

Popular Culture  
in the Age of White Flight

*Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles*

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## 2 The Nation's "White Spot"

### *Racializing Postwar Los Angeles*

Los Angeles is not what it was supposed to be. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, Los Angeles ranks among the largest and most polyglot concentrations of humankind anywhere in the world. Sheltering the nation's largest population of Mexicans, Koreans, Vietnamese, Salvadorans, and Thais, Los Angeles has become a cultural kaleidoscope of global proportions. Its Little Saigon, Little Tokyo, Little India, Little Armenia, Koreatown, and Thai Town, as well as its urban and suburban Chinatowns, anchor immigrant newcomers to the region and bring the cosmopolitan flavor of London, New York, Tokyo, and Hong Kong to Southern California. Any lingering complaints about Los Angeles' reputation for shallow suburban conformity are muted by the cacophony of some 150 languages. In our age of alleged multiculturalism, Southern Californians can finally bask in the self-congratulatory paeans to their city as the world's premier global city.

This was not, however, the case a century ago. At the outset of the twentieth century, Los Angeles entertained a set of racialized fantasies that depicted the region as a southwestern outpost of white supremacy. Local boosters ensured that their version of the city myth appealed to whites only and acknowledged the presence of nonwhite peoples only to the extent of their capacity to provide cheap but invisible labor. Such efforts operated alongside promotions of Southern California as a refuge from the "immigrant problem" that plagued other cities, and the earliest patterns of decentralized urbanization signaled the opportunity to create lily-white neighborhoods through racially exclusive practices such as deed restrictions and zoning policies. Los Angeles indeed had its immigrant populations, but city and state officials concocted elaborate but ultimately ineffective "Americanization programs" to minimize the region's social and cultural diversity. Through the combined efforts of housing developers, Progressive reformers,

and local boosters, Southern California sustained the development of a white city well into the first three decades of the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup>

World War II, however, unsettled any regional aspirations to white supremacy. The presence of a vital Japanese community threatened a regional sense of wartime security, while a disaffected yet more assertive generation of Chicano youths paraded their distinctive cultural styles before the urban public. More significant, and more challenging to the regional insistence on white supremacy, however, the war initiated the dramatic expansion of Southern California's black community. Blacks were by no means absent from Los Angeles prior to 1940, but the conspicuous presence of a growing black population during the war years and its rapid growth after the war significantly enhanced the region's racial diversity. The early 1940s unleashed what Carey McWilliams identified as a "racial revolution" upon Southern California, dashing once and for all any hope for the realization of a white city in the region.<sup>2</sup>

Or did it? This chapter surveys the social, political, and economic frameworks that structured the formation of a new "new mass culture," one that offered a whitened alternative to the blackened spaces of industrial urbanism. Southern California's new spatial culture took shape under the aegis of accelerated suburbanization and invasive urban renewal programs and effected a virtual "sorting out" of the regional population by race. While such developments wielded a strange new urban configuration that initially baffled planners and the public alike, suburbanization and urban renewal ultimately sanctioned the formation of a sociospatial order that reified the contrast between chocolate cities and vanilla suburbs in Southern California and heightened the salience of race in the regional culture. Against this backdrop, a suburban popular culture materialized, positing a racialized vision of the city as "the nation's white spot" and as the very image of "whiteness, flatness, and spread."<sup>3</sup> Ultimately, we shall discover, this vision flickered momentarily during the post-World War II period, yet lasted long enough to incite a profound shift in the course of American politics and culture.

#### THE BETTER CITY: A BLUEPRINT FOR RACE AND SPACE IN PROGRESSIVE LOS ANGELES

Key to understanding the cultural formation of a white city in postwar Los Angeles is Southern California's particular legacy of race relations. Since the U.S. conquest of California in 1848, civic boosters and public officials have struggled to overcome their self-consciousness about Los Angeles' Mexican

heritage by emphasizing a regional tradition of white supremacy. Joseph Widney, an early president of the University of Southern California, argued in *Race Life of the Aryan Peoples* (1907) that Los Angeles was destined to become the world capital of Aryan supremacy, and Abbot Kinney, a speculator and developer who established the region's first theme park at Venice Beach, crusaded for Anglo-Saxon racial purity through eugenics. The most compelling image of whiteness in Southern California, however, was what Carey McWilliams first identified as the "Spanish Fantasy Heritage," a romanticized vision of the city's Hispano past that masked the brutalities of a racialized conquest. For a brief moment at the turn of the twentieth century, such cultural endeavors suited a city with a rapidly expanding Anglo population and helped to distinguish Los Angeles from older polyglot cities that teemed with "un-American" immigrants.<sup>4</sup>

Southern California's myth of a white city had its variations. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, the migrants who populated American Los Angeles were not Europeans, but white midwesterners removed from their European roots who sought refuge from the drudgery of rural life. Between 1910 and 1930, Americans born outside California contributed three-quarters of the region's demographic growth. The midwestern flavor of the regional culture drew on the influx of Americans from Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, Indiana, Illinois, and Missouri, who established state societies that offered cultural life preservers for thousands of uprooted midwesterners. Of course, the "midwestern myth" of Los Angeles in the early decades of the twentieth century obscured the region's social diversity, but it did so by promoting an image of the city as the bastion of middlebrow, middle-class, midwestern whiteness.<sup>5</sup>

The Progressive era reinforced the "whitening" of the regional culture and society. Unlike urban reformers in other cities who struggled against both immigrant labor groups and powerful corporate interests to implement social and political reform, the Los Angeles Progressives readily assumed power in an open-shop city that did not teem with immigrant populations and agitated workers. Nonetheless, Southern California at the turn of the twentieth century harbored the growth of racial and ethnic communities that challenged the Progressives' melting-pot vision of an Anglo American civic culture. Against the city's growing Japanese, Mexican, and African American communities, Los Angeles Progressives supported an array of measures designed to ensure racial and ethnic homogeneity. Sharing a prevalent antipathy to Asians in turn-of-the-century California, Progressive reformers in Los Angeles generally favored restrictions on

immigration, including the Alien Land Act of 1913 and the Immigration Act of 1924. African Americans were generally excluded from the Progressive agenda, as exemplified by the exclusion of black women from the Los Angeles Women's Suffrage League, while the city's burgeoning Mexican population incited the creation of a set of Americanization programs by which foreigners were expected to shed their cultural differences and assimilate into the mainstream of social and cultural life.<sup>6</sup>

The Los Angeles Progressives situated their ambition for racial and ethnic homogeneity within a spatial vision that would distinguish their city from its older urban counterparts. While the conspicuous presence of immigrant and racialized groups in New York, Chicago, and San Francisco reinforced a growing perception of cities as bastions of cultural diversity and social mixing, Los Angeles Progressives recognized the region's capacity for suburban development as a "whiter" alternative to the polyglot congestion of the modern city. No better exposition of the Progressives' racialized suburban vision of Los Angeles emerged at the outset of the twentieth century than Dana Bartlett's *The Better City*. Bartlett, who came to Los Angeles in 1908 as a social-gospel minister/reformer, wrote *The Better City* to assert his vision of Los Angeles as a suburban retreat from the "noise and rush of modern commercialism," designed for "a people within whose veins run the red blood of the hardy Northmen." Praising the region's hospitable climate, Bartlett recognized a "tendency [toward] open and not to[o] crowded quarters," where the "laying out of new subdivisions far out beyond the city limits makes cheap and desirable home sites obtainable for a multitude of working men."<sup>7</sup>

Closely linked to the Progressives' vision of suburban homogeneity was an emphasis on family and domestic life. In cities throughout the nation, Progressive reform coalitions identified the family and home as bulwarks against the corrupting forces of urban modernity, and in Southern California, local Progressive reformers sought to implement a more "perfect family life" through suburban decentralization. Bartlett's vision of Los Angeles as a "city of homes" and a "city without slums" would provide a suitable environment for "only healthy, happy families." The California bungalow came to symbolize Progressive aspirations to white suburban domesticity. To reinforce their efforts to create a family-friendly environment, Los Angeles Progressives also passed a series of antivice measures between 1909 and 1915, which targeted the degrading influences of alcohol, gambling, and prostitution on Southern California's burgeoning civic culture. With some mockery, Willard Huntington Wright associated these

efforts with a small-town earnestness that defined the ethos of Progressive Los Angeles. In Wright's view, Los Angeles was created by the

rural pietist obsessed with the spirit of village fellowship, of suburban respectability. . . . The inhabitants of Los Angeles are culled mainly from the smaller cities of the Middle West—"leading citizens" from Wichita; honorary pall bearers from Emmetsburg; Good Templars from Sedalia; honest Spinsters from Grundy Center. . . . These good folks brought with them a complete stock of rural beliefs, pieties, superstitions, and habits. . . . Everyone is interested in everyone else. Snooping is the popular pastime, gossiping the popular practice.<sup>8</sup>

With its emphasis on domesticity, class harmony, and racial and ethnic homogeneity, the brand of "suburban respectability" that dominated the Progressives' vision of Los Angeles also included an ambition to achieve material progress. Despite their adherence to some aspects of an older Victorian social code, Progressives did not want to turn back the clock. Rather, they maintained aspirations to civic development that reflected a most material conception of progress. Bartlett lauded the industrious spirit in Los Angeles that produced streets, railroads, harbors, and other amenities of modern civilization. Like his Progressive counterparts in Los Angeles, Bartlett equated growth with progress but kept faith that progress could ensue without the moral corruption that seemed endemic to city life. "It is well to remember that the desire for mere wealth and outward greatness has proved the ruin of many a city," Bartlett cautioned, but his exhortation of civic development in turn-of-the-century Los Angeles conveyed his belief that material progress and moral uplift were compatible and that the fusion of these ideals was the key to creating a "better Los Angeles."<sup>9</sup>

Because of Southern California's distance from European points of entry into the United States and because of its conspicuous and enduring Hispano legacy, the promotion of Los Angeles during the Progressive era reflected a racial project that rendered the city's Spanish and Mexican past as a touristic fantasy packaged for mass consumption and targeted the city's racial and ethnic groups as candidates for either total assimilation or outright exclusion. This racial vision of Los Angeles encompassed both a moral repudiation of the sensual pleasures of urban life and civic commitment to infrastructural growth and material progress. Such ideals suited the decentralized patterns of growth beginning to take shape in the region, and, with limited but substantial success, Los Angeles Progressives pursued a racialized vision of suburban modernity that defined popular notions of Los Angeles well into the 1920s. The following decades, however, profoundly challenged that vision and threatened the prospects for making Los Angeles a white city.

THE SOUTHLAND SWINGS: INDUSTRIAL URBANISM  
DURING THE DEPRESSION AND BEYOND

By the 1930s, the notion of Los Angeles as the "seaport of Iowa" clashed with the increasingly multicultural reality of the city. Racial segregation was present throughout every stage of Southern California's development, but by drawing racially and ethnically diverse peoples to the region, the industrialization of the regional economy during the second quarter of the twentieth century reinforced the heterosociality of public life and undermined the Progressives' effort to create a racially and ethnically homogeneous society. Throughout the 1930s and into the 1940s, Southern California sustained the development of a New Deal political culture, which coalesced in public spaces such as factories, street fronts, streetcars, nightclubs, amusement parks, ethnic neighborhoods, community centers, and parks. Ironically, however, while the region's New Deal moment cultivated the sort of heterosocial public life that defied the Progressives' insistence on suburban homogeneity, federal officials in the Roosevelt administration created a blueprint for the spatial and racial polarization of the postwar urban region.

The Depression, of course, curtailed regional development, but contrary to the experience of its urban counterparts elsewhere, Los Angeles exhibited patterns of demographic and economic growth throughout the 1930s. In that decade, Los Angeles' population increased by six hundred thousand inhabitants, with more than 87 percent of that increase due to net migration. Also in contrast to the national pattern, industrial employment in Los Angeles rose sharply, particularly during the second half of the 1930s, when the city added an embryonic aircraft industry to its expanding manufacturing economy. By 1939, Los Angeles County ranked first nationally in agricultural income, as well as in the production of airplanes and motion pictures, second in auto assembling and retail trade, fourth in women's apparel, and fifth in the overall value of industrial production.<sup>10</sup> The region's industrial maturation during the 1920s and '30s was concentrated in distinct communities of the regional landscape, where a semblance of the heterosocial world of the modern city took shape.

