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Cities of Color: The New Racial Frontier in California's Minority- Majority Cities

ALBERT M. CAMARILLO

The author is a member of the history department at Stanford University. This was his presidential address at the annual meeting of the Pacific Coast Branch, AHA, in Stanford, California, in August 2006.

Demographic changes of enormous magnitude have altered the ethnic and racial composition of large cities and metropolitan suburbs across the nation over the past thirty years, especially in California. Many cities and suburbs that were once home to large majorities of whites are now places where ethnic and racial minorities form the majority. "Minority-majority" cities in California have emerged as a new frontier in ethnic and race relations, where African Americans, Latinos, and other non-white groups now find themselves, many for the first time, living together and struggling to coexist. Although conflict, tension, and misunderstanding characterize this new racial frontier, historians and other scholars must look deeper to find examples of cooperation and collaboration in these new "cities of color." This article considers three cities in California—Compton, East Palo Alto, and Seaside—as examples of the historical and contemporary forces that have shaped "minority-majority" cities and the relations between African Americans and Latinos in particular.

In the past decade or so, the national and local print and visual media have made much of African American-Latino conflict at many levels—in politics, in education, in gangs, and in other youth violence. For example, in a recent article titled "Black versus Brown," *Newsweek* focused on the contentious political climate in the City of Lynwood, a municipality located between downtown Los Angeles and Long Beach that over the past forty years went from a white- to a black- to a Latino-majority community. The article opened with a focus on Leticia Vásquez, the current mayor of Lynwood, who recalled the racially charged politics in 1997, when the new Latino majority in the city was mobilizing to gain control of the black-run city council. Vásquez remembered "people knocking on the door saying we needed to get rid of black city-council

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members.”¹ A *Time* magazine article in 1997, titled “The Next Big Divide? Blacks and Hispanics square off over bilingual education—and for control of schools,” discussed a similar environment in East Palo Alto (located on the San Francisco peninsula) that erupted in a confrontation between Latino and African American parents at a school board meeting, a tense situation that required the intervention of local police.² To be sure, conflict between Latinos and African Americans, as well as other minority groups, is a reality, but it is only one aspect of a much more complicated story in what I refer to as the “new frontier” in ethnic and race relations in American cities and suburbs of color.

Behind stories of minority-versus-minority conflict, often sensationalized in the media, are more important historical trends reshaping urban-metropolitan America. The emergence of minority-majority cities throughout California, and the nation in general, signals a fundamental demographic shift in American society and a seismic change in inter-group relations. One could argue that race and ethnic relations in generations past were characterized more by interactions between whites and non-whites, but, given demographic changes in metropolitan areas since the last third of the twentieth century, contemporary ethnic and race relations are increasingly defined by interactions among and between non-whites. As African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and other groups achieve numerical majorities in city after city and suburb after suburb, examples of conflict, misunderstanding, and tension are manifest almost everywhere. Less obvious, but just as prevalent, are examples of resourceful ways diverse people are working together. Inter-group cooperation, collaboration, and coalition building seldom make headline news, yet they exist and are a crucial part of contemporary urban history and the new racial frontier sweeping across hundreds of neighborhoods in metropolitan America.

In many ways, the rapidly emerging minority-majority cities and suburbs represent old patterns (i.e., the long history of neighborhood change as established groups move out and are replaced by newer groups) with new twists, but they also reflect altogether

1. *Newsweek*, July 10, 2006, pp. 44–45. Contiguous to Compton’s city limits to the north, the City of Lynwood is another community in southeastern Los Angeles County that was transformed after the 1960s from a white- to a black- to a Latino-majority population. Unlike Compton, however, the city is governed by a Latino-majority city council and mayor.

2. *Time*, Dec. 1, 1997.

new patterns in urban history. This article identifies some of the principal historical and contemporary developments that define California's emerging "cities of color" and the nature of intergroup dynamics that have developed in recent decades. It should be noted that descriptions of larger trends should not preclude attention to local variations, because local circumstances can have substantial bearing for understanding the often unique differences that exist among various cities. I discuss here some of these larger trends, using examples drawn from several localities, especially three relatively small cities—Compton, East Palo Alto, and Seaside—located in different metropolitan areas in California.

