

American Suburban History: Past Themes and Current Projects

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EU Erasmus + Cooperative Partnership
“Urbanism and Suburbanization in the
EU Countries and Abroad”

SUBEUA Transnational Meeting
University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany
September 14, 2022



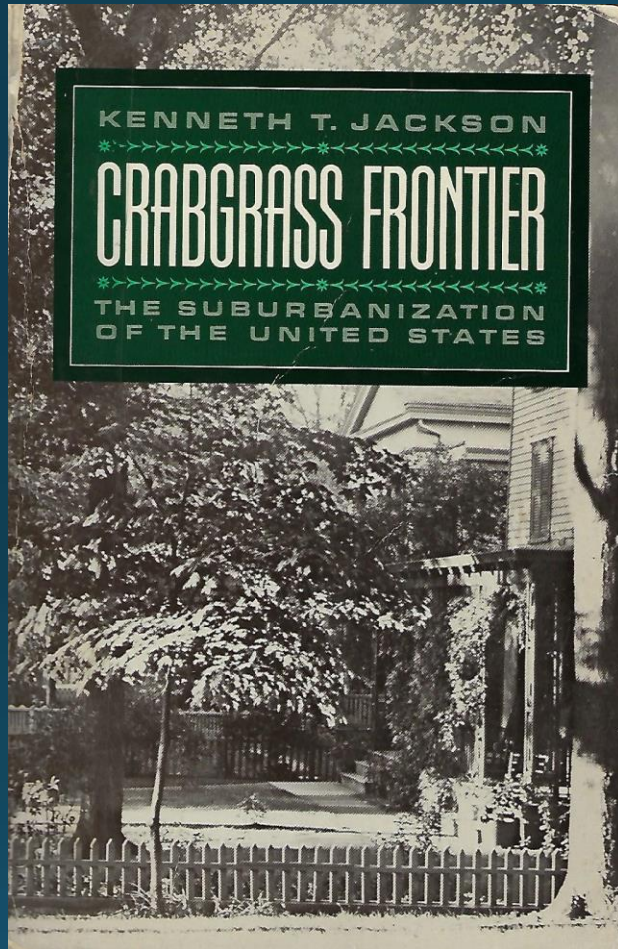
Columbia University



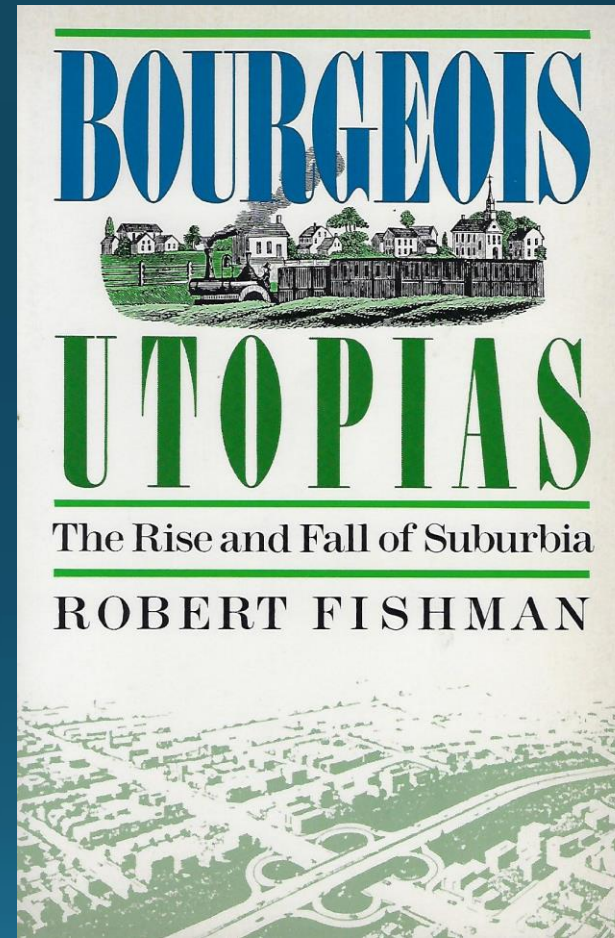
Kenneth Jackson



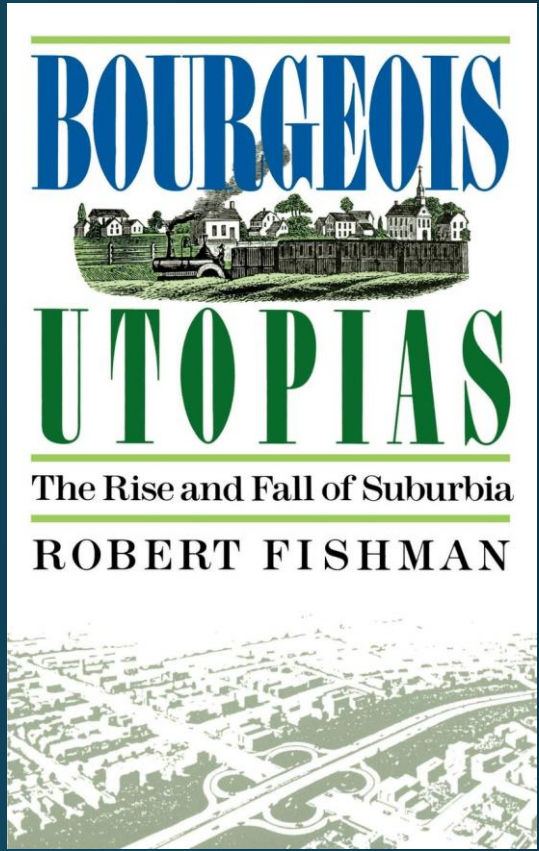
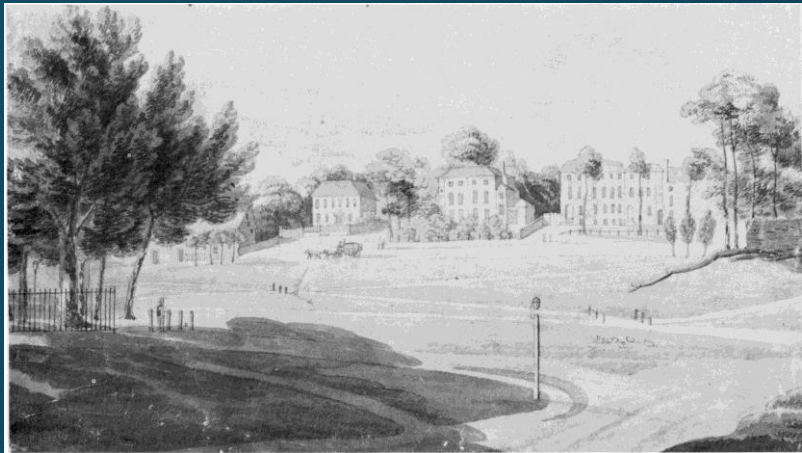
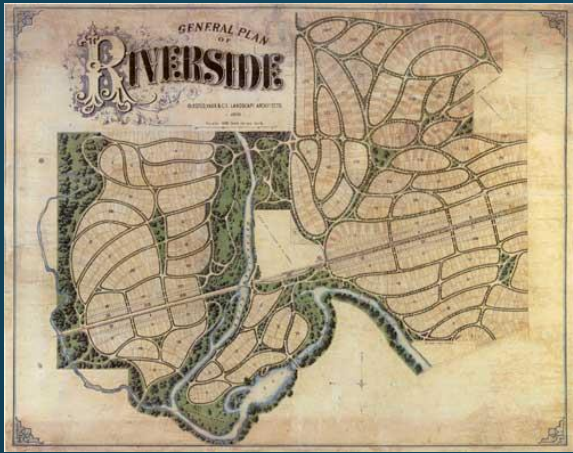
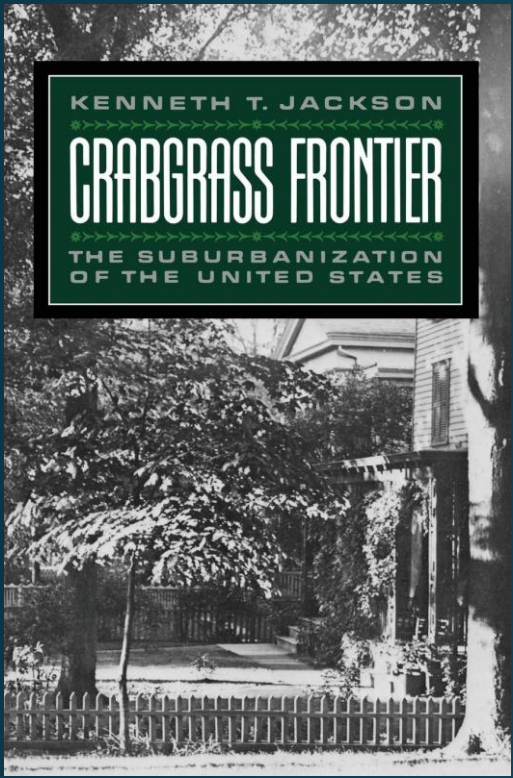
Classics works in the “orthodox” school of suburban history