Boyle Heights, for example, bustled in those decades, as its proximity to industrial activity along the southeastern periphery of downtown Los Angeles sustained the formation of a commercially vibrant, heterogeneous community. Initially, the neighborhood took shape in the 1880s as an enclave of white-collar workers, but during the early decades of the twentieth century, it became an initial point of settlement for Eastern European



Jews, who numbered more than thirty-five thousand by the mid-1930s. Jews settled alongside other social groups, including Mexican Americans, who began to concentrate in Boyle Heights during the 1930s. Jews and Mexicans shared Boyle Heights with African and Japanese Americans, whose collective presence conferred on the neighborhood the distinction of being a “U.N. in Microcosm.”<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, Watts before World War II witnessed a diverse concentration of native Angelenos and newcomers to the region. As of 1920, most Watts settlers were of European descent—Germans, Scots, Greeks, Italians, and Jews—but the town also included several hundred blacks and Japanese. Mexican workers employed by the Pacific Electric Railway established a *colonia*, a settlement for laborers and their families, in Watts, known as “Spanish camp” among the non-Spanish-speaking inhabitants of the area. Although Watts was seven miles south of downtown Los Angeles, the inter-urban lines of the Pacific Electric ensured easy access to centers of employment and entertainment. The Watts Junction, where the Long Beach–Santa Ana line connected with the San Pedro–Redondo line, anchored a heterogeneous working-class population who depended on the rail lines for travel throughout Southern California.<sup>12</sup> In his youth, the tenor saxophonist William “Brother” Woodman Jr. moved with his family from Mississippi to Watts, where he recalled finding a congenial social environment. “We all got along very well. There were whites, Mexicans, Orientals, Jewish people. That’s why, at that time, I didn’t really understand about prejudice.”<sup>13</sup>

Watts and Boyle Heights nurtured political alliances among their working-class inhabitants. The 1930s strengthened a regional tradition of interethnic cooperation among workers that dated back to the establishment of alliances such as the Japanese Mexican Labor Association in 1903 in rural El Monte. During the Depression years and well into the following decade, Mexican American men and women struggled alongside blacks, Jews, and whites to improve the workplace conditions for longshoremen and cannery and defense workers, and to elect public officials who defended the interests of the city’s working class. The 1933 Dressmakers’ Strike, for example, involved the cooperative efforts of Mexican American, African American, and Russian Molokan women, who organized under the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) and successfully struck for higher wages and improved working conditions. Other strikes among longshoremen, cannery workers, and aircraft employees reflected the collective efforts of employees who set aside racial and ethnic differences to advocate their mutual class interests.<sup>14</sup>

Such interactions, however, did not preclude vicious episodes of racial

hostility during the Depression. The repatriation and deportation campaigns of the early 1930s signaled renewed hostility to the growing presence of Mexicans and Mexican Americans in Southern California, particularly among poorer whites whose sense of entitlement to jobs and government assistance rested upon an ingrained sense of white supremacy. The spectacle of Mexican Americans applying for state and federal assistance irked those who supported the city's effort to deport foreigners, even if those "foreigners" happened to be American citizens. Between those who voluntarily repatriated to Mexico, discouraged by the entrenchment of racial discrimination in Southern California, and those forced onto trains and shipped across the Mexican border, Los Angeles lost approximately one-third of its Mexican population in the first half of the 1930s.<sup>15</sup> Thus even at the height of its multicultural moment, Los Angeles witnessed some particularly intense episodes of racial hostility and demonstrated a growing level of discomfort with the city's racial and ethnic diversity.

Still, blacks, Mexicans, whites, and other ethnic groups mingled in Los Angeles' nighttime venues, even as Mexicans were rounded up and deported to Mexico during the day. During the 1930s and 1940s, the reigning Swing Era sheltered a scattered array of racially integrated music venues. Along the coast, the Venice Pier and the Santa Monica Ballroom attracted working-class youths who sought a moment's release from the demands of work. In Long Beach, the Nu Pike Amusement Park drew crowds from all parts of the city. Downtown, Duke Ellington performed "Jump for Joy," an all-black musical revue, before integrated audiences at the Mayan Theater, and at Shep's Playhouse in Little Tokyo, Gerald Wilson, Coleman Hawkins, and other jazz greats performed before audiences of black and white war workers. In Hollywood, moreover, the Canteen on Sunset Boulevard sanctioned racially mixed dancing throughout the 1940s, and the Palladium on Sunset Boulevard also offered a racially mixed venue. These institutions highlighted the cultural landscape of industrial Los Angeles and reproduced a semblance of the "diverse and pluralistic street culture" that defined public life in older industrial cities such as New York and Chicago.<sup>16</sup>

Such interactions took shape in a political culture dominated by New Deal reforms, ushered in with the 1938 election of Fletcher Bowron as mayor of Los Angeles. Bowron's political posture reflected both the interests of labor and minority groups and the reformist stance of Los Angeles Progressives, as he won City Hall on a campaign to clean up the corruption of the previous mayoral administration. His abolition of the notorious Red Squad, the intelligence bureau of the Los Angeles Police Department that monitored the activities of labor organizations, signaled the end of the open

shop in Los Angeles. Bowron carried the support of political agencies in Los Angeles that reflected the city's myriad social interests—the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), the League of Women Voters, El Congreso de Personas que Hablan Español, the Los Angeles chapters of the Urban League, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the Community Service Organization. These organizations comprised the New Deal coalition that reigned in the city's political climate during the 1930s and early 1940s.<sup>17</sup>

Another local figure who assumed political prominence in this period was Edward Roybal, Los Angeles' first Chicano city councilman since 1881. Roybal symbolized a new generation of Chicano political leadership that ascended during the labor struggles of the 1930s and affiliated itself with the New Deal reforms of the Democratic Party. In 1949, with the assistance of the Community Service Organization, a Mexican American civic unity organization inspired by the work of the Chicago community activist Saul Alinski, Roybal captured the council seat representing the city's Ninth District. His candidacy won the support of labor groups such as the CIO Political Action Committee, the ILGWU, and several American Federation of Labor (AF of L) locals, as well as the various racial and ethnic constituencies of neighborhoods such as Bunker Hill and Boyle Heights. Beatrice Griffith, for example, noted the historical significance of Roybal's election: "For the first time in Los Angeles history, various nationality groups combined their forces to work unanimously for a councilmanic election. . . . Persons of Negro, Jewish, as well as Japanese, Chinese, Italian, Filipino, and Russian ancestry went into their own neighborhoods and plugged Roybal. Their various language newspapers often gave free space to the campaign."<sup>18</sup> Despite the racial and ethnic diversity of Roybal's supporters during the 1940s, however, Roybal increasingly personified the political engagement of East Los Angeles' expanding Chicano community. His outspoken stance against freeway construction, police brutality, and urban renewal programs illuminated Chicano opposition to the political culture that dominated Southern California in the age of white flight.<sup>19</sup>

Roybal and Bowron converged on a set of issues that constituted Southern California's period of New Deal reform. One issue in particular was that of public housing. During the 1930s, the constituent groups who rallied behind Southern California's New Deal coalition expressed their support for public housing. Women's groups, inheriting the legacy of the settlement house movement of the late nineteenth century, endorsed public housing, as did minority groups such as the NAACP, which, as a key element of the New Deal alliance, demanded access to improved housing con-

ditions for African Americans. Additionally, labor unions, most notably the AF of L and the CIO, also advocated public housing as a means of reviving a depressed construction industry and an opportunity to improve housing conditions for struggling families. Allied within the New Deal "hegemonic bloc" that governed American society during the 1930s and well into the following decade, these groups shared a commitment to public housing in a city historically dominated by the private housing market.<sup>20</sup>

Public housing and other New Deal issues, however, were suddenly shelved with the U.S. entry into World War II. Often regarded as a watershed in Los Angeles history, the war inaugurated the region's most explosive period of economic and demographic growth. While the war effort rescued the nation from economic misery, it sparked a "second gold rush" in California as the massive influx of federal dollars into regional defense production created a wealth of new jobs. Southern California garnered a disproportionate share of federal defense contracts, as its location on the Pacific coast and its preexisting industrial infrastructure proved ideal for the strategic armament of the West Coast. Between 1941 and 1945, the infusion of seventy billion federal dollars into the regional economy initiated the development of what eventually became the nation's largest military-industrial complex.<sup>21</sup> In 1943, the region's peak year of production, a quarter-million workers found employment in aircraft production, shipbuilding, oil refining, tank assembly, and aluminum, synthetic rubber, and machine tool production.

Federal investment in the regional economy triggered a dramatic population increase that endured well beyond the early 1940s. The city's population jumped from 1.5 million to approximately 1.8 million between 1940 and 1946, reaching just under two million by 1950. The war years provided a foundation for continued demographic growth throughout the postwar period. Los Angeles' population reached 2.5 million in 1960, climbing to 2.8 million in 1970. County growth was even more dramatic. In 1940, the population of Los Angeles County was 2.79 million; it nearly doubled to 4.2 million a decade later, and grew to six million by 1960 and seven million by 1970. This surge in population, coupled with the parallel growth of the surrounding four counties, transformed Los Angeles into a "regional metropolis" fueled by "mass suburbanization on a scale never before encountered."<sup>22</sup>

World War II sparked this growth, forcing Southern Californians to confront the radical diversification of their social environment. The demand for labor in the early 1940s compelled an unprecedented integration of workers in war-related industries. Whereas aircraft production and shipbuilding companies had employed few African Americans and Mexican Americans prior to World War II, their numbers rapidly increased on the production line. In

1945, one African American leader calculated that 85 percent of black workers in Los Angeles were employed in war industries, primarily aircraft and ship production. Mexican Americans similarly encountered new employment opportunities during the war years. In 1944, Mexican Americans comprised 10 to 15 percent of Lockheed's workforce, while the California Shipbuilding Corporation alone employed nearly 1,300 Mexican Americans.<sup>23</sup> In *Lonely Crusade*, the black writer Chester Himes noticed Los Angeles' heterogeneous workforce: "Mexicans, Europeans, Orientals, South Americans—and Filipinos, he added to the quartet. Southerners, Northerners, Easterners, Westerners—and Indians—this was manpower. With the curious blend of native and migrant, racial and religious, current and traditional hatreds—this was culture. . . . Niggers alongside nigger-haters. Jews bucketing rivets for Jew-baiters. Native daughters lunching with Orientals."<sup>24</sup>

Himes, however, knew that Los Angeles was not a utopia of interracial harmony. Former county supervisor John Anson Ford recognized the exacerbation of racial tensions during the 1940s: "Perhaps never before had so large a population in America experienced the variety and intensity of racial frictions that marked World War II and its aftermath in Los Angeles County." The internment of Japanese Americans symbolized the most egregious example of the kind of racist xenophobia that defined the social climate of wartime Los Angeles, but other groups found themselves the targets of racial animosity as well. The well-known Zoot Suit Riots of 1943 and the Sleepy Lagoon trial that ensued between 1942 and 1944 proved the extent to which racism against Mexican Americans remained entrenched in the region. The early 1940s marked what Supervisor Ford labeled Southern California's "difficult days of racial readjustment" and illustrated the heightened salience of race in midcentury American society.<sup>25</sup>

Perhaps nothing tested the regional level of racial tolerance more than the wartime and postwar migration of African Americans to Los Angeles. From 1848 through the Great Depression, Los Angeles had sustained a minor but visible black presence. The absence of a sizeable black population led blacks and nonblacks alike to conclude that Los Angeles remained a "ghettoless paradise," but the pouring of poor southern blacks into Southern California during the war years prefigured the formation of a black ghetto in Los Angeles. Between 1940 and 1946, Los Angeles' black population more than doubled, growing from 63,774 to 133,082. By 1950, that number reached 171,209, giving Los Angeles the West's largest concentration of African Americans. The following decade solidified that distinction, as Los Angeles' black population reached 334,916 by 1960, climbing even higher, to 503,606, by 1970.<sup>26</sup>

The blackening of Los Angeles during the war years and their aftermath sparked a reactionary effort to delineate a new set of spatial and racial boundaries that materialized throughout the course of postwar suburbanization. Because many Southern California communities prohibited African American residents, those areas where blacks already resided accommodated the settlement of incoming blacks. The early 1940s thus marked the beginnings of Watts's transition from a multicultural community to a black ghetto and the decline of the kind of interracial interactions that surfaced in the city's industrial communities. Throughout the postwar period, the blackening of the South Central portion of the city provoked an effort among white homeowners to discourage blacks from seeking shelter in their neighborhoods. In the Allied Gardens district of Compton, for example, whites threw rotten fruit at the newly purchased homes of incoming black settlers, smearing them with paint, tearing out rose bushes, cutting off electricity, and burning crosses in their front yards. Such turf wars marked a growing consciousness about the color of urban space in Southern California and a reinforcement of the borders that divided white space from black space. As one black migrant to Los Angeles recalled of the city in the 1940s, "You knew your boundaries."<sup>27</sup>

White wartime resistance to black settlement was particularly strong in the industrial suburbs of southeast Los Angeles, such as Huntington Park and South Gate, two communities that flourished during the 1930s with the establishment of industrial branch plants of the Firestone and General Motors corporations. These communities sheltered the initial influx of the Dust Bowl generation of migrants to Southern California, who maintained a strong sense of their whiteness by virtue of their former coexistence with southern blacks. Despite the initial efforts to prevent Okies' and Arkies' settlement in Southern California through the construction of "bum blockades" at the state border with Arizona and Nevada, Huntington Park and South Gate epitomized white suburbia by the outset of the postwar period. The uneasy juxtaposition of these communities with an expanding black neighborhood in the South Central area generated a set of racial frictions that recreated a semblance of southern-style segregation in the far Southwest.