Demographic transformations

The beginning of the twenty-first century marked an unprecedented development in the ethnic and racial group composition of urban America. In 2001, for the first time, over half of the nation's 100 largest cities were home to more African Americans, Latinos, Asians, and other racial minorities than whites. Consider the following: The total non-Hispanic white population in the 100 largest U.S. cities declined from 52 percent to 44 percent between 1990 and 2000; among these cities, the number with non-Hispanic white majorities fell from seventy to fifty-two during the same decade. In 2006 whites were the minority in thirty-five of the fifty largest cities, and, as people of color continue to fuel the population gains in American suburbs, additional cities and suburbs will join the growing category of "minority-majority" places.³ When viewed over the past thirty to forty years, these demographic trends are nothing less than spectacular. For example, the proportion of non-whites, including Hispanics, in the twenty largest cities in the United States increased from 38 percent in 1970 to 60 percent in 2000. At the turn of the twenty-first century, U.S. Census data revealed that nine of the ten largest cities in the nation had a majority of minorities, and in eight of these cities Latinos and African Americans together constituted the majority population. The overall percentage of the

3. Alan Berube, "Racial and Ethnic Change in the Nation's Largest Cities," in Bruce Katz and Robert E. Lang, eds., *Redefining Urban & Suburban America: Evidence from Census 2000* (Washington, D.C., 2003), 139–140; William H. Frey, "Melting Pot Suburbs—A Study of Suburban Diversity," in Katz and Lang, eds., *Redefining Urban & Suburban America*, 155, 163; *Washington Post*, Aug. 21, 2006, A-3. See also William H. Frey, "Diversity Spreads Out: Metropolitan Shifts in Hispanic, Asian, and Black Populations Since 2000," *Brookings Institution Living Cities Census Series* (Washington, D.C., 2006).

white population in the ten largest cities had declined to about a third (34.6 percent) by 2000.⁴ Once minorities, people of color in the nation's largest metropolises now form the great majorities.

The demographics of California's largest cities reflect comparable transformations over the past generation. The total non-Hispanic white population in the state's ten largest cities declined precipitously between 1970 (67 percent) and 2000 (35 percent): In Los Angeles, for example, the proportion of whites dropped from 61 percent to 30 percent, from 76 percent to 36 percent in San Jose, and from 86 percent to 33 percent in Long Beach. In 1970 all ten of the largest cities in the state claimed substantial white majority populations (Oakland was the only exception with 52 percent); by 2000 all had majorities of people of color.⁵ In particular during these three decades, the Hispanic and Asian-origin populations in cities soared, especially because of massive waves of immigration from Mexico, Central America, and many regions of Asia. The changing face of California's metropolitan areas is nowhere more notable than in the Los Angeles region where the surging Latino population is nearing majority status.⁶

The rates of demographic change over the past forty years are even more dramatic in many smaller California cities such as Compton, East Palo Alto, and Seaside. For example, in 1960 whites accounted for 60 percent of all Compton residents, while blacks made up 33 percent and Latinos 7 percent. A decade later, whites constituted a mere 16 percent as blacks now formed the great

4. Analysis of the U.S. Census population figures for the twenty largest cities for 1970, 1980, 1990, and 2000. See U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *1970 Census of Population, Characteristics of the Population*, Vol. 1, Pts. 1–52 (Washington, D.C., 1973); U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *2000 Census of Population and Housing, Summary Population and Housing Characteristics*, Pt. 1, PHC-1-1, Table 10 (Washington, D.C., 2002). See also U.S. Census Bureau website (<http://factfinder.census.gov>), American FactFinder, 2000.

5. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *1970 Census of Population, Characteristics of the Population, California*, Vol. 1, Pt. 6, Tables 24 and 27 (Washington, D.C., 1973); U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *1970 Census of Population, Subject Reports: Persons of Spanish Origin*, PC(2)-1C, Table 13 (Washington, D.C., 1973); U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *2000 Census of Population and Housing, Summary Population and Housing Characteristics, California: 2000*, PHC-1-6, Tables 3–5 (Washington, D.C., 2002). See also U.S. Census Bureau website (<http://factfinder.census.gov>), America FactFinder 2000, "California Cities: Race and Hispanic or Latino Origin" and "California Bigger Cities," both at website (www.city-data.com/city/California.html).

6. The Hispanic population in 2005 in Los Angeles County was 47.3 percent. See U.S. Census Bureau website, American Community Survey, Los Angeles County, California.