Published 1985

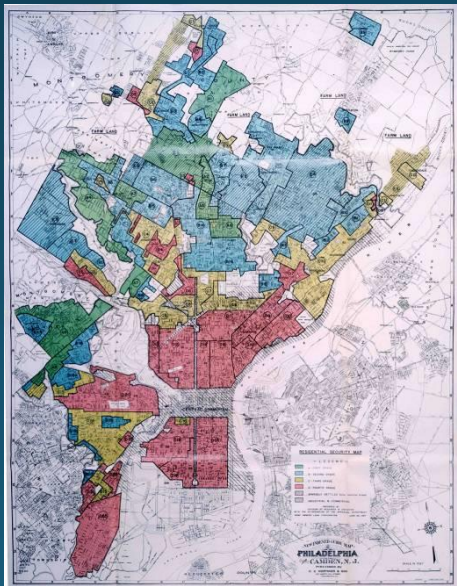


Published 1987



Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias*, (1987) rooted US suburbia in a history of elite, Anglo-American cultural values over two centuries.

Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: Suburbanization of the United States* (1985), emphasized suburbia as a quintessentially American phenomenon driven by race, real estate, government and values about home and family.



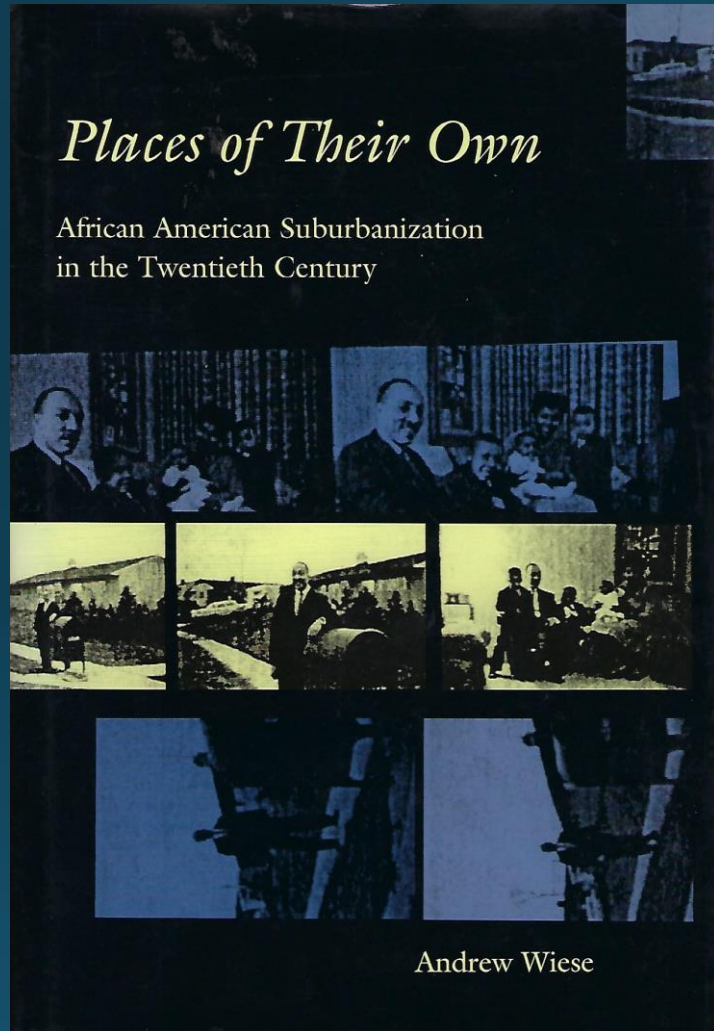
African American suburbia, Chagrin Falls Park, Ohio.



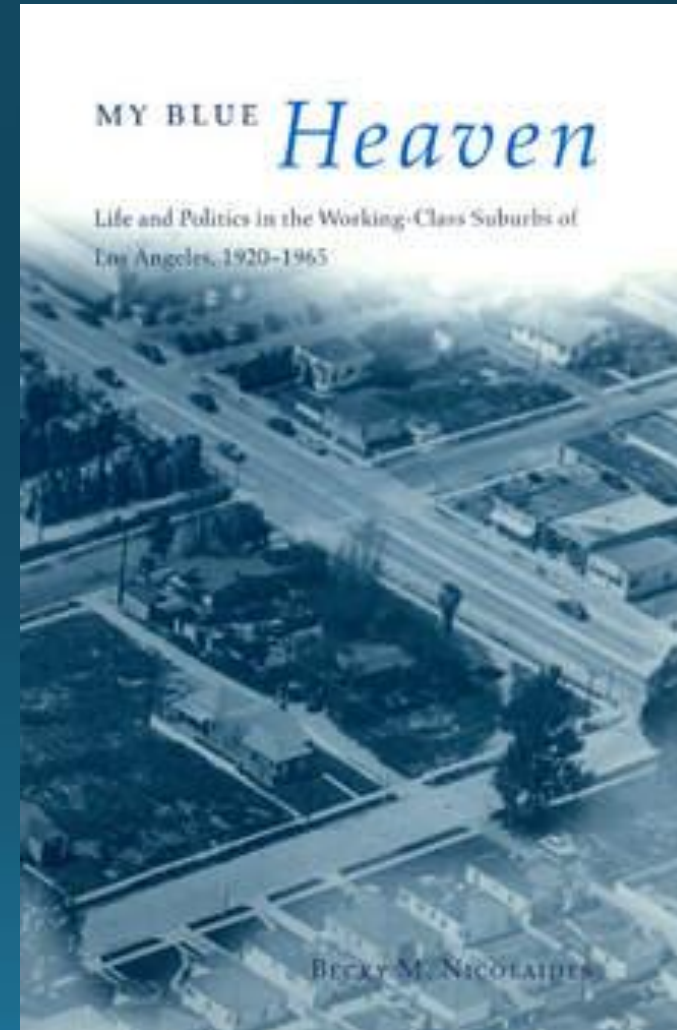
White working-class suburbia, Los Angeles, 1920s



Andy and Becky's first books – part of "revisionist" wave of suburban history



Published 2004



Published 2002

Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the 20th Century (2004).

Key Themes of the Book:

-African Americans lived in and moved to US suburbs throughout the 20th century.

-Black suburbanization was cumulative and linked through time by African American desires to create places of their own.