The Okies came to Los Angeles as another "Other" during the Great Depression, but their fate diverged significantly from their black counterparts who came to Los Angeles at roughly the same time. The postwar transformation of Dust Bowl communities such as South Gate, Huntington Park, and Bell Gardens illustrates the larger postwar enfranchisement of the white working class, who became the largest "welfare generation" in the history of the United States, relying on government programs that ex-

tended home ownership and education to the mass of American consumers. South Gate, for example, demonstrated the postwar affluence bestowed on the Dust Bowl generation of Okies and Arkies, while nearby Lakewood, heralded as a model of the postwar suburban good life, held a substantial population of southern whites who came to Los Angeles in dire straits during the 1930s. The proximity of these communities to an expanding black ghetto, however, heightened anxieties about neighborhood stability and prefigured the rise of the “silent majority” during the late 1960s. As recent social histories have demonstrated, that identity found its partial roots in the “plain folk Americanism” that white southerners brought with them to places like Los Angeles during the Great Depression.<sup>28</sup>

The war years thus inaugurated Southern California’s “racial turn.” A firsthand witness to Japanese internment and the Zoot Suit Riots, and legal counsel for the defendants in the Sleepy Lagoon trial, Carey McWilliams described the volatile social mix of wartime Los Angeles as nothing less than a “racial revolution.” Within the span of two years during the early 1940s, Los Angeles confronted a new racial landscape that shattered earlier idealizations of the city as the seaport of Iowa or the westernmost outpost of Aryan supremacy. With African Americans abandoning the southern system of apartheid in hopes of a better life in Southern California, Japanese Americans enduring the trauma of evacuation and internment, and Chicano youths arousing popular antipathy and public suspicion, race acquired a new salience in the regional culture. World War II sanctioned racial interactions in both antagonistic and amicable ways, but in the aftermath of that crisis, an expanding generation of white Southern Californians forged a return to racial normalcy that rested upon a distinct set of spatial practices.

#### RACIALIZING URBAN AMERICA

As the experience of early 1940s Los Angeles suggests, one of the most striking features of midcentury urbanization in the United States was the concentration of African Americans in the vicinity of the downtown core. Black urbanization had been in effect since the aftermath of the Civil War, but the magnitude of that process increased dramatically by the mid-twentieth century. From 1945 to 1964, millions of southern blacks, fleeing an impoverished and deeply segregated South, sought high-paying jobs and opportunities for advancement in the nation’s largest cities. Their convergence on the great cities of the Northeast coincided with, and perhaps caused, an emerging pattern of residential suburbanization among whites and white ethnics. Largely excluded from suburban development, African Americans concen-

trated within the parameters of the inner city and substantially darkened the face of urban America. New York City's white population, for example, decreased by 7 percent while its black population increased by 46 percent. Similarly, whereas Chicago's white population dropped by 13 percent, its black population rose by 65 percent, and Philadelphia's white population experienced a 13 percent decline during the 1950s and its black population a 41 percent increase. Washington, D.C., Detroit, and Newark experienced a transition from a white to a black majority in the course of a single generation. Whereas African Americans throughout American history had remained rural and southern, they became predominantly urban and northern during the postwar period.<sup>29</sup>

The concentration of African Americans within the precincts of northern cities during the postwar period coincided with the onslaught of a postwar urban crisis that crippled the nation's most vital manufacturing centers. The crisis, which fell especially hard on cities such as Detroit, Chicago, New York, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, Philadelphia, and Boston, reflected a complex array of government policies and corporate decisions that halted the centralized pattern of industrial urbanism that had taken shape throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In particular, the war effort during the early 1940s initiated an uneven pattern of regional economic development that favored the burgeoning urban centers of the South and West at the expense of the industrial Northeast. The reallocation of federal resources favored the growth of Sunbelt cities such as Miami, Atlanta, Phoenix, Los Angeles, and Oakland and inaugurated the formation of a Rust Belt that extended from the manufacturing centers of the Midwest to the Northeast.<sup>30</sup>

Federal policy played a significant role in the shifting pattern of urban development in postwar America. Federal policies during the war effort not only channeled federal investments away from the urban Northeast, but also actively encouraged industrial decentralization as a defense strategy. The "parallel plant" policy of the Department of Defense, for example, entailed the building of new defense plants outside traditional urban centers. The federal emphasis on industrial decentralization gave shape to a new urban geography that unsettled the economic hierarchy of the nation's cities. Whereas the manufacturing of textiles, automobiles, electrical appliances, motor vehicles, and military hardware had remained concentrated in the urban Northeast throughout the first half of the twentieth century, industrial leaders and corporate executives, following federal incentives to decentralize, sought to maintain a competitive advantage by relocating to suburban areas as well as to the growing centers of the Sunbelt economy. The "runaway shop" became a characteristic feature of the postwar urban



economy and entailed the loss of hundreds of thousands of manufacturing jobs in traditional urban centers.<sup>31</sup>

The federal government precipitated the urban crisis in other ways as well. Although chapter 6 will examine more broadly the effects of federally subsidized highway construction on the midcentury reconfiguration of urban life, the architecture of a national transportation policy exacerbated the postwar urban crisis. The Clay Commission, for example, established by President Eisenhower to study the need for highway construction, asserted that suburbs were superior to cities and that new freeways should be used to decentralize urban areas. In support of that endeavor, the Interstate and Defense Highway Act of 1956 authorized funding for the construction of an interstate highway network that would promote decentralization as a military strategy. The construction of beltways and a growing reliance on trucking for freight transport provided incentives for industrial relocation. By the 1960s, new factories lined peripheral highways, boosting the tax bases of suburban communities at the cost of central cities.<sup>32</sup>

Government policies and corporate decisions alone, however, did not determine the fate of American cities during the postwar period. Aspiring homeowners, taking advantage of federal housing initiatives, also hastened the deterioration of the industrial metropolis by relocating to the suburban fringes of American cities. Beginning during the New Deal, federal policy extended suburban home ownership to broader segments of the American public. The Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC), for example, established in 1933, innovated the self-amortizing home loan, allowing Americans of modest means to purchase homes without a substantial down payment. Similarly, the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), established by the 1934 National Housing Act, guaranteed privately financed home loans against default, allowing banks to adopt more liberal lending policies. FHA programs maintained a clear antiurban bias. The terms of FHA loans favored the purchase of single-family dwellings and implemented a set of minimum requirements that all but precluded home ownership in concentrated urban neighborhoods. Deeming crowded neighborhoods, older properties, industrial activity, and what it called "the presence of inharmonious racial or nationality groups" as anathema to secure investment, the FHA's *Underwriting Manual*, a veritable bible among private lending institutions, directed housing loans to the suburban periphery and opened doors for the exodus of people and capital away from urban centers.<sup>33</sup>

Despite the benefits the New Deal bestowed on African Americans and other racial constituencies during the 1930s, housing policy under the Roosevelt administration established a pattern of racial segregation that

structured the contours of subsequent urban development. Both the HOLC and the FHA implemented a racially biased set of policies that virtually prevented blacks and other nonwhite groups from attaining suburban home ownership. The HOLC, for example, devised a method of property appraisal, adopted as a national standard by private lending institutions, which maintained an extreme sensitivity to race. Based on an extensive survey of urban neighborhoods, the HOLC assigned a "grade" to each neighborhood—1 being the highest and 4 the lowest. Each number corresponded to both the code letters A, B, C, and D, and to the colors green, blue, yellow, and red, respectively.<sup>34</sup>

The HOLC's assessment of Los Angeles neighborhoods, for example, demonstrates how race factored into government calculations of urban property values. Los Angeles neighborhoods "highly protected by deed restrictions" and those where the "population is homogeneous" were always accorded an A rating, while neighborhoods with "first-grade qualifications" yet within a short distance of "fourth-grade contamination" areas were assigned a B rating. The C neighborhoods in Los Angeles evinced "indication[s] of infiltration of Jewish families" or sheltered a "few Mexicans and Japs." Invariably, neighborhoods that sheltered even a few black families received a D rating and were redlined. Thus, those neighborhoods that sustained the region's heterosocial public life throughout the 1930s and early 1940s were targeted by the HOLC. Watts acquired a "low red" grade, as did Boyle Heights, which HOLC officials identified as a "'melting pot' area, literally honeycombed with diverse and subversive racial elements."<sup>35</sup>

The FHA, chief underwriter of the postwar suburban boom, used the racially biased ratings established by the HOLC and reinforced the federal government's insistence on racial homogeneity as a precondition for home ownership. "If a neighborhood is to retain stability," the FHA's *Underwriting Manual* stated, "it is necessary that properties shall continue to be occupied by the same social and racial classes. A change in social or racial occupancy generally contributes to the instability and decline in property values." A 1933 report submitted to the FHA by one of its consultants, Homer Hoyt, reveals the FHA's assessment of racial worth and its acknowledgment of the fluid and contingent boundaries of white identity:

If the entrance of a colored family into a white neighborhood causes a general exodus of the white people it is reflected in property values. Except in the case of Negroes and Mexicans, however, *these racial and national barriers disappear when the individuals of foreign nationality groups rise in the economic scale or conform to American standards of living. . . .* While the ranking may be scientifically wrong from the

standpoint of inherent racial characteristics, it registers an opinion or prejudice that is reflected in land values; it is the ranking of race and nationalities with respect to the beneficial effect upon land values. Those having the most favorable effect come first on the list and those exerting the most detrimental effect appear last:

1. English, Germans, Scots, Irish, Scandinavians
2. North Italians
3. Bohemians or Czechoslovakians
4. Poles
5. Lithuanians
6. Greeks
7. Russian Jews of lower class
8. South Italians
9. Negroes
10. Mexicans<sup>36</sup>

Thus, FHA officials recognized the inherent instability of ethnic hierarchies, but remained vigilant toward racial distinctions between white and non-white. This recognition provided a material basis for the development of an inclusive white identity predicated on suburban home ownership, and in Southern California, where the FHA maintained a most vital role in shaping regional patterns of suburban development, the settlement of places such as Orange County and the San Fernando Valley created a space where a diverse array of whites and white ethnics could “conform to American standards of living” and remove themselves from the FHA’s least-wanted list. The great paradox here is that while the New Deal sustained the development of a heterogeneous public culture in Southern California during the 1930s and into the following decade, it simultaneously planted the seeds for the destruction of that culture by enacting a set of racially biased policies that enabled the racial polarization of the postwar urban region.

#### VANILLA SUBURBS

To be sure, Los Angeles experienced an urban crisis at midcentury, but it was one of growth, not decay. World War II inflicted a set of growing pains upon Los Angeles, a region long advertised as a bucolic retreat from the tensions of urban life. The booster myths that mediated an image of Los Angeles throughout the 1920s, whatever their distinct nuances, all shared a common emphasis on how Los Angeles stood apart from other American cities. Los

Angeles, unlike New York, Chicago, and San Francisco, lacked the qualities of urban life that, as chapter 3 illustrates, Hollywood subsequently defined as noir: congestion, pollution, anomie, and crime, as well as racial and ethnic mixing. While Southern California's phase of urban development during the 1920s challenged such urban bravado, the wartime boom exposed Dana Bartlett's "Better City" as pure farce. More alarming, the postwar formation of a ghetto and barrio within the city's older neighborhoods signaled the radical urbanization of the region and prompted a search for new patterns of community formation that minimized the sort of interactions that defined previous modes of urban social relations.