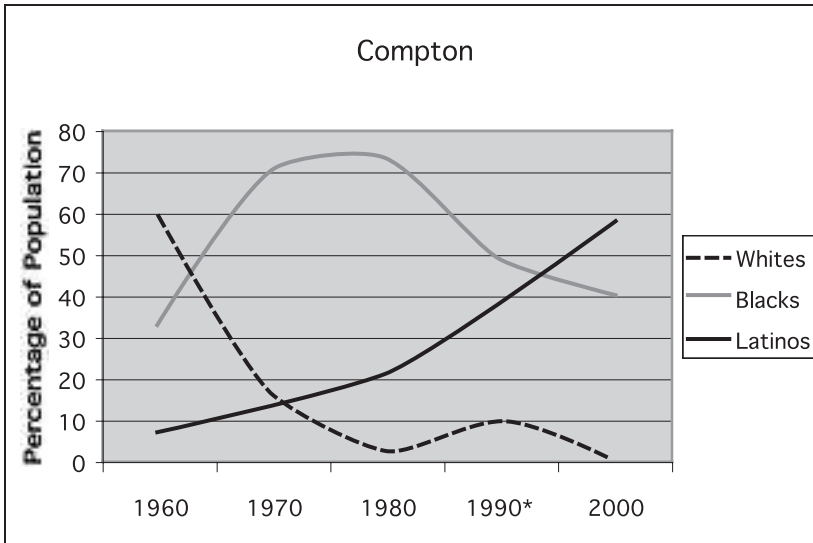


Figure 1. Graph showing changing percentages of whites, blacks, and Latinos in Compton, California, for the period 1960 through 2000, based on figures in the U.S. Census. Percentages for people of Asian and other backgrounds are so small as to be negligible.

*The 1990 figures for whites include many Latinos because of a confusing question on race for many Latinos.

majority, 71 percent; Latinos were 13 percent of the total population in 1970 in this city located in the center of Los Angeles County. During the 1980s and 1990s, Compton's population profile went through yet another major shift as Latinos emerged as the majority population by the turn of the twenty-first century (in 2000, of the approximately 93,000 people in the city, Latinos accounted for 57 percent of the total population while the proportion of blacks slipped to 40 percent).⁷

East Palo Alto's population changes closely paralleled those in Compton for the same decades. In 1960, for example, whites in this

7. Albert M. Camarillo, "Black and Brown in Compton: Demographic Change, Suburban Decline, and Intergroup Relations in a South Central Los Angeles Community, 1950–2000," in Nancy Foner and George Fredrickson, eds., *Not Just Black and White: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Immigration, Race, and Ethnicity in the United States* (New York, 2004), 364–366. The U.S. Census Bureau enumerations of Hispanics in Compton in 2000 and in earlier censuses were, most likely, substantial undercounts, primarily because of a large percentage of undocumented immigrants in the city. The percentage of Hispanics in 2000 was probably closer to 60 to 62 percent of Compton's total population.

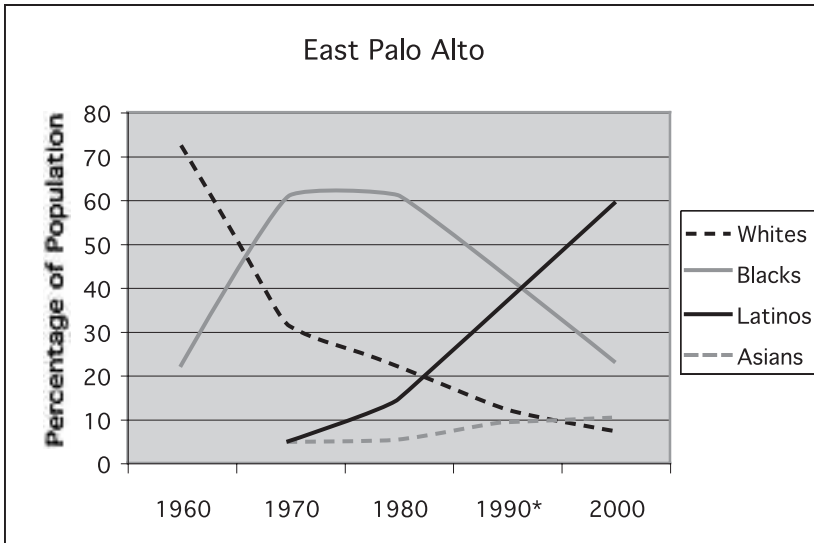


Figure 2. Graph showing changing percentages of whites, blacks, Latinos, and Asians in East Palo Alto, California, for the period 1960 through 2000, based on figures in the U.S. Census.