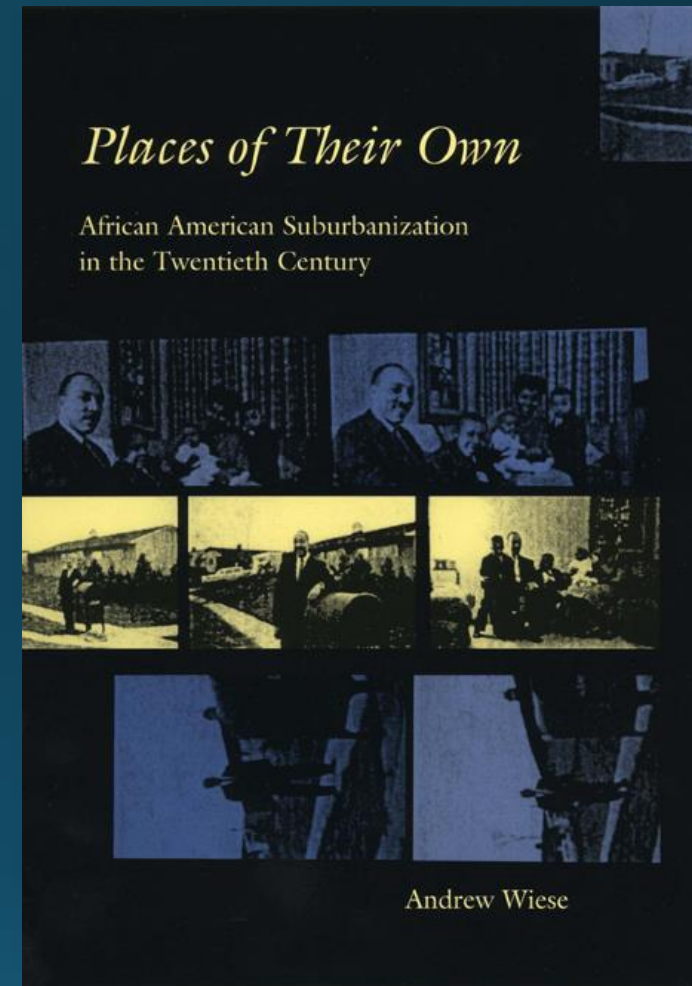
-African Americans molded homes and neighborhoods into "safe spaces" to nurture families, defend interests, and move up. Values for home ownership, family, community, and hope drove the process.

-Suburban homes were not only private retreats, but arenas of political struggle and resistance to white supremacy.

- "Race and class formation were fundamentally spatial practices." (7)

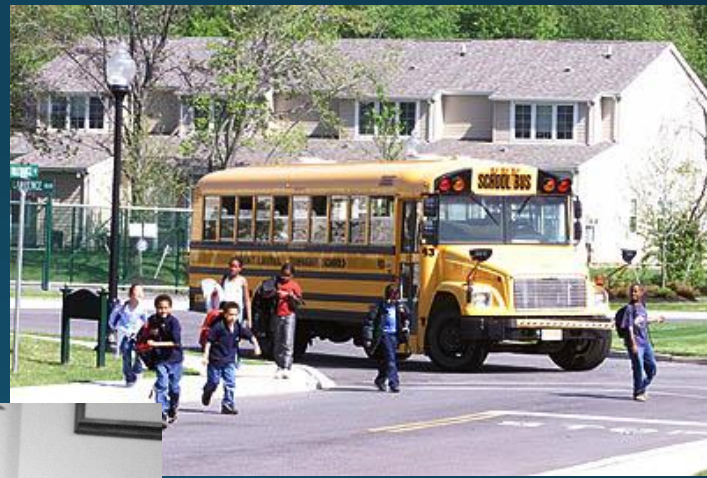
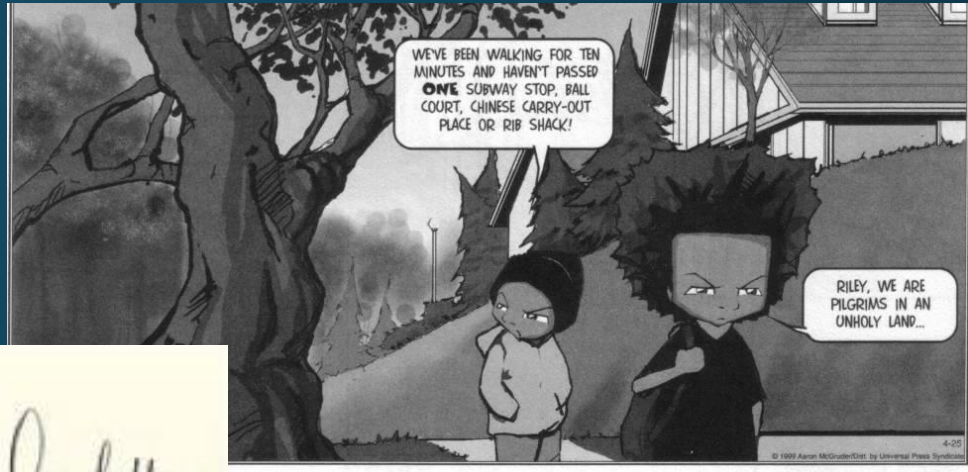
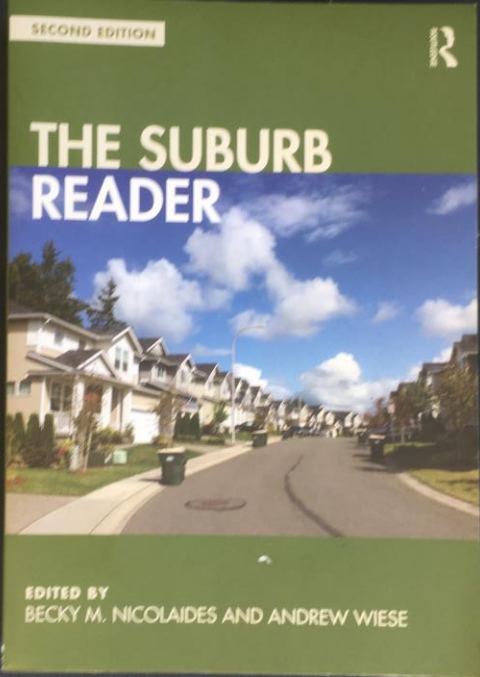
"Suburbs played a key part in the movement to racialize urban space, that is to link specific places to the evolving racial hierarchy, limiting access, cementing advantage and disadvantage, and defining locations and their residents in the same separate and unequal terms."
41-42.

- African American suburbanization reveals need to rethink U.S. suburbs overall



See:

<https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/P/bo3619193.html>



"Suburbanization is a process that has shaped crucial historical developments in America." 1

"We emphasize a broad definition of suburbia that encompasses a long sweep of time and a diverse collection of communities, landscapes, and functions." (8-9)



The Green City: Environmental Politics in San Diego, California, since 1960



Co-founder of Citizens Coordinate, Esther Scott, and present president, Doretha Edmonson, symbolically stand guard over the Cabrillo Freeway, San Diego's most beautiful scenic drive. The freeways-old pressure group for urban history has forced city re-examination of plans to widen, primarily by cutting into the slopes on the west side of the freeway, the existing road from four to eight lanes. (Photographs by Bill Reed)

Cabrillo freeway fight

CITIZENS COORDINATE TAKES ON THE CITY AND THE CHAMBER

By Harold Keen

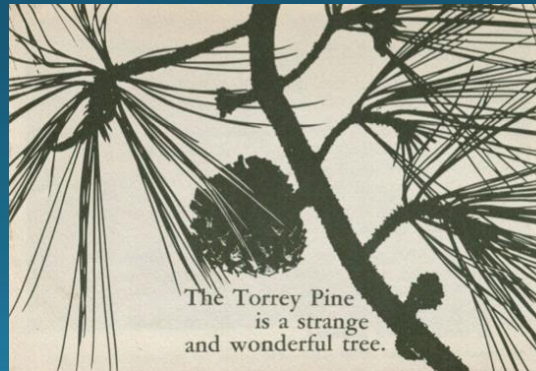
● SAVE SAN DIEGO

- THE SAN DIEGO ENVIRONMENT PACES TOTAL DESTRUCTION...
- OUR WAY OF LIFE IS AT STAKE...
- SAN DIEGO IS RAPIDLY BECOMING ANOTHER LOS ANGELES...
- VALUABLE CANYONS AND FUTURE PARK LANDS ARE BEING DESTROYED...
- OTHER CANYONS ARE THREATENED BY DEVELOPMENT...
- TECOLOTE CANYON FACES THE BULLDOZERS...OTHERS WILL FOLLOW
- UNLESS WE ACT NOW...
- WE FACE AN UNTHINKABLE FUTURE...