The 1940s brought a set of rude awakenings for Southern Californians. The worsening of traffic congestion during the early 1940s, for example, dramatized the crowding of city streets and underscored the need for a highway system that better served the needs of commuters who found themselves driving longer distances to work. In a 1942 survey of 225,000 Southern California workers, the California State Railroad Commission calculated that more than 85 percent traveled to work in cars. Even when efforts were made to ensure the accessibility of places of employment to public transit, workers still asserted their preference for the automobile. Traffic congestion and, in particular, the "promiscuous" mixing of different types of vehicles on the city streets alerted public officials to one aspect of the crisis of growth in Los Angeles and, as chapter 6 will illustrate, heightened the impetus to build a regional network of thoroughfares that provided for the rapid movement of traffic through an expanding regional metropolis.<sup>37</sup>

If Southern California enjoyed fame for its natural setting and hospitable climate, the intense phase of wartime urbanization left its scars on its unblemished landscape. Smog was first discovered in Los Angeles in 1943, when a brown haze settled in the Los Angeles basin, so noxious that the *Los Angeles Times* reported Southern California's "Gas Attack" on its front page. The identification of smog incited public officials to implement an array of measures to limit the proliferation of exhaust in the city's air and to establish municipal agencies to evaluate their success during the 1940s and 1950s. Such efforts notwithstanding, the browning of Southern California's air severed a more mature Los Angeles from its youthful myth as the healthful antidote to a hyperurbanized society.<sup>38</sup>

The war years wreaked further havoc on Los Angeles' infrastructure. Wartime rationing of building materials brought the construction of new housing to a halt, while massive population growth severely strained the city's existing housing stock, particularly in expanding black neighborhoods, where greater numbers of people with severely limited housing opportuni-

ties concentrated in unprecedented numbers. The issuing of building permits sank to new lows during the war years, and by July 1943, public officials estimated the city's vacancy rate at a mere 0.4 percent. "I am convinced that the overall housing shortage," mayor Fletcher Bowron confided to a friend in 1945, "is unequaled in any other major city in the United States."<sup>39</sup>

The housing crisis that befell wartime Los Angeles dramatized the need for new housing to both public officials and private developers, who had competing visions about the future course of urban development in Southern California. City officials, particularly those affiliated with Fletcher Bowron's New Deal coalition, emphasized a "public" mode of urban growth that stressed government programs such as public housing to eliminate slum conditions and to provide affordable housing for the city's inhabitants. Their notions clashed with the privatized version of development favored by land developers and corporate interests, who constituted an unofficial, but no less powerful, force in the process of urban development. Ultimately, the market approach trumped the public vision; the defeat of public housing in → Cold War Los Angeles illustrates the transition to a new political culture that encouraged the spatial and racial fragmentation of the postwar urban region.

Whatever support fueled the campaign for public housing throughout the 1930s, it garnered opposition from the private sector after World War II, particularly among the real estate, finance, and construction industries. The arrival of the Cold War serendipitously offered interest groups such as the National Association of Real Estate Boards and the Urban Land Institute a potent weapon in the fight against public housing. By decrying housing subsidies as socialist, private real estate interests and their allies waged a powerful assault on the fate of subsidized housing in Southern California and illustrated the virility of red-baiting as a key political strategy during the Cold War.

It is difficult to comprehend the success of the campaign against public housing without understanding the salience of McCarthyism in Southern California's postwar political culture. One might argue that alongside Washington, D.C., where Cold War diplomacy of global scope took shape, Los Angeles arose as the western capital of the Cold War. Perhaps no region of the United States profited more handsomely from federal investments in Cold War defense production than Southern California. After a brief lull in the late 1940s, the Korean War reignited the regional economy and prompted federal orders for more missiles, aircraft, and surveillance technology. Regional dependence on Cold War defense production signaled political opportunities for local Republican strategists such as Richard Nixon,

who defeated Helen Gahagan Douglas in the 1950 senate race through a successful media campaign of red-baiting his Democratic opponent. And, as chapter 3 will discuss, Hollywood provided a conspicuous arena for the investigations of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), which used the film industry as a vehicle to publicize its determination to rid the nation of Communist subversives. Studio executives such as Walt Disney came to the aid of HUAC in its hunt for Communists, purging anyone suspected of socialist politics from the ranks of the film industry and producing films that celebrated a conformist, classless, and consumerist vision of the "American way."<sup>40</sup>

Southern California's virulent strain of McCarthyism spawned a regional political climate that refused to tolerate New Deal programs such as public housing. The anti-public housing forces scored a major victory in 1949, when Los Angeles secured a contract from the federal government, under the Taft Ellender Wagner Act, which promised the construction of ten thousand units of public housing. The Small Property Owners' League immediately retorted by issuing a pamphlet, *Bowron Administration Moving People via Gestapo Housing Authority*, claiming that "government owned tenement housing . . . would accomplish the major step towards Communism." Housing developers such as Fritz Burns, as a spokesman for the Southern California Association of Real Estate Boards and a vigorous opponent of public housing, argued for the "ways and means of meeting and defeating socialism which seems about to engulf us." And the *Los Angeles Times*, historically Southern California's voice of private enterprise and real estate development, decried public housing as outright "socialistic."<sup>41</sup>

Following the example set by HUAC's investigation of Hollywood studios, the foes of public housing also scrutinized the offices of the City Housing Authority (CHA) for any subversive influences. Frank Wilkinson, chief public relations officer for the CHA, in a routine eminent domain hearing for a proposed housing project, refused to answer the question that ended so many careers in Cold War America: "What organizations, political or otherwise, have you been a member of since 1932?" The California State Un-American Activities Committee took Wilkinson's silence as proof of his subversive persuasions and succeeded in ousting him and six other CHA employees.

Furious over the purging of the CHA, Fletcher Bowron remained adamant in his refusal to cancel the city's contract for public housing, which caused his political demise. Public housing was the central issue of the 1953 mayoral campaign, in which Norris Poulson successfully branded Bowron a Communist and won the race. Poulson, a three-term congressman from Los

Angeles and virtually hand-picked by the *Los Angeles Times* to run against Bowron, immediately canceled the city's contract with the federal government for the construction of public housing and restored, for the remainder of the decade, the privatized vision of growth endorsed by the *Times*.<sup>42</sup>

Though a powerful force in the "making" of modern Los Angeles, the *Los Angeles Times* and its allied forces did not simply will the defeat of public housing. Whereas organized labor had endorsed public housing into the 1940s, McCarthyism limited labor's institutional power and halted the enactment of New Deal programs such as public housing. After the 1953 election of Norris Poulson, organized labor in Los Angeles "was almost never in a weaker position," and the labor unions, key constituents in Southern California's New Deal coalition, withdrew their support for public housing. Without labor's support, as the historian Don Parson concludes, public housing could not withstand the red-baiting campaigns marshaled by private real estate interests.<sup>43</sup>

Not that public housing was ever central to the interests of mainstream labor activists. With or without public housing, Southern California's white working-class and middle-class families retained access to government programs that effectively secured their own version of the suburban dream, however modest, and, unlike black community leaders, they did not view public housing as a solution to pressing housing needs. The most severe features of the urban crisis that settled on Southern California during the war years thus remained confined to expanding communities of color, while suburban development exempted white Southern Californians from the many problems that afflicted the inner city. As consumers, the white working class found in FHA and Veterans Administration (VA) assistance programs the means to realize their dream of suburban home ownership. The array of housing options available to them, however, widened Southern California's racial fault lines.

Beginning during the early 1940s, for example, new FHA communities surfaced in the Southern California landscape that marked a distinct departure from the polyglot communities of Watts and Boyle Heights. For example, in 1939, Fritz Burns, probably the most successful among Southern California's "community builders," built Westside Village, a planned community of eight hundred homes near the Douglas Aircraft plant in Santa Monica, to serve the needs of war workers. The success of Westside Village inspired the 1941 creation of a larger development, Westchester, a community of three thousand homes situated alongside the city's main airport and North American Aviation. In 1947, Burns teamed up with the industrial magnate Henry J. Kaiser to form Kaiser Community Homes, which under-

took the construction of Panorama City in North Hollywood, located near the Lockheed and Vega plants in Burbank. Largely immune from the side effects of wartime urbanization in Southern California, these new communities followed the decentralized pattern of industrial development that delineated the parameters of postwar suburbanization.<sup>44</sup>

By virtue of their racial exclusivity, however, the new wartime communities sheltered an inclusive white identity on the fringes of the urban core. Toluca Wood, Panorama City, Westchester, and Westside Village all encouraged occupational and class diversity while strictly enforcing racial homogeneity. Fritz Burns, for example, "intentionally programmed" class and occupational diversity into developments such as Westchester and Panorama City, integrating workers, managers, and professionals in the same neighborhood unit. Burns viewed class stratification as un-American but apparently did not hold the same view toward racial segregation. The developer maintained a steadfast policy of Jim Crow, even after the Supreme Court's prohibition of racially restrictive covenants in *Shelley v. Kraemer* in 1948. While the new wartime communities underscored the blurring of class lines along the suburban periphery of the metropolis, ensconcing white workers and their families in the comforts of suburban home ownership, they simultaneously reinforced the pattern by which chocolate cities and vanilla suburbs took shape.

Housing developers, of course, were not solely responsible for the racial exclusivity of the new aircraft communities. While developers built racially exclusionary measures into their new communities, they were sanctioned by a larger culture that maintained racial discrimination at the workplace. White employers at the region's largest aircraft firms remained committed to Jim Crow, and after the labor shortage of the early 1940s had subsided, with white veterans returning home in search of steady employment, they returned to a whites-only policy following the war's conclusion. Their restoration of a white workforce was supported by white workers, many of whom belonged to unions such as the United Auto Workers, which remained determined to provide employment for returning white veterans. Thus, the whiteness of Southern California's new aircraft communities also hinged on the efforts of white employers and their white employees to expel blacks from the aircraft labor force in the aftermath of World War II. Consequently, blacks went from representing approximately 10 percent of the aircraft labor force at the peak of production in 1944-45 to less than 3 percent by 1950.<sup>45</sup>

The FHA, guaranteeing a major share of home loans for Southern California's wartime communities, underwrote the whiteness of the postwar



urban region. In many ways, Los Angeles became the FHA's favorite city during the 1940s and 1950s. "Nowhere in the country has activity in FHA loans been so pronounced as in the Los Angeles area," noted the regional director of the FHA in Los Angeles, commenting on the fact that by the early 1940s, California won the largest share of FHA funding for private homes.<sup>46</sup> The FHA's insistence on racial homogeneity, however, structured racial exclusivity in postwar suburban development. Although whites did not flee the more densely concentrated neighborhoods of Los Angeles' inner city for the suburbs, as they did in New York City and its boroughs, Southern California nonetheless exhibited the characteristic spatial and racial fragmentation of the twentieth-century urban populace. The editors of the *California Eagle*, serving Southern California's black community, indicted the FHA for its complicity in this development in 1959: "Whites are moving to suburban areas and leaving the centers of the metropolitan areas to Negroes and other so-called minorities. Negroes aren't moving to the suburbs because they are barred from suburban housing developments. The most important single factor in the discriminatory policies pursued by developers and builders is the indirect support such discrimination gets from FHA and VA."<sup>47</sup>

Federal housing policy had created the basis for the racial segregation of the postwar urban region as far back as the late 1930s, and it was during the 1950s that racial distinctions became even more pronounced in the region's social landscape. Perhaps no community better epitomized Southern California's vanilla suburbs than Lakewood, an "instant city" of 17,500 homes near Long Beach, about fourteen miles south of downtown Los Angeles, which opened in 1951. Lakewood reflected the collaborative efforts of Ben Weingart, Louis Boyar, and Mark Taper, who imagined a self-sufficient residential community with its own schools, recreation grounds, religious facilities, civic center, and, of course, shopping center. Near Douglas Aircraft and alongside Southern California's primary industrial corridor, Lakewood was situated in a growing area where agricultural fields rapidly gave way to residential subdivisions. With the assistance of private investors and one hundred million dollars from the FHA toward construction costs and mortgage guarantees, Weingart, Taper, and Boyar's housing development was the largest undertaking of its kind.