*The 1990 figures for whites include many Latinos because of a confusing question on race for many Latinos.

unincorporated area of Santa Clara County made up 72 percent of the population, and African Americans were the second largest group (22 percent) in this community of about 15,000 people. But by 1970 the population proportions nearly reversed as blacks accounted for 61 percent and the rapidly declining white population fell to 31 percent of the area's population. Similar to Compton, East Palo Alto's small Latino community—overwhelmingly of Mexican origin—began to increase significantly beginning in the 1970s. In 1980 Latinos comprised 14 percent of the population, but by 1990 they constituted over a third of all residents (36 percent); by 2000 Latinos were the majority population in the city (East Palo Alto was incorporated in 1983) at 59 percent. The percentage of blacks fell to 41 percent in 1990 and plummeted further to 23 percent in 2000, while the proportion of Asian/Pacific Islanders in the city increased to 10 percent. Whites accounted for only 7 percent of the city's inhabitants in 2000. In this growing city of about 30,000 residents, Latinos now make up about two-thirds of the population.⁸

8. For the U.S. Census population figures for 1970 and 2000 for East Palo Alto, see note 5. For 1980 and 1990 population figures, see U.S. Department of Commerce,

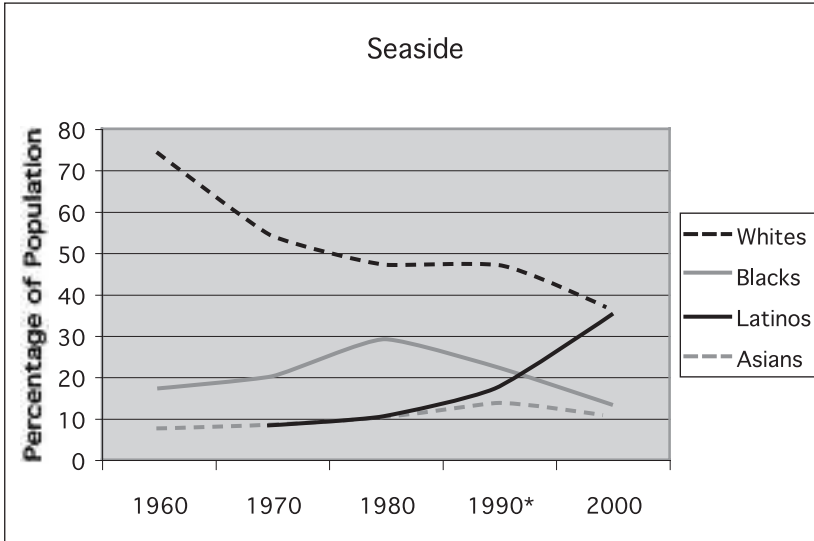


Figure 3. Graph showing changing percentages of whites, blacks, Latinos, and Asians in Seaside, California, for the period 1960 through 2000, based on figures in the U.S. Census.

*The 1990 figures for whites include many Latinos because of a confusing question on race for many Latinos.

In much the same way as East Palo Alto and Compton, but with some important variations, the City of Seaside went through significant population changes during the last third of the twentieth century. In this city, located on the Monterey Peninsula next to Fort Ord, one of the largest military installations on the West Coast, the non-Hispanic white population declined sharply after 1960. With a total population of about 20,000 in 1960, whites

Bureau of the Census, *1980 Census of Population, General Population Characteristics, California*, PC 80-1-B6, Vol. 1, Table 32 (Washington, D.C., 1982) and U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *1990 Census of Population, General Population Characteristics, California*, PC-1-6, Table 5 (Washington, D.C., 1992). Michael Berman, "Race, Ethnicity, and Inter-Minority Suburban Politics: East Palo Alto, 1950–2002" (unpublished paper, Stanford University, 2002); *San Jose Mercury News*, April 25, 2004, A1–A17. The census figures are difficult to ascertain with precision for many reasons in addition to the undercount of undocumented immigrants who form a sizable proportion of East Palo Alto's Latino population. The Latino population before 1980 was variably enumerated as "Spanish-surname," "Spanish-origin," or "Spanish-Mother Tongue," all of which were imprecise in counting the actual number of people in any designated census tract or other locality. East Palo Alto's census counts were complicated further since before 1983 the area was an unincorporated area of Santa Clara County and thus not a continuously designated "place" over time.