HELP SAVE SAN DIEGO

SAVE SAN DIEGO IS A MOVEMENT TO UNITE ALL CONCERNED GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS FOR EFFECTIVE ACTION...NOW

- WE INVITE YOU TO OUR FIRST MEETING
- WE NEED YOU...SAN DIEGO NEEDS YOU



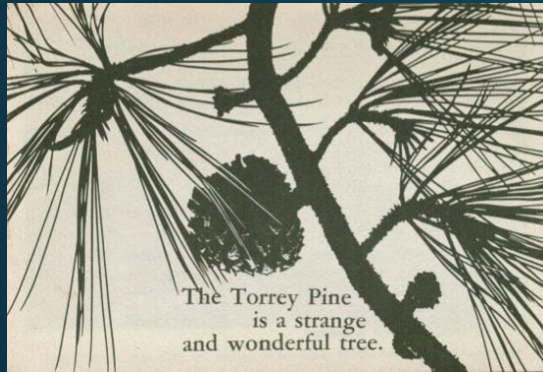
The Torrey Pine is a strange and wonderful tree.



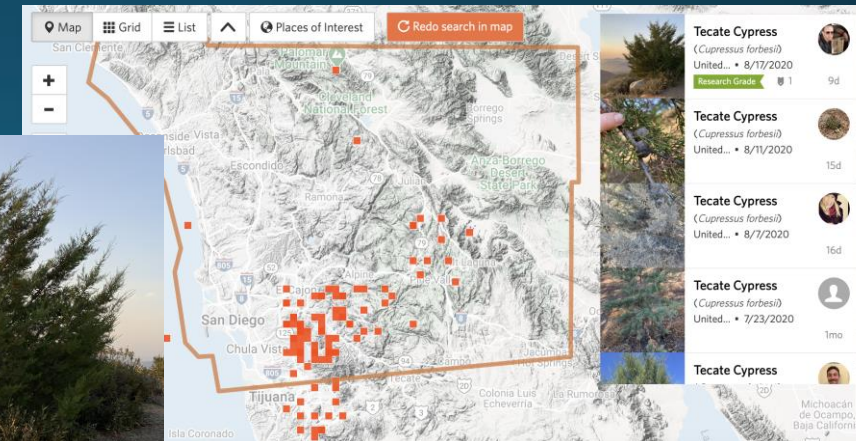
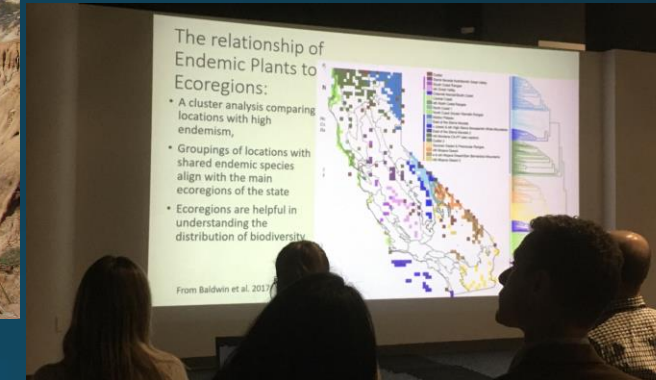
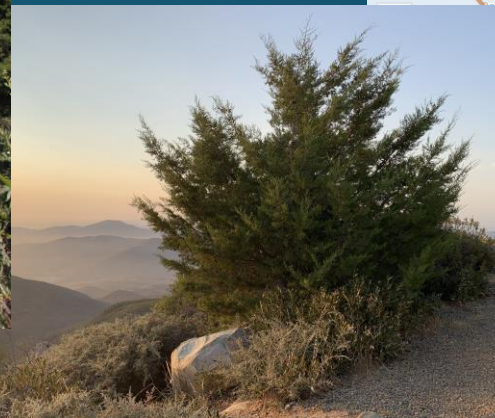
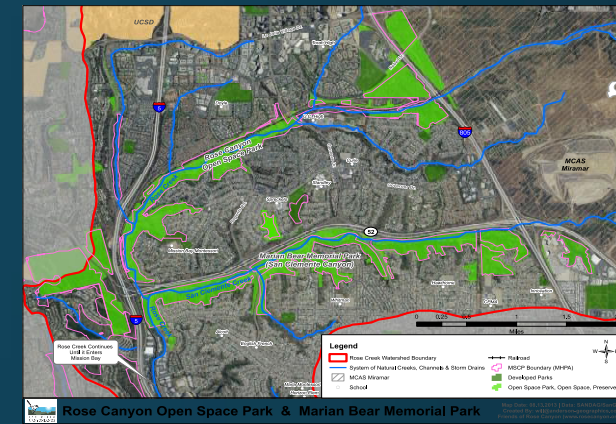
SAN DIEGO CITY COUNCIL ITEM 201 DECEMBER 5, 2016
University Community Plan Amendment