Lakewood's success as a prototypical suburban community reflected an ironic moment of cooperation among diverse peoples who collectively maintained a racially exclusive suburban community. An early promotional brochure touted Lakewood as the "white spot" of Long Beach, a city whose African American population had dramatically increased between 1940 and

1950. It emphasized to potential buyers the use of racial and residential restrictions that ensured Lakewood's standing as a "100% American Family Community."<sup>48</sup> Lakewood's sales staff refused to accept applications from black families, steering them toward the expanding black neighborhoods of South Central Los Angeles. Still, Lakewood's inhabitants varied across religious, class, and regional lines. Jews, Catholics, Okies, engineers, janitors, aircraft plant workers, and their families all found Lakewood amenable to their pursuit of the suburban good life, but their many differences did not preclude their entry into a suburb reserved for whites only.

In Southern California during the postwar period, Jewish men such as Taper, Weingart, and Boyar encountered success as agents of suburbanization in postwar Southern California, and they embodied a new generation of Jewish community builders who "replaced the Jewish film magnate as the entrepreneur par excellence" in postwar Los Angeles. Initially, the land purchased by Lakewood's developers was protected by "restrictions of an all-inclusive nature," which, along with restrictive covenants built into property clauses, prevented the sale of lots to blacks, Mexicans, and Jews. Although Boyar, Taper, and Weingart purchased a suburb in which they could not live, they lifted the restriction and Lakewood welcomed Jewish home buyers upon its opening. "It was often said of this suburb," recalls lifelong Lakewood resident D. J. Waldie in his suburban memoir, "that every other house was either Jewish or Catholic."<sup>49</sup>

The settlement of Jews in Lakewood demonstrates the extent to which postwar suburbanization in Southern California sustained the "whitening" of a social group that endured centuries of racist persecution. Jews came to Los Angeles in the early decades of the twentieth century and, confronted with restrictive covenants that explicitly barred them from Southern California's white neighborhoods, settled in Boyle Heights alongside other racial and ethnic groups. During the 1940s, however, Eastside Jews, by virtue of their commercial success as service providers, began to enjoy a newfound affluence and initiated an exodus out of Boyle Heights to converge on areas west of downtown Los Angeles. The opening to Jews of the Westside, which included communities such as Beverly Hills, Bel Air, Brentwood, Pacific Palisades, and the southern portion of the San Fernando Valley, made that area synonymous with the new affluence that Jews acquired during the postwar period.

The presence of Jewish developers in the making of postwar suburbia offers a glimpse into "how the Jews became white folks" in the sociospatial context of postwar America. Clearly, the atrocities of Nazi Germany forced American and European gentiles to rethink the ancient stereotypes of Jews

as a degenerate group. In the United States, the weakening of an entrenched anti-Semitism, coupled with an economic boom, created a national context in which Jews could “become white,” but perhaps no region was better suited for that makeover than Los Angeles. Hollywood, as Michael Rogin and others have argued, facilitated the “whitening” of Jews not only through its financial success, but also through its representations of racial otherness. Most significant, however, the combination of undeveloped land, which created unprecedented opportunities for Jewish community builders, and the dramatic expansion of a black presence in the region sustained a growing perception of Jews as white. *U.S. News and World Report*, for example, included Jews in its report on a religious version of white flight in Southern California: “Churches and synagogues have been abandoned by whites, sometimes to be taken over by Negro congregations.”<sup>50</sup>

Lakewood’s inclusive version of suburban whiteness rested upon a unique administrative structure that accelerated postwar Southern California’s fragmentation into a sprawling agglomeration of racially exclusive communities. In 1954, the developers of Lakewood struck a deal with the county of Los Angeles. For minimal costs, the county would provide vital services (fire, police, library) to Lakewood, which incorporated as an independent municipality. The deal between Los Angeles County and the city of Lakewood eliminated the presence of a homegrown bureaucracy and exempted Lakewood’s citizens from the burden of supporting public services.<sup>51</sup>

The Lakewood plan initiated a “new trend” in municipal incorporation that promised to “shape up the shapeless boundaries” of the expanding postwar urban region. Whether or not suburbanization entailed a rejection of city life, the incorporation of suburban communities such as Lakewood indeed signaled a repudiation of city government. The *Los Angeles Mirror News*, reporting on the incorporation “craze” that swept suburban Southern California during the 1950s, wondered, “Are big cities obsolete?” Although the Lakewood plan excited concern about the development of a “sprawling, disconnected, haphazard” urban region, the residents of Lakewood and the twenty-five other “cities by contract” between the years of 1954 and 1960 relished the opportunity to assume greater control over municipal affairs.<sup>52</sup>

*Local control* became a mantra among suburban Southern Californians, who used municipal incorporation as a means of ensuring homogeneous communities and stable property values. By allowing a greater degree of control over zoning and land-use policies, municipal incorporation allowed the residents of Lakewood to create racially homogeneous communities by excluding those populations who tended to rely on rental housing and county services. In this way, the Lakewood plan authorized the “sorting

out" of the regional population by race. Although the Los Angeles urban region became increasingly diverse during the postwar period, individual communities in Southern California grew increasingly homogeneous. In 1950, there were thirty-eight cities with populations less than 1 percent black; these cities contained 24 percent of the metropolitan area's population. In 1970, by contrast, there were fifty-eight cities with populations less than 1 percent black, containing 33 percent of the regional population. Both the number of segregated cities and the population residing in those cities increased. Moreover, of the fifty-eight segregated cities, thirty-one were older cities that had successfully retained antiblack patterns. The other segregated cities were the new Lakewood Plan cities. Of the thirty-two created between 1950 and 1970, twenty-eight had populations less than 1 percent black. Thus, Gary Miller concludes, "the Lakewood Plan cities were essentially white political movements."<sup>53</sup>

In addition to its social composition and its political structure, Lakewood's design and construction reflected the larger cultural preoccupation with order shared by a new generation of suburban Americans. Uniformity, efficiency, and predictability were the key imperatives that guided Lakewood's development from the laying of foundations to the sale of homes. A bucket excavator could dig foundations for individual homes in less than fifteen minutes. Workmen laid 2,113 foundations in a hundred days, quickly followed by carpenters who nailed up three-foot foundation forms. Lakewood's developers applied the Fordist principles of mass production to housing construction. Construction crews repeated discrete tasks—pouring concrete, laying floors, raising walls, scaling rafters—synchronizing their efforts in order to move from house to house as quickly as possible. In this way, workers built a hundred homes a day and more than five hundred per week. Whereas "the average number of houses per acre in prewar subdivisions had been about five," one acre of Lakewood yielded eight homes. Consumers could choose one of seven floor plans, each decorated in one of four styles—Maple, Traditional, Modern, and Provincial. Lakewood was not exactly the "bourgeois utopia" that more affluent Americans pursued during the suburban boom of the 1920s, but it offered a modest version of the suburban good life to greater numbers of people.<sup>54</sup> Veterans needed no down payment, and the FHA guaranteed loans at 4 percent interest for up to thirty years. "When the sales office opened on a cloudless Palm Sunday in April 1950," recalled D. J. Waldie, "twenty-five thousand people were waiting."<sup>55</sup>

Lakewood's layout epitomized the efficient organization of space that marked the development of postwar suburbia. Typical of suburban develop-

ments built on Southern California's flat terrain, Lakewood was built on the grid system, "a fraction of a larger grid, anchored to one in Los Angeles." Streets intersected at right angles, with avenues running north and south and streets running east and west. The grid also dictated the arrangement of homes. "Each block is divided into the common grid of fifty-by-one-hundred feet lots," wrote D. J. Waldie; "all the houses are about 1,100 square feet." The grid reflects distinct traditions of city planning, and its historical application reflects a solution to the problem of ordering undeveloped land. For the builders of Lakewood, the grid proved the most efficient way of organizing 3,500 acres of Southern California land "that was as good as any other."<sup>56</sup>

At the center of the grid stood an institution that earned a greater prominence in the cultural life of postwar Americans. Lakewood Center, an outdoor pedestrian mall occupying a 154-acre site, featured one hundred businesses and a major department store, making it the largest development of its kind upon its opening in 1950. Unlike downtown commercial districts situated along bustling city streets, Lakewood Center stood at the center of a vast parking lot that accommodated twelve thousand cars, and its one-story buildings faced inward along a central promenade. The designers of Lakewood Center sought ways to manipulate consumer behavior through a rigorous ordering of pedestrian space. They used the principles of department store interior design and drew on existing knowledge about the psychological aspects of shopping to create a self-contained environment wholly dedicated to consumption. The minimally landscaped promenades of Lakewood Center allowed an unobstructed view of window displays, and its understated modernist architecture gave greater prominence to signs and advertisements. Lakewood Center's highly disciplined layout not only established an important precedent for a subsequent generation of regional malls that appeared in Southern California and throughout the nation during the 1950s and 1960s, but also reflected a larger spatial culture that informed the design of freeways, theme parks, ballparks, and, of course, insular suburban communities such as Lakewood itself.<sup>57</sup>

The spatial organization of suburban Southern California reflected a larger demand for social order that seemed imperative at an uncertain time in American history. Contrary to the popular perception of the post-World War II period as "happy days," Americans found themselves preoccupied with a number of global and domestic concerns. The Cold War against the Soviet Union loomed as the gravest threat to the nation, not only provoking fears about nuclear annihilation, but also heightening anxieties about internal subversion. HUAC's hearings, the execution of the Rosenbergs, and

the Alger Hiss trial intensified the suspicion that engulfed Americans throughout the postwar period. Other social anxieties compounded Cold War tensions. Juvenile delinquents and working women threatened the primacy of the nuclear family and prompted a renewed emphasis on patriarchal domesticity. The burgeoning civil rights movement, moreover, threatened the tradition of white supremacy in the United States, arousing a growing suspicion of liberal elites who mandated racial integration from their perch in Washington, D.C. White Americans, not far removed from the misery and anxiety of the 1930s and early 1940s, seemed vulnerable, psychologically at least, to the profound changes that engulfed the nation and the world throughout the postwar period.<sup>58</sup>

If postwar Americans could not order the chaos of global affairs and internal developments, they could at least take shelter in their own suburban havens. Like Lakewood, Orange County was one such haven during the 1950s, at least for the time being. The county's name reveals its agricultural past, but World War II foretold a very different future. The war channeled a flood of federal defense outlays into the region, bringing an influx of military personnel and their families. The formation in Orange County of what eventually became the nation's largest military-industrial complex fueled the regional economy, spurring activity in the real estate, construction, finance, and service industries. Orange County's population growth after World War II, moreover, was nothing less than astounding. Although the county's population nearly doubled between 1940 and 1950, it underwent its most spectacular growth in the following decades, skyrocketing from 216,224 in 1950 to 703,925 in 1960. By 1970, Orange County sheltered nearly 1.5 million inhabitants, furthering the expanse of Southern California's suburban metropolis. The county's rapid demographic growth, however, did not include racial and ethnic diversity. By 1960, for example, African Americans constituted less than 0.5 percent of the county's overall population.<sup>59</sup> Alongside Mexican Americans, Orange County's black minority remained confined to the older urban centers of the region.