made up 74 percent of the city's residents, blacks comprised 17 percent, and the remainder consisted of small communities of Asian Americans (mostly Filipinos and Japanese Americans) and Mexican Americans. As the city's total population rose substantially during the 1970s, so too did the proportion of African Americans. By 1980 blacks accounted for 29 percent of the city's population as the percentage of whites declined to 47 percent; Latinos made up 10 percent of all residents. Like so many other cities throughout California during the 1980s and 1990s, the Latino population rose dramatically at the same time that the number of blacks dropped drastically after the closure of the Fort Ord military base in 1994, once a source of much employment for a large sector of the African American community. Between 1990 and 2000, the black population declined from 22 percent to about 13 percent, while the Latino proportion of city residents more than doubled from 17 percent to nearly 35 percent. The non-Hispanic white population also declined during this decade, dropping to 36 percent in 2000; Asian/Pacific Islanders accounted for 10 percent of the population. Today in Seaside, Latinos form the largest single ethnic group.⁹

Historical and contemporary developments

Numbers provide important snapshots of stunning population changes occurring in California's cities, large and small, and in hundreds of other areas throughout the nation, but they do not tell us how and why these demographic transformations came about or provide understanding about their impact. The story behind the massive movements of people of color in and out of cities over the past forty years is intimately tied to the long history of racial residential segregation, the out-migration of whites from cities and suburbs in the post-Civil Rights Era, the changing nature of regional and national economies, and the unprecedented volume of immigration from Mexico, Central America, and Asian countries since the mid-1960s. Although each of these recent historical developments is complex and related to the others, and each deserves substantial attention to detail in its own right, I provide here some brief, general contexts for understanding how together they have influenced significant population changes over time.

9. Carol McKibben, "Diversity, Community, and Race: Seaside, California, 1908–2006," paper presented at the annual meeting of the Pacific Coast Branch-American Historical Association (Stanford University, 2006).

Until well after the mid-twentieth century, Los Angeles suburbs such as Compton, Lynwood, Southgate, Lakewood, Inglewood, and most other cities in the region simply did not allow African Americans to reside within their boundaries. You might find small barrios of Mexican Americans in some of these communities, but, if they existed at all, they were usually confined to segregated neighborhoods. The history of race and space in Los Angeles is an increasingly well-known story of racial exclusion—systematic use of ubiquitous and restrictive race-based real estate covenants, reinforced through customary practice among realtors and, sometimes, by white homeowners associations intent on keeping minorities out of their communities. The result, over time, was a clearly defined pattern of residential concentration of the region's two largest minority groups: African Americans in the expanding South Central sections of Los Angeles and Mexican Americans in eastside neighborhoods. Asian-origin groups, especially Chinese, had an even longer history of this type of residential separation from whites. Indeed, the residential segregation of people of color in California—most acutely experienced by blacks—was part and parcel of a widespread, national phenomenon, aided and abetted by the discriminatory practices of the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and by private mortgage lenders that drew the infamous “redlines.”¹⁰

Residential segregation based on race and class was replicated in large and small cities up and down the state during the first half of the twentieth century: in Oakland and its East Bay suburbs, in San Francisco and the peninsula, in San Jose and San Diego, and in the Monterey Bay region. The local histories of Compton, East Palo Alto, and Seaside reveal many housing patterns that were common statewide. Realtors and homeowners alike largely kept blacks

10. The formation of segregated African American neighborhoods in what is commonly referred to as South Central Los Angeles is treated in great detail in two new books: Douglas Flamming, *Bound for Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America* (Berkeley, 2005), and Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African Americans in Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley, 2003). For Mexican American residential patterns, see George J. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900–1945* (New York, 1993). Asian American community segregation patterns are described briefly in Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (New York, 1989). An excellent case study of Southgate, California, describes how municipal leaders and residents in this white working-class suburb near Compton deliberately kept minorities out of the city during the pre- and post-World War II decades. See Becky Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920–1965* (Chicago, 2002).