San Diego: Bio-Diversity Hotspot



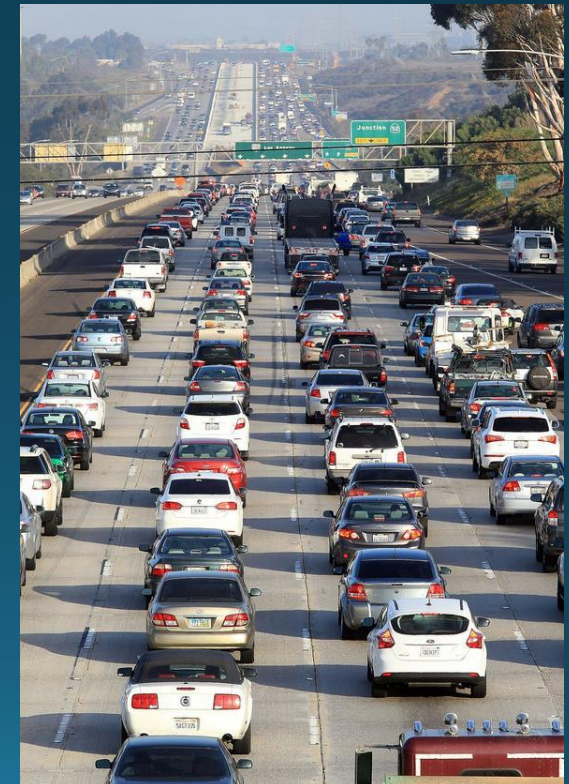
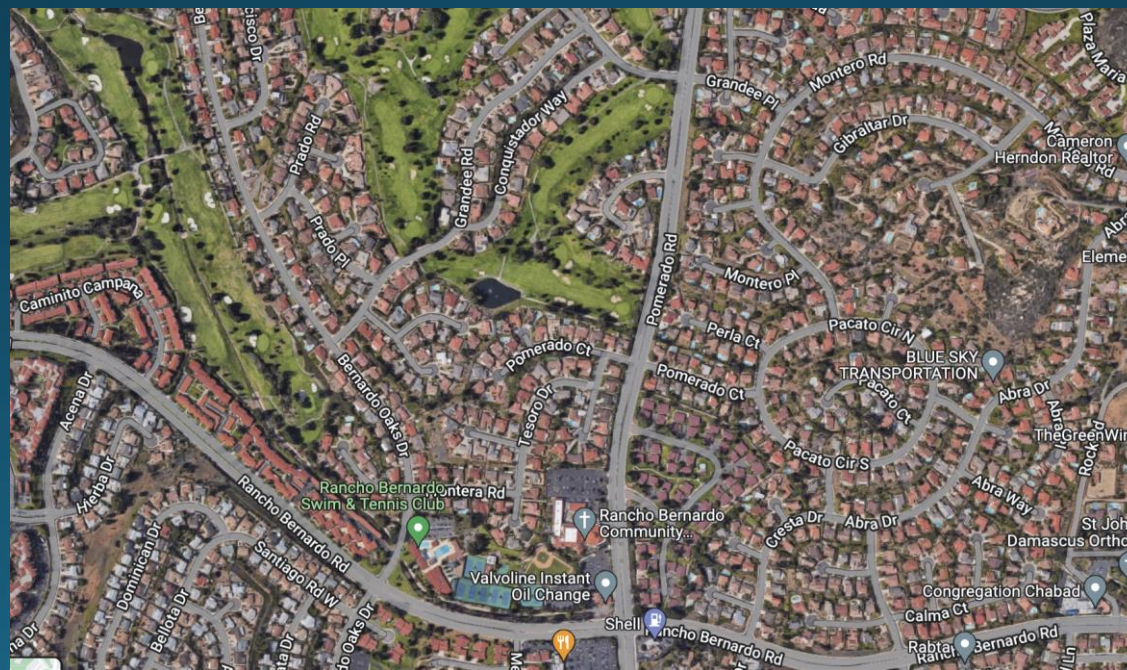
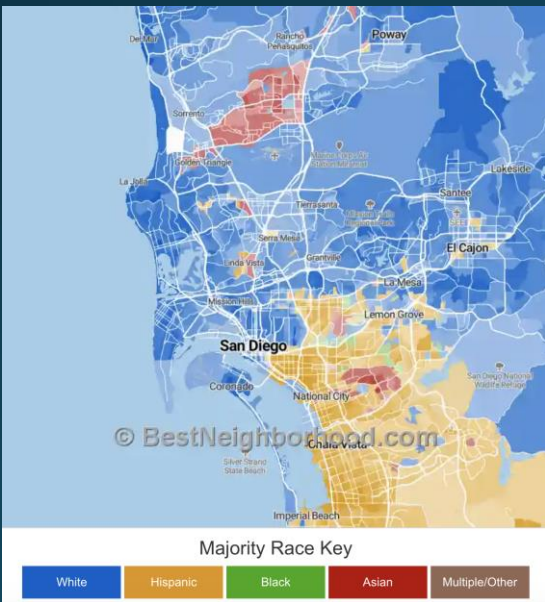
Soil, slope, orientation, elevation, moisture, micro-climate... all shape interconnected ecological landscapes, interwoven with the urban fabric, the most bio-diverse metro area in North America.





Sprawl City

California's second largest city is a quintessential, "suburban style" metropolis, characteristic of the U.S. Sunbelt and postwar U.S. urbanism in general.



Patterns of residence – race and ethnicity, 2020

Border Town

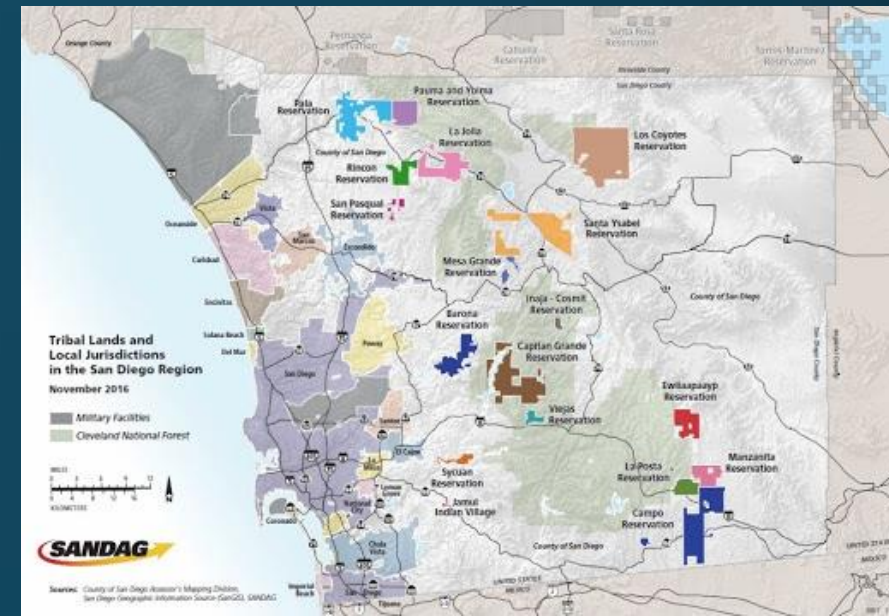


San Diego and Tijuana straddle one of the busiest land borders in the world, which is itself an environmental feature of the region.



Diverse City

One of the whitest cities in America in 1960, modern San Diego is a complex, “majority minority” city with historic communities of color and growing immigrant communities which contribute to a diverse environmental politics.



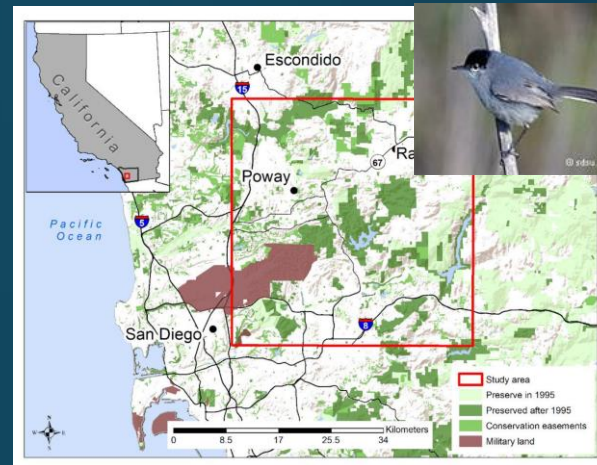
18 Indian Nations, most in any U.S. county



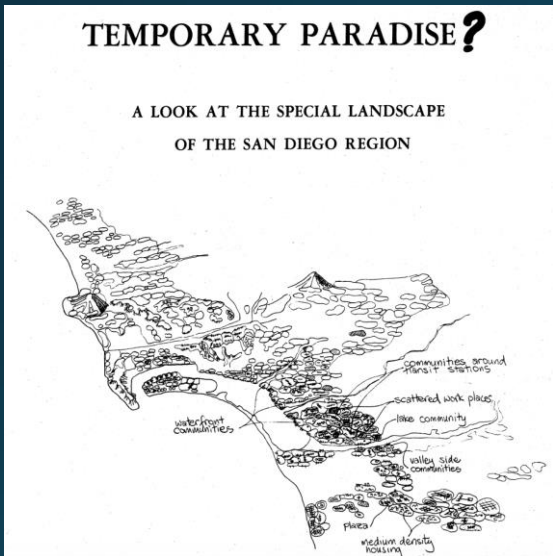
Environmental Proving Ground

San Diego has served as a proving ground for environmental policy and ideas since the 1970s.

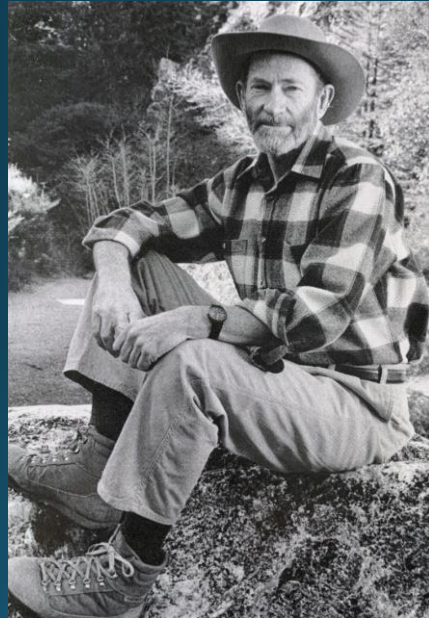
SD passed the first metro scale habitat conservation plan in the US, 1997



SD writer Richard Louv helped spark an international movement for children in nature, 2000s



Kevin Lynch's 1974 "Temporary Paradise?" envisioned San Diego as a city uniquely integrated with nature.