Orange County's characteristics—its racial homogeneity, its dependence on a Cold War economy, its high rates of home ownership, and its flurry of intense real estate development—fostered a distinct political culture that foreshadowed the changing tenor of national politics during the 1970s and 1980s. Orange County residents, many of them newcomers to Southern California, sparked a conservative revival that espoused a strong defense, a weak federal government, virulent anti-Communism, staunch nationalism, and unabashed celebration of laissez-faire capitalism. Conservative churches such as the Central Baptist Church, right-wing organizations such as the

John Birch Society, and local newspapers such as the *Orange County Register* offered a forum where such values were codified into political action. These and other institutions that highlighted Orange County's cultural landscape, including Disneyland, as chapter 4 suggests, reflected and reinforced a burgeoning "middle-class revolt" that crystallized in the suburban spaces of Southern California.<sup>60</sup>

The brand of political conservatism that Orange County's residents adopted hinged in no small part on a growing consciousness of race and racial difference in postwar America. The civil rights movement, at its zenith during the 1960s, surfaced as a major threat to the guarded white identity incubating in the insular suburban spaces of Orange County. Through a number of racially exclusive practices that prevented or discouraged blacks from acquiring housing and employment in the area, Orange County residents exhibited a remarkable racial homogeneity. Their success in that endeavor seemed particularly imperative in the national context of the 1960s. The gains won by the civil rights movement during the 1960s not only intensified opposition to government-sponsored efforts to remedy racial discrimination, but also mobilized a white backlash that catapulted conservative ideologues into public office. Ronald Reagan, for example, successfully mobilized his white suburban constituents in places like Orange County to advance his political ambitions. With 72 percent of its electorate voting for Reagan in the 1966 gubernatorial election, Orange County won recognition as Reagan Country at the height of the civil rights movement. Reagan demonstrated an acute awareness of the racial anxieties of his white suburban constituents. Arousing local animosity to metropolitan Los Angeles and conjuring menacing images of teeming black masses, Reagan warned his Orange County supporters that "the jungle is waiting to take over" in the aftermath of the Watts riots.<sup>61</sup>

One issue in particular codified a suburban brand of identity politics among white homeowners in Orange County and other parts of Southern California. In 1963, the state legislature passed the Rumford Fair Housing Act, which opened housing laws to prevent racial discrimination in the renting or selling of real estate. The Fair Housing Act incurred intense opposition in California, particularly in the southern portion of the state. The following year, white Californians retorted by placing Proposition 13 on the ballot, which would rescind the Fair Housing Act, derided by its opponents as the "Forced Housing Act." California voters approved the proposition in 1964, winning a two-to-one majority in Orange County. Although white suburban Southern Californians thus enjoyed a momentary reprieve from the threat of racial diversity, the California State Supreme Court nullified

the proposition that same year, declaring it unconstitutional, and thus gave California conservatives such as Ronald Reagan another issue with which to mobilize white suburban voters, who felt, in Reagan's words, that "if an individual wants to discriminate against Negroes or others in selling or renting his house he has a right to do so."<sup>62</sup>

The unique political culture that took shape in Orange County during the postwar period engendered a political transformation that ultimately shaped the course of national politics during the remainder of the century. The Reagan Revolution of the 1980s saw the realization of a conservative populism that reflected the values of disaffected working-class and lower-middle-class whites, who shifted their political allegiance from the Democratic to the Republican party. Race—racial ideology and racial identity—played a significant role in that shift. Distant from the class-based coalition politics of the New Deal years and disillusioned with the racial liberalism of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society, white Americans of the 1970s and 1980s, predominantly northern Catholics and southern Protestants, channeled their grievances into support for a new political leadership that trumpeted a return to traditional values such as patriarchy, patriotism, law and order, hard work, and self-help, and that promised to end federal "favoritism" toward special interest groups. The Reagan Revolution gripped regional constituencies throughout the nation during the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, but it first took root in the new suburban communities of Southern California toward the end of the postwar period.<sup>63</sup>

#### CHOCOLATE CITIES

While Orange County cultivated a suburban brand of white identity politics, inner-city communities experienced an unprecedented degree of racial segregation, which ultimately gave way to a racialized brand of political activism that mirrored that of their white suburban counterparts. By the early 1960s, the patterns of racial segregation in Southern California's social geography had become clear to contemporary observers. The Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations documented the effects of white flight on the social geography of 1950s Los Angeles. "Of the 334,916 Negroes living in the City of Los Angeles," the report summarized, "313,866, or 93.7 percent live in the Central District." And of the 12,297 blacks who lived outside of Watts, 10,860 "have simply joined members of their race in the segregated areas of San Pedro, Venice and Pacoima." Mexican Americans experienced a similar concentration in the unincorporated territory east of the downtown core. Between 1950 and 1960, the percentage of Latino residents in East Los



Angeles increased from 29.4 percent to 51.5 percent. Such findings led the commission to conclude that Los Angeles was "experiencing the growth of a highly segregated community that can be compared to the most unfortunate of such situations to be found anywhere in the United States."<sup>64</sup>

During the 1950s, Watts and South Central Los Angeles, which had remained two separate black communities through the 1940s, coalesced to form a broader area that became synonymous with the black ghetto. Although the *Los Angeles Times* and other real estate interests waged a fierce battle to obstruct the construction of public housing within the confines of downtown Los Angeles, those groups did not object to three new public housing projects in Watts during the 1950s, which accentuated the poverty endemic to the area. Moreover, the deterioration of housing conditions in that area, exacerbated by a rapidly expanding black population, fostered the conditions typically associated with slums. Whereas African Americans had once touted Los Angeles as a "ghettoless paradise," the structure of racial inequality built into postwar suburbanization ensured that Southern California's suburban good life would remain off-limits to blacks.<sup>65</sup>

The transformation of Watts during the postwar period gave a different set of connotations to that community in the minds of suburban whites. Eldridge Cleaver, for example, who grew up in Watts during the 1950s, recalled how his community's name became an epithet, "the same way as city boys used 'country' as a term of derision. To deride one as 'lame' who did not know what was happening . . . the 'in-crowd' of the time from L.A. would bring a cat down by saying that he had just left Watts." If Watts symbolized the backwardness of country life to some, it began to signify the danger of the city to many whites, particularly following the Watts riots of 1965. In his successive bids for election as mayor of Los Angeles beginning in 1961, Samuel Yorty marshaled white anxieties about Los Angeles' growing black population and exploited images of an overcrowded ghetto bursting with black rage. In his successful 1969 campaign against Tom Bradley, who eventually became Los Angeles' first black mayor, Yorty and his campaign forces associated Bradley with the militant strain of black nationalism that unnerved white America. Circulating black and red flyers that read "Watts power" in white suburban communities and placing late-night phone calls to San Fernando Valley residents from a fictitious "Watts Committee for Bradley," Yorty strategically situated his opponent within a misrepresentation of Watts as the locus of seething black nationalism.<sup>66</sup>

The city's new mayor personified the political transformation of Southern California during the postwar period. Although Yorty had once been a

New Deal Democrat, the Cold War inspired his political metamorphosis as he cofounded California's version of HUAC. Yorty campaigned for Richard Nixon in the 1960 presidential election and later endorsed California's winning gubernatorial candidate, Ronald Reagan, whose political career followed a trajectory similar to Yorty's. His prodevelopment stance shaped his commitment to freeway construction, thereby winning the support of organized labor groups. Perhaps most crucial to his entry into the mayoral office, however, Yorty capitalized on the racial anxieties of white suburbanites who looked with trepidation on the inner city from their suburban enclaves. Yorty's tenure as Los Angeles mayor completed the political transition from the diverse working-class coalitions of the New Deal era to a politics predicated on the racial divisions that took shape in the context of decentralized urbanization. Subsequent chapters of this book, accordingly, explore the cultural dimensions of that transition, identifying the values and mindset that encouraged political leaders such as Yorty and Reagan to abandon the Democratic for the Republican party, not to mention the millions of working-class and lower-middle-class whites who undertook a similar crossing of party lines during the 1960s.<sup>67</sup>

If Watts surfaced as Southern California's ghetto after World War II, East Los Angeles became synonymous with the *barrio*, which sheltered the nation's largest concentration of Mexicans and Mexican Americans during the postwar period. Although Mexicans have maintained a presence in Eastside communities since the turn of the century, they shared those communal spaces with African Americans, Japanese Americans, Italian Americans, Jews, Russians, and Armenians. The war years, however, initiated the departure of groups that were not ethnically Mexican, leaving their homes to be rented or bought by Mexican immigrants and their children. During the 1940s, for example, Boyle Heights lost its Jewish population and coalesced with other Eastside communities to form a larger Chicano *barrio*, homogeneous and isolated from the rest of the city.<sup>68</sup>

The departure of the Jews from Boyle Heights left its mark on that community. A group typically associated with service provision in urban ethnic economies, Jews established a vibrant commercial life in East Los Angeles, but their exodus after World War II crippled the economic health of that community. One woman recalled the fate of East Los Angeles in the wake of its version of white flight:

Everything was decaying and getting worse and worse. When I moved here, there were Japanese and Jewish. It was really a Jewish community. Everything was so green. We had everything—the theater, the drug stores, the little post office in the drug store. But since Jewish people

went, that was the end of the post office. Now, no more post office, no more banks. So we have to go to the one on Brooklyn or go downtown.<sup>69</sup>

The unincorporated status of East Los Angeles, moreover, limited that community's capacity to improve living conditions. Throughout the postwar period, East Los Angeles remained an unincorporated county "island" surrounded by Los Angeles and other municipalities. The concentration of Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans in East Los Angeles during the postwar period added further strain on existing services and exacerbated the problems that already afflicted the community: poor housing, inadequate public services and facilities, meager employment opportunities, and deteriorating schools. Lacking the advantages of political self-determination and wholly dependent on an unresponsive county burdened with administrative responsibilities elsewhere, Chicanos and Mexican immigrants in East Los Angeles had little means to combat the placement of prisons and industrial waste sites that other communities successfully resisted. At the losing end of the municipal incorporation game, the citizens of East Los Angeles struggled to remedy the deteriorating quality of life in their community.<sup>70</sup>

Even as East Los Angeles witnessed a growing concentration of Mexican and Chicano poverty during the postwar period, however, the barrio did not encompass the experience of Los Angeles' Mexican American community to the same extent that the ghetto characterized the postwar experiences of African Americans in Los Angeles and other American cities. Although some may find such broad comparisons unsettling, historians have emphasized in recent years the "racial indeterminacy" of Mexican Americans, and have illustrated the ways in which that group has used this ambiguity to its advantage. Clearly, the experience of Mexican American soldiers during the war effort heightened a sense of patriotic nationalism in the Chicano community and inculcated a sense of entitlement to the good life that burgeoned in suburban Southern California. Neighborhoods in the San Gabriel Valley such as Pico Rivera cradled a Chicano middle class during the postwar period, while communities such as Lakewood tolerated those families of Mexican descent who willingly identified themselves as "Spanish." Less segregated than African Americans, Mexican Americans in postwar Los Angeles straddled the fence between chocolate cities and vanilla suburbs.<sup>71</sup>

The brief career of pop star Ritchie Valens illuminates some of the ambiguities underlying Mexican American identity in postwar Los Angeles. Valens grew up in Pacoima, a racially and ethnically heterogeneous suburb on the outskirts of the San Fernando Valley. During the late 1950s, Valens, then known to his friends and family as Ritchie Valenzuela, attended San

Fernando High School, which sheltered a striking and seemingly amicable intermixture of Chicano, black, Asian American, and white students. There, Valens earned local recognition by singing for the Silhouettes, a multiracial band popular among white and Chicano car clubs in East Los Angeles. The record producer Bob Keane recognized Valenzuela's potential and, after changing his name to Ritchie Valens, prepared the singer for mass-market appeal. Valens's Anglicized name reflected the racial premises on which Mexican Americans could attain success in show business, but his musical sensibilities drew on the polyphonic sounds of Southern California's diverse social mix. His childhood familiarity with traditional Mexican folk ballads, combined with his appreciation of rhythm and blues, rockabilly, and country western, sparked his talent for creating a unique sound that proved widely popular with a national audience. Valens's two greatest hits, "La Bamba," a traditional Mexican *son jarocho* taught to Valens by his uncle, and "Donna," a song about a failed romance with a white classmate whose father forbade her to go out with "that Mexican," illuminated the singer's transracial appeal and typified the subtle nuances embedded in postwar Mexican American identity.<sup>72</sup>

Valens belonged to a broader musical culture that maintained remnants of the cultural interactions that ensued during Southern California's Swing Era. Despite the overarching pattern of spatial and racial segregation, certain musical venues remained points of contact among black, Chicano, Asian, and white youths. In East Los Angeles, the Angelus Hall, East Los Angeles College, Rainbow Gardens, and the El Monte Legion Stadium featured R&B and rock and roll musicians that attracted predominantly Chicano and black audiences. The Zenda Ballroom downtown and the Hollywood Palladium echoed with the sounds of the Latin jazz that flourished in 1950s Los Angeles, catering to a mixture of blacks, Latinos, and Jews. These venues showcased the new musical styles that captivated the city's diverse populace and, to a certain extent, preserved what remained of the heterosocial New Deal culture that flourished during the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>73</sup>