from penetrating Compton city boundaries until the 1950s. Although a small Mexican American barrio had formed in the north-central section of the city during the first decades of the 1900s adjacent to the unincorporated areas of Watts and Willowbrook, the systematic use of restrictive racial covenants by the 1920s ensured that blacks from South Central Los Angeles and new black migrants from the South were shut out of the so-called “hub city.” However, by the 1950s hundreds of black families began to move into the northwestern neighborhoods of the city, as realtors, both black and white, engaged in “block busting” practices that created opportunities for middle-class black homeowners to purchase relatively new tract homes in Compton. By the early 1960s thousands of African Americans had moved into westside homes following the flight of previous white homeowners. White realtors, as a result, divided Compton in half, creating a racially bifurcated city—west Compton was black and brown while east Compton was nearly exclusively white. The Watts riots of 1965 destroyed any hope of the informal racial boundary line holding back blacks as white flight turned into a white exodus. By 1970 the large black majority in the city could proudly lay claim to the first city west of the Mississippi River entirely governed and administered by blacks.¹¹

Although fear of race riots did not prompt whites to flee East Palo Alto in great numbers during the 1960s, as it had in Compton, discriminatory housing practices in the region, block busting, and white flight combined to achieve a similar outcome by 1970. A small agricultural community through the 1930s, East Palo Alto was caught up in the post-World War II era’s suburban transformation of much of the San Francisco Bay Area. From a small hamlet of about 1,500 shortly after the war, the area’s population soared to 12,000 by the early 1950s as a result of the availability of inexpensive homes. Predominantly a white community through the 1950s, East Palo Alto’s population soon shifted as it became one of the few areas where blacks were grudgingly permitted to buy property. Although some white Palo Altans clamored against the break in the color line, realtors took advantage of white fears as they brought in busloads of blacks from San Francisco and Oakland interested in buying affordable homes. The trickle of black residents turned into a tidal wave during the 1960s, making East

11. Camarillo, “Black and Brown in Compton,” 363–365.

Palo Alto the largest concentration of African Americans in the area beyond San Francisco and Oakland.¹² By 1970 East Palo Alto and Compton had both become widely known as “black cities.”

During the 1970s when both East Palo Alto and Compton acquired reputations as black enclaves, Seaside was also increasingly identified as a predominantly African American community, at least in the perception of many people in the Monterey Bay region. Although Seaside's black population increased significantly during the 1970s and 1980s, African Americans never accounted for more than 29 percent of the city's total population. Seaside has always been a much more multiracial city than its counterparts in the San Francisco Bay Area and in South Central Los Angeles. Incorporated in 1954, Seaside, the eastern-most neighborhood of the City of Monterey, was home to many poor, working-class, and minority people during the first half of the twentieth century. Literally a dumping ground for Monterey (the county refuse dump was located there), the Seaside area from the 1920s through the start of World War II was a hodge-podge of small homes and hastily built shacks located on small lots that housed a diverse population of a few thousand souls: poor whites, including some Dust Bowl refugees, Asians (especially Filipinos and Japanese), Mexicans, African Americans, and some European immigrant families. It was no surprise that Seaside contained most of the region's people of color, since realtors in Monterey worked to exclude racial minorities from neighborhoods in the city's central districts.¹³

The multiracial diversity of Seaside was given an added boost after the founding of Fort Ord on adjacent lands to the east in 1940. During and after World War II this military installation became one of the largest of its type on the West Coast (50,000 soldiers were stationed there at a given time during the 1940s). As a result, Seaside's history is closely tied to Fort Ord, as the city took on the character of a military town—for better or worse—from the 1950s through the early 1990s. As the small population of Seaside soared to nearly 20,000 by 1960, so too did the number of military-related residents, a growing percentage of whom were minorities, especially African Americans. Serving as the base for many different U.S. Army infantry divisions, Fort Ord was also home to the 7th

12. Berman, “Race, Ethnicity, and Inter-Minority Suburban Politics.”

13. McKibben, “Diversity, Community, and Race: Seaside, California.”

Infantry and 2nd Filipino Regiment, both of which contained many mixed-race families—black soldiers who had married French and German women after the war and Filipino soldiers who had intermarried with various European-origin women. In the Vietnam War era, Seaside’s population continued to grow, with the city’s black population expanding at an even faster clip. Despite the fact that some retired and active-duty black soldiers were officers and middle-class, residential segregation practices in the region kept them mostly within Seaside’s boundaries. Despite the diverse population of the city, the ills that are often associated with military towns—prostitution, drugs, and increased crime rates—reinforced its stigma as an impoverished, crime-ridden, black city, an identity that retarded the city’s ability to achieve needed economic development.¹⁴ Thus, by the 1980s, in the eyes of the public at large, Seaside shared a dubious distinction with Compton and East Palo Alto as “depressed black suburbs.”

