residents of Los Angeles, this is even more localized to our region. The homegrown generation is entirely a product of us, and, with the rising senior ratio, we are entirely dependent on our own investments to strengthen the younger generation.

VI. CONCLUSION

Looking back 25 years we can see better where Los Angeles has been and where it is headed. The events of 1992 were rooted in the explosive growth of the 1980s, an aberration among decades of otherwise slow and steady growth. At the time many residents may have assumed this was the new normal, and understandably there was a lot of reaction against that. In hindsight we better grasp the extremity of the boom conditions that led to the extremities of despair during the crash of the early 1990s.

The Los Angeles riots of 1992 began as a rebellion by African American young adults against accumulated injustice, built from pressures of the underlying economic and demographic trends, and focused by the failure of the courts to provide commensurate relief following the videotaped attacks on Latasha Harlins and Rodney King. The civil unrest unleashed after the verdicts on the Rodney King beating swept all Angelenos into its vortex.

Today we benefit from a more tranquil pace of change. But the slower pace of growth and reduced inflow of immigrants will put even more emphasis on our existing residents. We now realize we depend on our homegrown. The majority of all our young people are California born, and Los Angeles has settled into a ready accommodation of diversity. Indeed, our diversity is
worn with pride and sophistication as cultures rub off on one another. This is a large part of what makes this city great.

In the new maturity of Los Angeles, the one area for improvement is a greater responsibility taken by the older generation in fostering the most excellent development of the younger generation on whom we will depend. In this city of creative arts, matched only by New York, very few of our young people receive as much basic exposure and training in creative skills as once was the practice. How great could this city really become? How many other ways are there where we offer our youth less than before? Given the rising senior ratio there is a newfound importance of the homegrown young for the future of Los Angeles. We must all redouble our efforts to cultivate the young and allow them to reach their greatest potential.

The primary question for the future is how well our older residents can assist the flourishing of Los Angeles in a new golden age. That is the potential within grasp, but it starts with the middle aged and older citizens helping the young. The homegrown revolution means we really are all in it together. The future is something we make, not simply allow to happen to us. Los Angeles presents us at this moment with a tremendous opportunity.
End Notes

2 This period of history was so dispiriting for all residents—from the heights of the 1980s boom to the depths of the 1990s virtual depression—and including a crime wave that peaked in 1991, the Northridge earthquake, and other calamities of the early 1990s, that it led to a widespread gloomy and despondent outlook. See “A Dismal Future?” chapter 4 in Dowell Myers, Immigrants and Boomers (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2008).
6 Among the scholars who are African-American and who have used the “rebellion” description of 1992 events are senior figures such as Lawrence Bobo, Darnell Hunt, James H. Johnson Jr., Melvin Oliver, and others.
10 As referenced above in survey data, FN 1.
15 As noted previously, African Americans accounted for only 36 percent of those arrested.


This is a variant of demographers’ traditional old-age dependency ratio. Classically that defines working age as beginning at 15 or 18, based on assumptions of able-bodied labor in farm work or other manual occupations. In contemporary, post-industrial or information-based economies young people have more extended training ages. In any event, in the U.S. in recent decades young people do not begin to contribute more in taxes than they receive in public services, on average, until age 25. At older ages, people increasingly have delayed retirement, but 65 remains the commonly used boundary beyond which less than one-third delay.

The fact that California’s residents had become majority California-born was unheralded after the 2000 census until its discovery and political significance were reported for the first time on April 21, 2009 in Tyche Hendricks, “California shows increase in native population,” San Francisco Chronicle, and in Rich Connell, “More California natives are staying put,” Los Angeles Times. Los Angeles county was among the last county in the state to reach this threshold, as recorded in the 2014 American Community Survey.

See note 16.