Michael Soulé's work on San Diego was key to the new field of Conservation Biology, 1970s-80s.



Environmental Health Coalition, founded in 1980, pioneered Environmental Justice organizing in CA

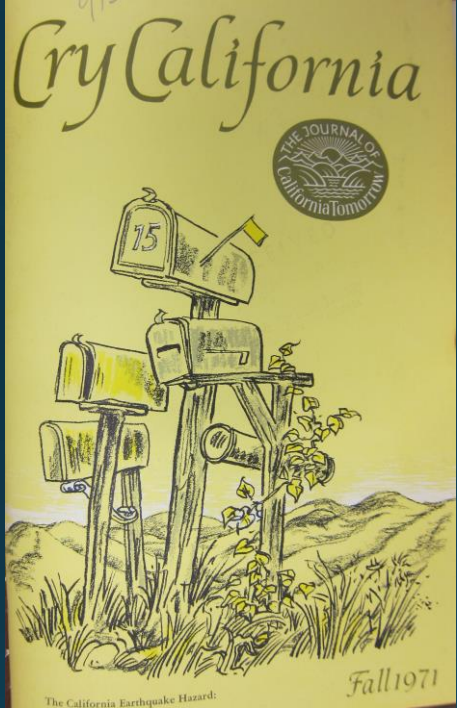


Protests against toxic dumping by a US firm in Tijuana's Colonia, Chilpancingo, led to a landmark trans-border cleanup and mobilization. 1990s -

The Politics of Place

"Place is space invested with meaning in the context of power." (Cresswell)

San Diegans created affective meanings of places and used them to organize politically.



There is NO TIME for TOMORROW! TODAY, DEMAND

of SENATOR RICHARD J. DOLWIG (R-San Mateo County) Chairman, Governmental Efficiency Committee,

the removal of his own bill, S.B. 839 — and any other Bill designed to exploit San Francisco Bay and its shorelines — from consideration by His Governmental Efficiency Committee of the Legislature of the State of California.

TODAY — when Senator Dolwig, and his fellow legislators, have voted of amendments to his own bill, S.B. 839, the Public Use, Protection, and the Preservation of the San Francisco Bay, and the Governmental Efficiency Committee, (S.B. 839) that the San Francisco Bay including the cause for history, wildlife, environment and recreation.

TODAY — when the Senate has passed the measure of S.B. 839 — or any other Bill of a similar nature, the Public Use, Protection, and the Preservation of the San Francisco Bay, and the Governmental Efficiency Committee, (S.B. 839) that the San Francisco Bay including the cause for history, wildlife, environment and recreation.

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TODAY, THERE IS STILL TIME — to save and salvage the incomparable, but exploited, San Francisco Bay and its shores — to protect the interest of all the people from the financial self-interest of the Very, Very, Few.

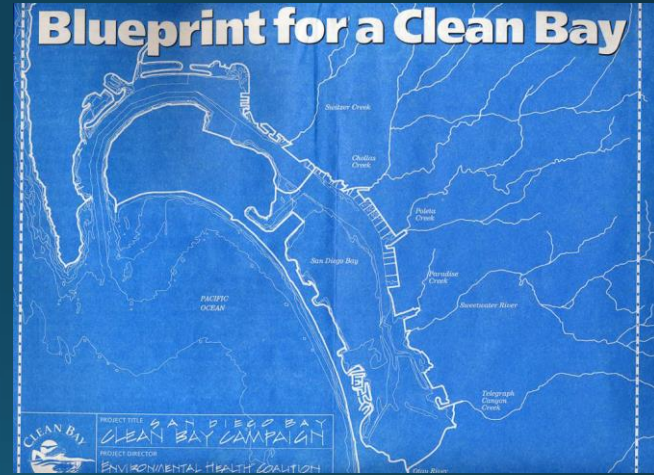
DEMAND a HALT to 122-years of DESTRUCTION of SAN FRANCISCO BAY

SAVE OUR BAY ACTION COMMITTEE
to act on every issue, coordinate, meet

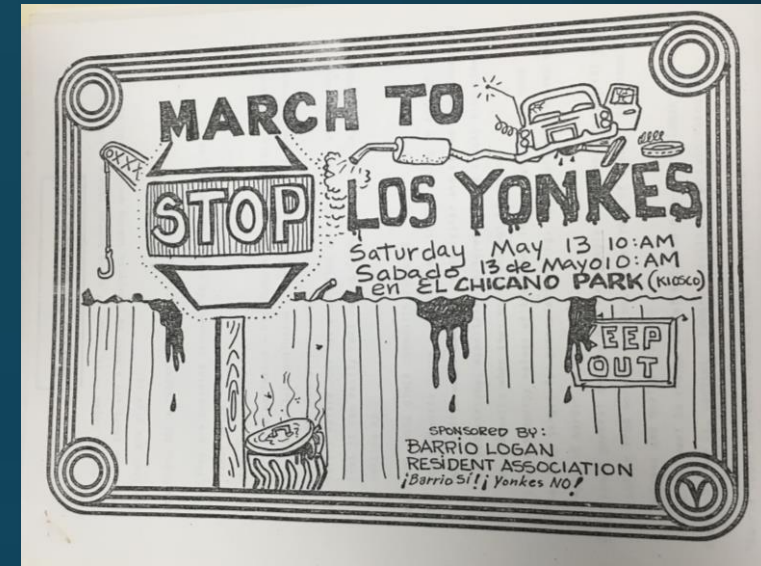
NEEDS VOLUNTEERS! and CONTRIBUTIONS!

NAME: _____
ADDRESS: _____
PHONE: _____
ENCLOSED IS MY DONATION OF \$: _____
I WANT TO ACTIVELY PARTICIPATE

SAVE OUR BAY ACTION COMMITTEE
MURRAY A. HIGLEY, BARBARA A. HIGLEY, co-chairmen
JOHN ANDERSON, CLARE BERGER, co-chairwomen
414-254-0800 • 415-254-0800 • 415-254-0800 • 415-254-0800