White flight and changing neighborhoods

The edifice of raced-based residential exclusion began to break down during the 1950s and finally crumbled during the 1960s and 1970s. There were many reasons for the breakdown of racially segregated neighborhoods, but the results were the same in most localities—white flight. Despite efforts in many cities and suburbs to hold the line against the encroachment of people of color, the combination of federal laws, block-busting real estate practices, and fear led to the wholesale departure of white folks from many formerly segregated communities stretching from San Francisco to San Diego. The U.S. Supreme Court held, in the case of *Shelley v. Kraemer* in 1948, that restrictive real estate covenants were not enforceable by law, creating the opening public policy salvo targeted at the house that Jim Crow had built.¹⁵ Informal practices by realtors continued to keep most blacks, Mexicans, and Asians from buying and renting property in all-white communities and neighborhoods, although some realtors, both black and white, broke ranks and participated in the lucrative practice of block busting. With greater consequences than were achieved by any law,

14. *Ibid.*

15. The segregated residential housing patterns, focusing on blacks, are richly described in Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge, Mass., 1993).

formerly white neighborhoods and entire suburbs were affected by the initiatives of realtors who encouraged—indeed provoked—whites to sell their property before real estate values, they argued, would plummet as blacks and others minorities moved nearby. Block busting may have spurred white flight to outlying suburbs, but in communities in Los Angeles that bordered Watts, the riots in 1965 resulted in what I refer to as “white exodus.” The rapid and nearly complete departure of whites, including white ethnics, from cities such as Compton, Lynwood, and Southgate by the mid-1970s prompted the emergence of many minority-majority cities in the region. Cities more distant from the civil disorders of South Central Los Angeles also began to experience a steady erosion of their white populations and the influx of people of color, although at a slower pace.

In Seaside, white flight sped up during the 1960s and 1970s as the black population more than tripled between 1960 and 1980 (from 3,261 to 10,732). The 1980 U.S. Census revealed that Seaside had become a minority-majority city for the first time, with African Americans as the largest minority group. Through most of the 1960s, as in many other cities with substantial percentages of people of color, redlining in Seaside had much to do with preventing the federal government from funding redevelopment projects and allowing realtors to steer prospective middle-class white homeowners away from the city. According to a city employee, “All of Seaside was redlined. No one could get a FHA or VA [Veterans Administration] loan in the whole city until [after] 1964.”¹⁶ According to documents in the City Planning Department, the reason for the hold-up of federal funds was the lack of proper sewage facilities, but it was commonly believed by residents that the government was unwilling to support development in a community that was increasingly perceived as an African American city.¹⁷

Race-related concerns were not the only reasons that whites fled older suburbs throughout California's large and smaller metropolitan centers. The jobs that had once attracted millions of Americans to the San Francisco Bay Area and Los Angeles in the

16. Interview with Don Drummond by Carol McKibben, Carmel Valley, June 15, 2006. Use of the oral histories regarding Seaside as cited in this article was granted by Carol McKibben, director of the Seaside City History Project. All oral histories from the project will eventually be placed in the Seaside Public Library.

17. McKibben, “Diversity, Community, and Race: Seaside, California.”

World War II and postwar decades foundered during a period of economic restructuring that began in the 1970s. For example, in Los Angeles, employment in the durable manufacturing sectors (such as the auto and related industries) downsized, closed, or migrated either to other regions in the United States or overseas. California cities did not experience the same degree of deindustrialization that older “smokestack” cities in the Northeast encountered, but thousands of skilled, blue-collar jobs disappeared nonetheless. In their place were abundant jobs in the expanding service-sector economy, construction, retail trade, and non-durable manufacturing, such as the garment and furniture industries—jobs dominated by growing legions of low-skill and low-wage immigrant workers from Latin America and Asia.¹⁸