The popularity of these musical venues illustrates a key strategy by which the region's youth found the means to "cruise around" the hegemonic bloc that enforced spatial and racial segregation, but it also provoked a powerful counter-effort to reinforce the cultural paradigm of chocolate cities and vanilla suburbs.<sup>74</sup> The Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), under the leadership of chief William Parker, played a key role in this effort. Parker, an elite U.S. Army soldier who fought in World War II, became police chief in 1950 and restructured the police department along military lines. Although Parker managed to weed out the entrenched corruption in

the LAPD, his militarization of the department inaugurated an epoch of sour relations between the police department and the black and Chicano communities, which have provided a constant source of trenchant criticism of law enforcement in Los Angeles since the Parker years.<sup>75</sup>

If the LAPD and its infamous Red Squad targeted union organizing in Los Angeles during the reign of the open shop, interracial mixing became the new scourge of law enforcement during the post-World War II period. The trumpeter Art Farmer, for example, recalls police harassment at a “nice club, what we would call black and tan, because black people and white people went there too.” Los Angeles police officers, however, broke up the scene “because they said they didn’t want this racial mixing there, and if the club didn’t change its policy there was going to be trouble.”<sup>76</sup> John Dolphin, owner of South Central’s R&B record stores, organized a rally of 150 local businessmen who protested the LAPD’s practice of turning away white patrons from black businesses on the grounds that it was simply “too dangerous to hang around black neighborhoods.”<sup>77</sup> The musician Johnny Otis, who hosted a local television show for Los Angeles bands and their fans, described how the police would harass the youths who participated in the program: “The cops would come and hassle the kids standing in line, . . . they see the black and Hispanic and Asian kids and they don’t like it. They just didn’t want to see that. If it were all Asian and Hispanic and black they wouldn’t care, but there were whites there and they’re mixing with the blacks and what not.” Such tactics on the part of law enforcement so frustrated Otis that he ceased to promote his concerts in Los Angeles. The police effort to prevent interracial mixing within the venues of Los Angeles’ nightlife suggests not only the degree to which such mixing persisted throughout the postwar period, but also a reinvigorated determination among city officials to enforce the emerging paradigm of space and race in the postwar urban region.<sup>78</sup>

Police harassment of minority youths had deadlier consequences than the closing of nightclubs. On the evening of August 11, 1965, the California Highway Patrol stopped Marquette Frye and his brother, who were found to be driving under the influence of alcohol. The officers handling the situation were about to release Frye and his brother when less forgiving officers appeared on the scene. The ensuing confrontation between the police and the Frye family aroused the anger of a nearby crowd of observers, all black, who began throwing rocks, bottles, and sticks at the officers as they fled in their cars. From this spark, the worst race riot in American history erupted over the course of five days, leaving thirty-four people (mostly Watts residents) dead, 1,032 injured, 3,952 arrested, and more than forty million dol-

lars in property damage. In the wake of this tragedy, police chief William Parker offered his sensitive assessment of the situation: "One person threw a rock, and then, like monkeys in a zoo, others started throwing rocks."<sup>79</sup>

The racist comparison between African Americans and monkeys notwithstanding, Parker's description of Watts as a "zoo" not only bears an affinity to Reagan's vivid description of Los Angeles' inner city as "the jungle," but also implies the extent to which postwar suburbanization placed Southern California's black community in a virtual state of captivity. Excluded from the region's new suburban developments, African Americans found themselves boxed in by the exclusionary policies of federal agencies, as well as by the violence deployed by white homeowners and racist police officers. As the interracial working-class coalitions of the New Deal era fragmented under the aegis of the Cold War, and as a new pattern of racial segregation surfaced in the postwar American city, black Americans forged new models of political activism that asserted an invigorated sense of black identity and emphasized the distinct needs of the black community. The frustrations embedded in such activism at times exploded in violence, as it did in Los Angeles in August 1965 and throughout the rash of urban uprisings that punctuated the nation's "long hot summer" of the mid-1960s. But while the 1960s codification of identity politics among various racial groups elicited, and continues to elicit, charges of separatism from white liberals and conservatives alike, the logic of such politics mirrored the separatist pattern of decentralized urbanization that overtook American cities in the aftermath of World War II.

#### DERACINATING DOWNTOWN

The expanding concentration of poverty along the southern and eastern periphery of the city center vivified the crisis that afflicted downtown Los Angeles. Since the turn of the twentieth century, Los Angeles has followed a decentralized pattern of development, but that did not prevent the formation of a centralized urban core as far back as the 1920s, which sustained the concentration of the region's commercial and cultural activities. Office buildings, banks, restaurants, movie palaces, and streetcars lined the thoroughfares of Broadway and Spring Streets, offering some semblance of the centralized city. World War II, however, reversed that development by initiating an accelerated pattern of residential and industrial decentralization, diminishing the commercial and cultural prominence of downtown. By the mid-1950s, urban critics and boosters alike dismissed downtown Los Angeles as a mere "illusion," while national magazines such as *U.S. News and World*

*Report* underscored the perception of a downtown in decline: "The downtown area in Los Angeles has been hurt badly by the new patterns created by long-distance freeway driving and suburban living. Property values are down. There are more vacancies. Older buildings require repairs and replacements. Many blocks are filled with stores which look like outdoor bargain basements. This is not a problem indigenous to Los Angeles. All big cities have the same trend. But here the figures are especially depressing."<sup>80</sup>

Popular accounts of urban decline in Los Angeles implicated the presence of nonwhite social groups. *U.S. News and World Report*, for example, described a downtown "overrun with shoddy discount houses displaying signs in both English and Spanish."<sup>81</sup> A 1941 Works Progress Administration (WPA) guide to Los Angeles highlighted the disjuncture between the "grimy structures and crumbling adobes of the pueblo period" and the "monumental modern buildings" that began to appear in the downtown scene. "Evidences of the city's dissimilar periods and cultures create a feeling of confusion in this vicinity," the very kind of confusion that troubled a postwar generation of urban planners who sought to impose the modernist principles of order and uniformity on the urban landscape. The same guide identified Main Street as "the principle business street of a district with some 60,000 people of foreign birth—mostly Japanese, Fillipinos, Chinese, Mexicans, Negroes, Jews and Italians," and singled out this space for harboring "diverse types of derelicts and transients."<sup>82</sup> Throughout the postwar period, downtown Los Angeles became identified with the kind of racial heterogeneity that a new generation of suburban Americans abhorred.

American Indians soon became a part of downtown's social mix, particularly during the 1950s. The post-World War II period marked the expansion and urbanization of California's Indian community and, as a result of this process, Los Angeles sheltered the nation's largest concentration of Indians by the mid-1970s. In the early 1950s, the Bureau of Indian Affairs established its "Relocation" Program to generate greater self-sufficiency among Indians by removing them from reservation areas and placing them in jobs in western industrial centers. Though Los Angeles had historically maintained a small Indian presence relative to other racial and ethnic groups, the decades following World War II saw the expansion of an Indian population representing the many tribal affiliations of the Midwest and Southwest. In 1955, Los Angeles County had an Indian population estimated at six thousand; this more than doubled in the span of five years. In the twenty-one-year period between 1955 and 1976, approximately thirty thousand Indians were relocated to Los Angeles, most of whom initially settled as tenants in the low-rent, central city neighborhoods that had not yet been razed by

a downtown in decline: "The downtown badly by the new patterns created by suburban living. Property values are buildings require repairs and replacements which look like outdoor bargain stores which look like outdoor bargain stores indigenous to Los Angeles. All big cities are especially depressing."<sup>80</sup> In Los Angeles implicated the presence of shoddy discount houses displaying a 1941 Works Progress Administration highlighted the disjuncture between the "oboes of the pueblo period" and the "modernist" that began to appear in the downtown "modernist" periods and cultures create a feeling of every kind of confusion that troubled a modernist who sought to impose the modernist on the urban landscape. The same guide to the downtown business street of a district with "mostly Japanese, Fillipinos, Chinese, and singled out this space for harassment of transients."<sup>82</sup> Throughout the postwar period identified with the kind of racial segregation of suburban Americans abhorred. The start of downtown's social mix, particularly during the World War II period marked the expansion of the downtown community and, as a result of this period's largest concentration of Indians in the Bureau of Indian Affairs established to generate greater self-sufficiency among reservation areas and placing them in jobs in Los Angeles had historically maintained to other racial and ethnic groups, the period of expansion of an Indian population in the Midwest and Southwest. In the Indian population estimated at six thousand in a span of five years. In the twenty-one-year period approximately thirty thousand Indians of whom initially settled as tenants in shacks that had not yet been razed by

urban renewal programs. Leaving the reservation without money, jobs, work skills, and, in most cases, basic familiarity with English, the 1950s generation of Indian arrivals in Los Angeles remained vulnerable to disease, unemployment, anomie, and, in particular, alcoholism in their confrontation with city life.<sup>83</sup>

The racialized milieu of downtown contrasted sharply with a vision of downtown redevelopment that took shape in Southern California's corporate community. For the business executives and city officials who constituted the downtown establishment of American cities, declining revenues, increasing crime, and the general exodus of a more affluent corps of workers, taxpayers, and consumers proved worrisome. To reverse downtown's downward spiral, business leaders formed alliances with municipal officials and labor groups. The "growth coalitions" that took shape in the nation's cities marshaled an array of public and private resources that transformed the historic function of the central business district. As with postwar suburbanization, the federal government played no small part in this process. As we shall see in chapters 5 and 6, public monies available for the construction of highways made possible the clearing of vast segments of downtown property that had been identified as "blighted," and Title 1 of the 1949 Housing Act authorized municipal governments to purchase, assemble, and clear blighted areas and then sell the bulldozed land to private developers, ostensibly for the purposes of housing. Such power encouraged municipal agencies to mitigate the effects of the postwar urban crisis by marshaling an array of public and private resources to reverse the fate of the postwar American city.<sup>84</sup>

Endowed with federal support, corporate leaders took the initiative in the effort to rebuild the nation's downtowns. In the two decades following World War II, the economic health of the central business district increasingly depended on the presence of national and multinational corporations, especially those affiliated with the expanding FIRE (finance, insurance, and real estate) sector of the economy. These industries dominated urban economies during the postwar period and compelled corporate executives to take an active interest in downtown revitalization. Corporations thus more or less directly sponsored the urban renewal process of the 1950s and 1960s as corporate leaders served on planning agencies and collaborated with city officials to create a downtown infrastructure amenable to the corporate world and its professional legions.<sup>85</sup>

In response to downtown decline, Los Angeles mayor Norris Poulson expressed a sentiment in 1955 shared by many of his mayoral counterparts elsewhere during the postwar period: "Sure we're decentralized here in Los



Angeles, but we've got to support and strengthen the downtown area. It's my notion that no city can be a great city without a strong downtown core."<sup>86</sup> Private businessmen concurred with the mayor's opinion. Walter Braunschweiger, executive vice president of Bank of America and chairman of the Los Angeles Central City Committee, described the imperative to redevelop downtown: "Los Angeles has a remarkable opportunity to proceed with the development of a new downtown. There is a need for new, larger structure and for investors to build buildings and for us to build a city. . . . [T]he plan can enhance the values of the Los Angeles central area as the headquarters for business and as a cultural and recreational center."<sup>87</sup>

In that endeavor, public officials, labor groups, and corporate interests vested in downtown redevelopment established various agencies to remedy inner-city decline. Los Angeles' growth coalition comprised many organizations such as the Greater Los Angeles Plans Incorporated (GLAPI) and the Downtown Businessmen's Association, which represented the support of twenty-five of downtown's most prominent businesses, including Norman Chandler of the Times Mirror Corporation. At a moment when the economic vitality of downtown Los Angeles weakened under the decentralizing force of suburbanization, the city's business elite sought ways to secure the presence of large firms to maintain regional economic development.<sup>88</sup>

Among GLAPI's first tasks was the redevelopment of Bunker Hill (see figure 1), formerly a middle-class residential enclave in the heart of downtown Los Angeles, which by the 1940s sheltered a working-class immigrant community of tenement houses, mom and pop stores, cafes, restaurants, drugstores, shoe-repair shops, and dry-cleaning services. That neighborhood presented an eyesore for city officials and downtown executives who envisioned a sanitized corporate image of downtown Los Angeles. In 1939, the HOLC identified the "blighted" condition of Bunker Hill, noting in particular its racial diversity: "This is one of the older and practically obsolete single family residential sections, having had its beginning 50 years or more ago. Subversive racial elements predominate. . . . [I]t is a slum area and one of the city's melting pots." The HOLC targeted Bunker Hill as a "slum clearance project," but recognized that "definite steps have as yet [not] been taken."<sup>89</sup>

The first plans for Bunker Hill's redevelopment reflected the initial compatibility of public housing with redevelopment, as prescribed by New Deal policy. Architects Robert Alexander and Drayton Bryant, both of whom shared the social vision that informed the planning policies of the New Deal, proposed a redevelopment scheme that ensured the maintenance of the "predominantly residential" character of Bunker Hill, using funds from the



FIGURE 1. Noir Los Angeles, circa 1940: "blight" on Bunker Hill. (Courtesy of the Los Angeles Public Library.)