Activists Matter



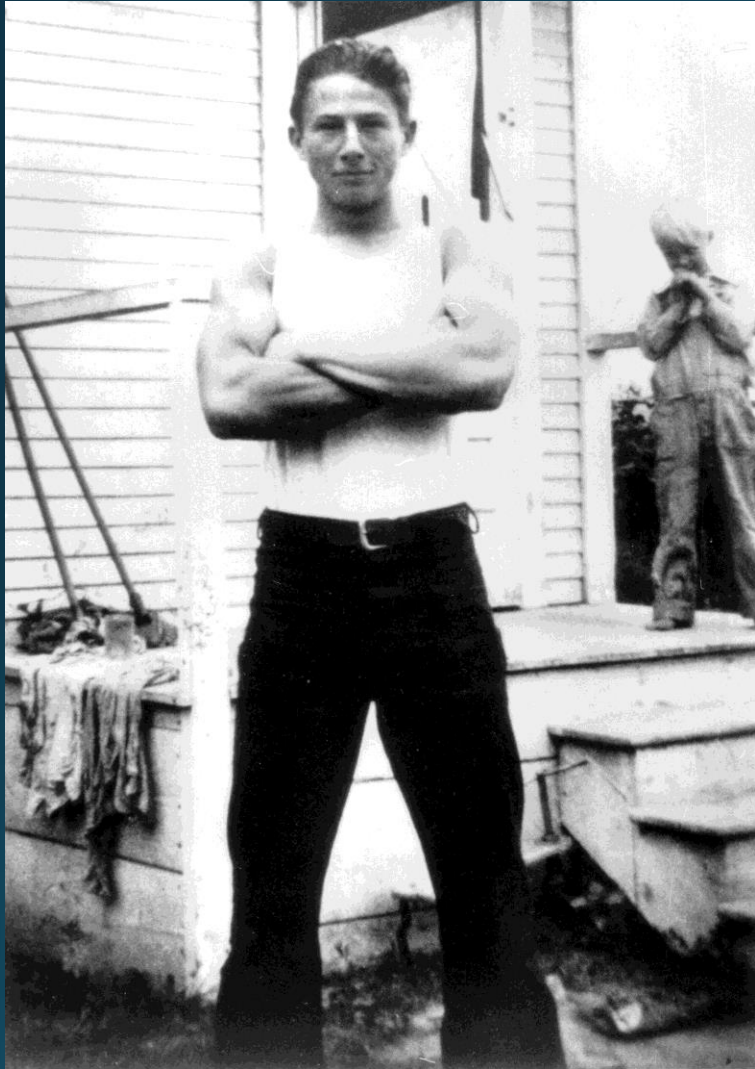
Senses of Place



Activist interviews reveal multi-layered meanings of urban environments – a “deep map” - beneath the politics that can be applied to future action.



My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965 (2002)

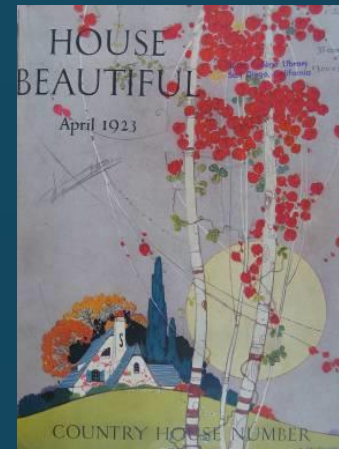


Photos from Glenn Seaborg, *Huntington Park Signal*

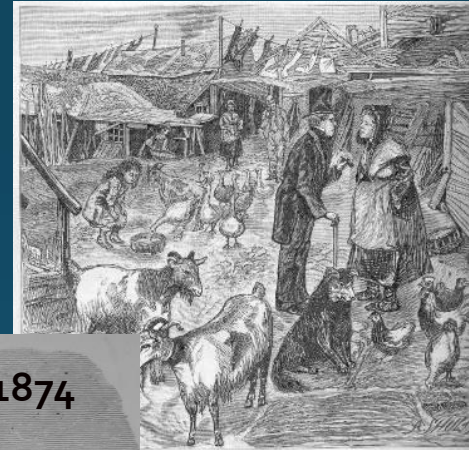
The 'New Suburban History'

"We would do well to remember that places and patterns are always more complex than is implied by the way we label them." Richard Harris and Robert Lewis, 1998

19th -20th century metropolitan expansion produced a diverse and complicated suburban fringe filled with working people, especially immigrants, and people of color.

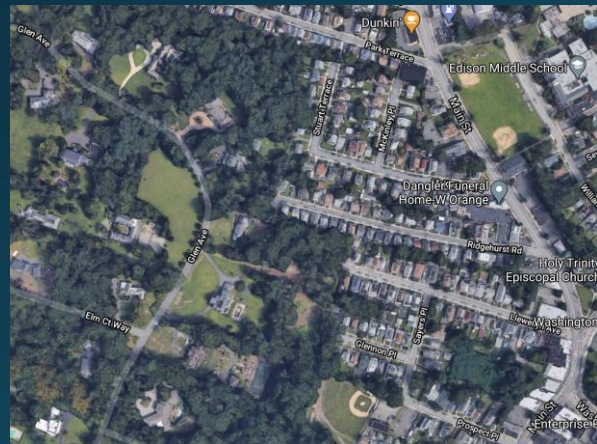


Glen Cove, 1900



Bird's Eye View of South Chicago, 1874

Early industrialization shaped the suburban fringe



Service work shaped the suburban landscape: West Orange, NJ

The New Suburbia: Life in LA Suburbs Since 1945

(Oxford University Press, forthcoming)



Mark Padoongpatt, age 6, the son of Thai immigrants, San Fernando Valley, 1989

- Mark's neighbors included Mexicans, Salvadorans, Filipinos, Vietnamese, Thais, African Americans, and whites

Greater ethnic and racial diversity

In 100 largest U.S. metros

| | |
|------|---|
| 1970 | 10% - of all suburbanites were Black, Latino, and Asian |
| 2010 | 35% |

In Los Angeles County

| | |
|------|---|
| 1970 | 26% - of all suburbanites were Black, Latino, and Asian |
| 2010 | 70% |

More immigrants

Signs of immigrants in suburbs of LA's San Gabriel Valley (Monterey Park, Roland Heights)



Greater class diversity and economic inequality

Bradbury



Azusa

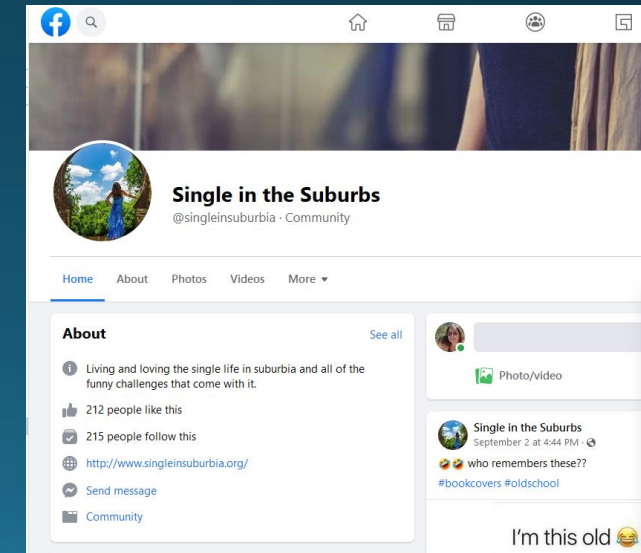


San Fernando Valley – homeless person in the red sleeping bag



Household composition changing

- More singles, divorced adults, LGBTQ residents, extended families, and the elderly in the suburbs



Family in elite Palos Verdes, suburb of LA



Rising non-white homeownership in L.A.



Maywood (in Southeast L.A.) - Latino



Pico Rivera (eastern LA) - Latino



Arcadia – majority Asian American



Walnut – majority Asian American

Case study suburbs of *The New Suburbia*



Some themes from *The New Suburbia*

- White anxiety and the resulting resegregation of social life

Pasadena's worlds of debutantes,
private clubs, private schools... a
basis of re-segregation

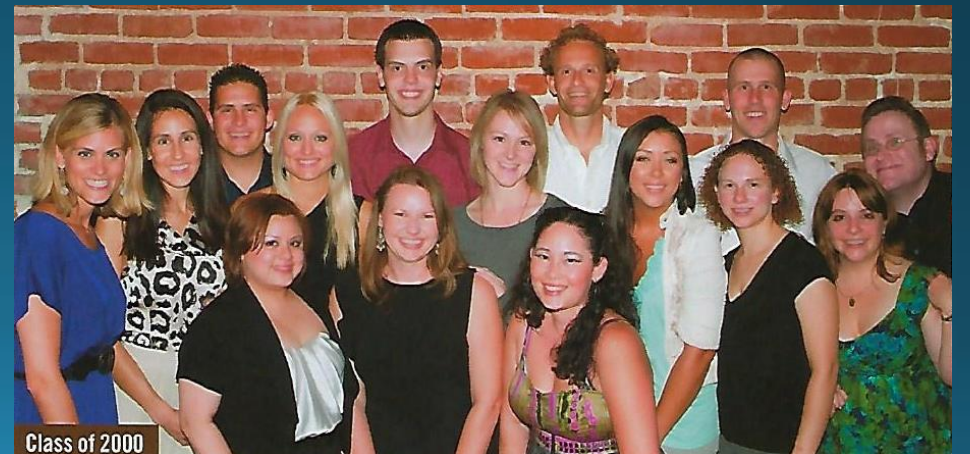
Pasadena's Valley Hunt Club Rose Parade Float, 2018