1949 Housing Act to build eleven apartment buildings "so spaced and oriented as to take full advantage of views, sun and breeze."<sup>90</sup>

The mid-1950s defeat of public housing, however, freed the Los Angeles Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) to pursue a redevelopment program that did not contain a housing component, one that more closely reflected the corporate-civic vision of GLAPI and the Downtown Businessmen's Association. A sense of betrayal descended on the soon-to-be-displaced residents of Bunker Hill, who waged a campaign against the CRA through letter writing, lawsuits, and public protests. Much of their outrage focused on the apparent contradiction in the logic of the city's probusiness forces, which decried government-subsidized housing as "socialistic," yet welcomed the use of public monies for slum clearance and urban renewal. Without the support of organized labor, which by the 1950s had abandoned New Deal issues such as public housing and had embraced the prodevelopment agenda of the city's corporate interests, the community activists of Bunker Hill found little support for their cause.<sup>91</sup>

Bunker Hill redevelopment would thus proceed without the original housing scheme proposed by Alexander and Bryant. Vested with the broad powers of eminent domain to acquire, administer, sell, and lease property, the Los Angeles CRA condemned Bunker Hill as “blighted” in 1951 and slated the district for redevelopment. The CRA used official reports from fire, police, and health departments, all of which emphasized the dangerous and decrepit conditions of that neighborhood. After the piecemeal acquisition of Bunker Hill properties, the CRA relocated the residents and businesses of Bunker Hill and began site demolition in 1960.<sup>92</sup>

In the course of a single decade, the CRA wiped out one hundred years of organic growth in Bunker Hill. The corporatization of that neighborhood closely followed the discipline of modernist city planning, which embraced the principles of homogeneity, uniformity, and monumentality over diversity, complexity, and locality. Bunker Hill itself was smoothed, homogenized, graded, and degraded. High-rise corporate “monuments” appeared, linked by private pedestrian walkways and plazas. Luxury apartment towers substituted for tenement houses, catering to Bunker Hill’s anticipated white-collar clientele. The streets that had sustained Bunker Hill’s bustling social life gave way to multilane thoroughfares that bisected vast parking structures. “Superblocks” and “megastructures” highlighted the landscape of the new Bunker Hill and reflected the new spatial order that overtook American inner-city landscapes during the postwar period (see figure 2).<sup>93</sup>

Aware that office towers and luxury apartments alone could not sufficiently anchor a corporate workforce in a revitalized downtown, city officials and corporate elites sought to implement a new cultural infrastructure within downtown’s parameters. Their logic reflected an important pattern in the history of urban growth. Cultural institutions such as museums, symphonies, theaters, and universities have historically played an auxiliary, yet important, role in the promotion of urban development. The corporate makeover of the nation’s inner cities implicated such institutions of high culture. The early 1960s construction of New York City’s Lincoln Center, for example, epitomized the use of high culture in the postwar drama of urban redevelopment.<sup>94</sup>

In their quest to assert the cultural sophistication of their city, civic elites in Los Angeles pursued their own version of Lincoln Center. The construction of the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion and the Mark Taper Forum (together referred to as the Music Center) illustrates the process by which high culture came to displace working-class immigrant culture in downtown spaces such as Bunker Hill. “In a dazzle of diamonds and décolletage, with cinema stars, celebrities and just plain millionaires on hand,” the Music Center

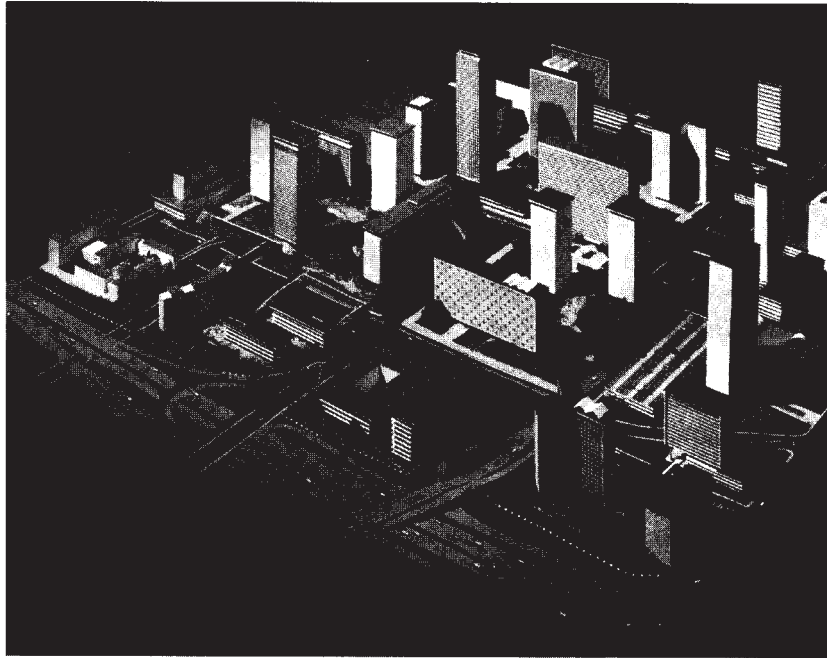


FIGURE 2. Model for the new Bunker Hill, circa 1950s. (Courtesy of the Los Angeles Public Library.)

opened on December 6, 1964, illustrating the cultural politics of downtown revitalization.<sup>95</sup> As chapter 5 emphasizes, however, downtown's makeover also included more popular cultural institutions, as the construction of Dodger Stadium in nearby Chavez Ravine comprised the popular counterpart to the Music Center, both cultural centerpieces of the "new downtown."

The opening of the Music Center marked a turning point in the regional history of elite formation. Until Dorothy Chandler executed her scheme, the ranks of Southern California's elite remained firmly grounded in WASP identity. To the consternation of the downtown establishment, however, Chandler "crossed over" to the city's burgeoning Westside, to enlist Jewish financial support for her vision of high culture in downtown Los Angeles. She turned to Mark Taper, who saved the day for Mrs. Chandler by handing her a last-minute sum of one million dollars. Taper's contribution symbolized a kind of olive branch that mended the widening rift between Westside Jewish wealth and downtown WASP wealth, and signaled the initial acceptance of Jews into the upper echelons of Southern California society.<sup>96</sup> The

Dorothy Chandler Pavilion and the Mark Taper Forum thus stood as tributes to the ethnic rapprochement between WASPs and Jews in the upper tiers of Southern California's class hierarchy.

Despite the spatial discrepancy between the monumentality of the new downtown and the decentralized, low-density development of its surrounding urban region, the postwar makeover of downtown Los Angeles reveals the extent to which urban planners predicated their redevelopment efforts on a set of values similar to that which guided suburban development. Their efforts to implement homogeneous, uniform spaces within the parameters of downtown and to obliterate the existing spaces of complexity and diversity reflected the same principles that informed the design and construction of communities such as Lakewood, as well as the cultural institutions that sustained their quality of life: shopping malls, theme parks, and freeways. Chapter 5 extends this discussion further, emphasizing the ways in which Dodger Stadium mirrored the postwar suburbanization of the city center, but that process followed a set of principles that guided the organization of urban and suburban space throughout the postwar period.

If suburbanization, at least in its postwar manifestation, implied a racialized process that privileged an inclusive white identity, then the suburbanization of downtown Los Angeles underscored the saliency of race in the midcentury transformation of urban life. Writing to city councilman Edward Roybal in the midst of the Bunker Hill controversy, Maria Gallegos de Hillary thanked the city's first twentieth-century Mexican American official for his outspoken stance against downtown redevelopment: "If it should go through none of us in the old neighborhoods of the town would feel safe. . . . One would think that this were Russia where a community of individuals can be liquidated at the whim of a planner. . . . Yo no soy en su distrito, pero soy de tu raza [I am not in your district, but I am of your race]."97 Such sentiments, while reflecting a sense of ethnic pride, also capture the ways in which urban renewal programs of the 1950s conjured feelings of racial solidarity among those groups adversely affected by the convulsive transformation of American urban life at midcentury.

#### SUBURBANISM AS A WAY OF LIFE

The spectacular growth of Southern California in the decades following World War II brought national attention to the region. *Newsweek*, for example, declared that "it's still an age of miracles" in its 1953 cover story about Los Angeles and its postwar development. "The most rapidly expanding area on earth," Los Angeles surfaced in the pages of *Newsweek* as "big

league country" even before the arrival of the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1957. Other national magazines offered similar glimpses of the "new" Los Angeles. *Life*, for example, ran a 1960 cover story titled "Los Angeles in a New Image," and *National Geographic* showcased an elaborate photo essay on the "Colossus of the West," depicting the same cultural icons that rival magazines highlighted in their coverage of the expanding western metropolis: "Hollywood's gaudy white way," the "ecstatic world" of Disneyland, the "ultramodern" Dodger Stadium, and "the ribbons of freeway."<sup>98</sup>

In the cultural discourse of postwar America, Hollywood, Disneyland, Dodger Stadium, and the freeways symbolized the "new" Los Angeles that took shape in the decades following World War II. In the following chapters, we shall discover how each of these institutions corresponded to the various dimensions of Southern California's postwar transformation that have been considered in the preceding pages. Hollywood, through its rendition of film noir and science fiction, visualized the "blight" that afflicted Southern California's urban core during the mid-1940s, while Disneyland encompassed the utopian aspirations that guided the region's explosive phase of suburban development. Dodger Stadium demonstrated, ostensibly, the regenerative possibilities of urban renewal, while the implementation of a unified network of freeways underscored the centrality of highway construction to the postwar urban experience. Inner-city decline, suburbanization, urban renewal, and highway construction transformed the American city in the decades following World War II, and the combination of these factors wielded a new cultural configuration that defined the "new" Los Angeles in the second half of the twentieth century.

These spatial processes, however, simultaneously engendered a growing awareness of race and racial difference, and this too dominated public discussion in and about the "new" Los Angeles. In 1956, *U.S. News and World Report* soberly reported, "West Coast, Too, Has Its Race Problems." The article described the dramatic expansion of Los Angeles' black community. "Negroes are flocking to Los Angeles from the South," where they "meet hostility from 'Anglo' whites and sometimes, too, Mexican Americans." The national newsmagazine reported this development to its white readership with a faint hint of alarm: "At every hand, in the factories, offices and schools of Los Angeles, you'll find growing numbers of the new Negro—ambitious . . . and aggressive in his demands." Local magazines intensified the spotlight on the "blackening" of postwar Los Angeles. *Los Angeles*, "the magazine of the good life in Southern California," featured an article about the problems facing "our Negro community," while *Frontier* magazine, reflecting the more liberal slant of *The Nation*, which owned it, reported

that Los Angeles "may not know it," but it was "spiritually below the Mason Dixon Line."<sup>99</sup>

Thus, to the chagrin of those who, like police chief William Parker, upheld Southern California as the nation's white spot, the "new Negro" became part and parcel of the new Los Angeles. By and large, black newcomers to Los Angeles during and after World War II were excluded from the postwar suburban boom, and their confinement within the parameters of an expanding ghetto garnered heightened awareness of Southern California's "widening black-belt." The "racial revolution" that exploded during the war years thus set the stage for the spatial and racial polarization of Southern California's postwar urban region and anticipated the formation of a racialized political culture that brought a decisive end to Southern California's New Deal order. While postwar Americans could read about the "blackening" of Los Angeles in the pages of newspapers and magazines, they could also witness Hollywood's rendition of that process through the arrival of new film genres that focused on the "black" city and its alien invaders. Film noir and the urban science fiction film delineated a set of representations that dramatized the nation's urban crisis, and Los Angeles, a rapidly expanding metropolis in deep denial about its own urbanity, played a starring role in such representations.