Pasadena June Ball, 2022



Mayfield (private) School, Class of 2000 reunion

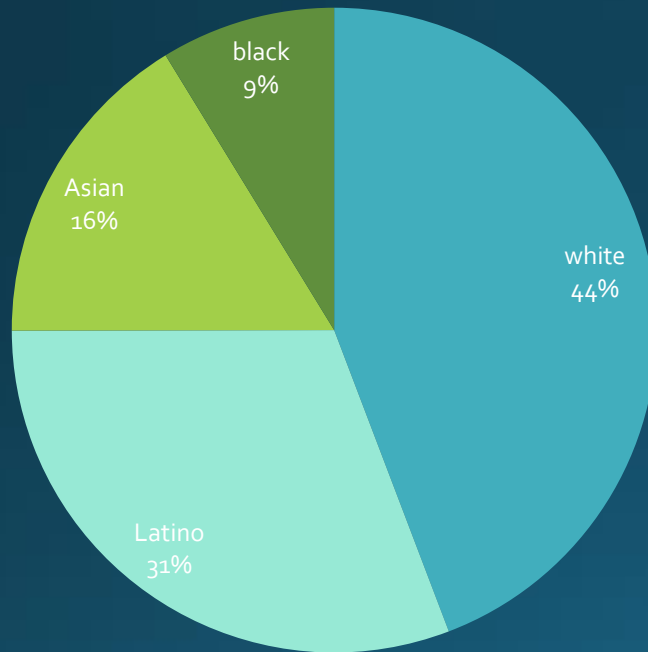


Lakewood, 1950, 2014

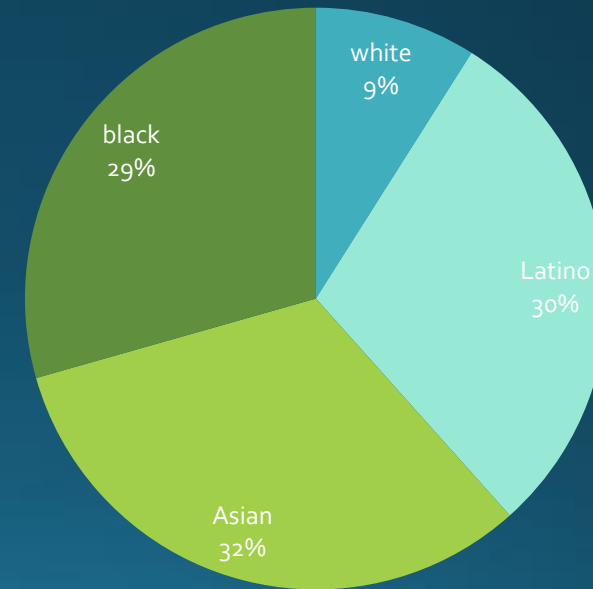


Racial profiles of the mass-produced suburbs of Lakewood and Carson, next to each other in Southeast LA

Lakewood, 2010



Carson, 2013



Chase family, moved to Lakewood 1980



Williams family, moved to Lakewood 2006



Neighborhood Watch in Lakewood, photo 1987



Some themes from *The New Suburbia*

- White anxiety and the resulting resegregation of social life
- Persistence of exclusionary practice, by diverse homeowners

San Marino homes, 2015



No Chinese characters allowed in signs, per 1987 ordinance



DO'S & DON'TS

(MOSTLY DON'TS)

The unique residential character of San Marino has been preserved for seventy-five years by the enactment and enforcement of certain ordinances which are not always found in other cities and which are sometimes a surprise to prospective new residents and their realtors.

To stress the importance of some of the more important of these, we are setting them forth in illustrated graphic form. The titles are oversimplified but the details of each ordinance are available at City Hall. By avoiding bureaucratic language and lengthy prose, we hope to make the messages both interesting and clear.



ONLY ONE FAMILY PER HOME



ONLY ONE KITCHEN PER HOUSE



Design review guidelines in San Marino, 1999

These measures prohibited:

- multi-generational households
- second kitchens

Homes of South Gate, 2017



The "Enacted" Latino environment of East LA

James Rojas photos and concepts



Attempts to regulate English-language signage and paint color in South Gate

Sign Law Would Require English in South Gate

By MIRNA ALFONSO, Times Staff Writer

SOUTH GATE—The Planning Commission, in a move that it says would help police and firefighters identify businesses during emergencies, has recommended that the City Council require businesses to display English-language signs.

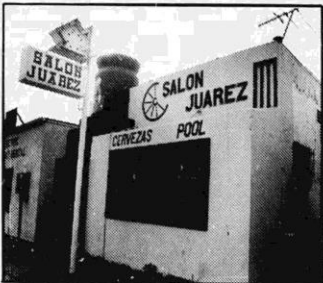
However, a spot check by The Times shows that some business owners here see the move as an unnecessary expense as well as an infringement of their rights. One merchant called the proposal discriminatory.

The commission is proposing that the council amend an existing ordinance that regulates on-premises signs. The measure, which would require identification of the business and address in English, is expected to go before the council Nov. 12 and, if approved, it could become law before the end of the year.

Planning officials said the measure is intended not only to improve public safety, but also to make it easier for customers. The measure would require business owners to either alter their existing signs or erect supplemental signs.

South Gate would be the first city in the Southeast area to impose such an ordinance. At least six other cities in the county—West Covina, Monterey Park, Rosemead, Arcadia, Temple City and Gardena—have either

Please see **SIGNS**, Page 4



Bar on Tweedy Boulevard with signs in Spanish would be affected by new law.



ALISON WISE / Los Angeles Times

Children's clothing store owner Maria Ochoa agrees with proposed English-language sign ordinance in South Gate. She was intending to install one anyhow.



Photos by ANACLETO RAPPING / Los Angeles Times

The city of South Gate is considering color limits on homes that likely would not permit the turquoise Hermila Sanchez chose.

Hue and Cry Over Colors of Homes

■ **South Gate:** While the council considers banning loud paint jobs, others defend them as a tradition brought from Latin America.

By HUGO MARTIN
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Since Hermila Sanchez and her husband, Miguel, painted their beige South Gate home a light turquoise with white trim, they have noticed some passing neighbors giving the small stucco house disapproving looks.

"I say if they don't like it they can come help us paint it another color," Hermila Sanchez said good-naturedly from her front porch.

Her neighbors may not have a say in the color, but the city of South Gate soon may. This predominantly Latino, blue-collar city in southeast Los Angeles County is considering imposing the kind of color and design restrictions that are usually found only in affluent communities such as Laguna Beach and Westlake Village.

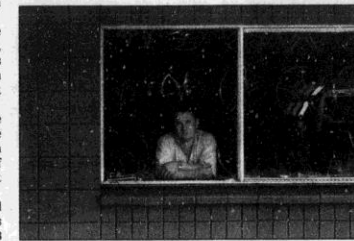
At the request of Mayor Henry Gonzalez, the South Gate City Council will vote today on creating a citywide program that limits the colors of homes and businesses to a designated few—most likely not to include the turquoise of the Sanchez home, or the maroon, orange and purple that also dot the landscape.

Gonzalez said the proposed restrictions were prompted by several complaints from residents about garish colors

Please see **COLOR**, B8



Some consider the lively colors on Juan Herrera's home, above, and Antonio Rubio's business, below, a cultural identity.



Concluding thoughts



Possible themes to explore from a transnational perspective

- The housing crisis
- Race and class relations
- Suburban politics