Compton, East Palo Alto, and Seaside were all caught up in this new era of economic change in California, but in different ways. In Compton, for example, the departure of small businesses, corporate retail establishments, and financial institutions coincided with the flight of the white middle and working classes. Over time, as the notoriety of the city worsened, many middle-class black and Latino families abandoned Compton during the 1980s and 1990s, leaving an increasingly working-poor population that had little access to the decreasing number of well-paid, unionized jobs in the declining manufacturing sectors of the Los Angeles economy.¹⁹ East Palo Alto’s black majority and the surging Mexican immigrant population during these decades also found themselves tied occupationally to a growing service-sector economy, and the perception of the city as a violence-prone, minority suburb scared away potential economic investment.²⁰ Seaside’s economic stagnation was also directly affected by the economic restructuring at the end of the Cold War when Fort Ord was closed. The closure of the base in 1994 sent a wave of panic through the Monterey Peninsula generally, but in Seaside most of all. The immediate impact in Seaside was job loss, the out-migration of African Americans by the

18. David M. Grant, “A Demographic Profile of Los Angeles County, 1970 to 1990,” in Lawrence D. Bobo, *et al.*, eds., *Prismatic Metropolis: Inequality in Los Angeles* (New York, 2000).

19. Jeffrey Benjamín Camarillo, “In and Out of Compton: The Impact of Demographic Change and Urban Decline in a Los Angeles Community, A Case Study of Compton” (senior honors thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 2001).

20. Berman, “Race, Ethnicity, and Inter-Minority Suburban Politics.”

thousands (many of whom had been government employees connected to the military as support personnel), and a sharp decline in housing prices. The city's director of public works described the effects of the military facility's decommissioning: "It was almost like Seaside turned into a ghost town. City coffers dried up. There was something like a 75% or 80% drop in housing rental occupancies. The car dealerships, the auto mall really felt the hit. . . . Then all the schools started to close."²¹

Economic restructuring—including the loss of well-paying, unionized jobs, white flight, and the rapidly growing service industries—all had a huge impact on the status of cities and suburbs just at the moment when minorities were becoming the majorities. Blacks and Latinos, in particular, had the dubious distinction of inheriting communities increasingly inhabited by poor, working-class people and spiraling in downward directions, characterized by diminished tax bases, weakened institutional infrastructures, mounting crime rates, and violence. This "suburban decline"—the corollary to the "urban crisis" in the older, industrial cities of the Northeast—remains one of the chief challenges facing cities of color in the twenty-first century.

Into this new environment entered one of the largest waves of immigration in American history. Latin American immigrants, the great majority from Mexico, joined a mass emigration of people from many Asian nations, fueling a niche economy in the burgeoning minority-majority cities that increasingly depended on foreign-born workers, both legal and undocumented. The Hart-Cellar Immigration Act of 1965 opened the gates to legal immigration for Asians and Latin Americans, leading to unprecedented numbers that have entered the United States since 1970. For example, of the 31.1 million foreign-born people in the United States in 2000, those from Asian nations comprised 26 percent (the largest number from China, the Philippines, India, and Vietnam). Those from Latin America account for a much larger percentage of the foreign-born: 52 percent.²² The number of Mexican immigrants—documented and undocumented—far surpassed those of

21. Interview with Diana Ingersoll, Seaside Public Works Director, Seaside, Calif., by Carol McKibben, Seaside Public Works Department Offices, Jan. 18, 2006 (hereafter Ingersoll interview).

22. U.S. Census, *The Foreign Born Population: 2000*, U.S. Census Bureau website (www.census.gov/population).

any other single group. For example, Mexican-origin people in the United States had numbered only 1.75 million in 1960, but by 2000 they exceeded 21 million. Together, a high birth rate and a steady increase in immigration ignited this enormous population explosion. California is clearly the state of preference for Mexican-origin people, claiming 8.5 million or about 40 percent of their total population in 2000. California is also home to the largest number of undocumented immigrants in the nation, an estimated 2.4 million, the great majority of whom were born in Mexico (57 percent of all illegal immigrants in the nation) and other Latin American countries (24 percent).²³ Latinos, native and foreign-born, together with Asians and African Americans, are shaping the state's new minority-majority cities of color in momentous ways. Compton, East Palo Alto, Seaside, and dozens of other California cities, large and small, have been transformed by this new demographic wave.

Inter-group relations in new cities of color

In the final decades of the twentieth century, immigrants from Latin America and Asia, together with their native-born counterparts, increasingly found themselves living in many cities and neighborhoods where other minorities predominated. In these new cities of color, inter-group relations are playing themselves out in ways reminiscent of earlier eras when native-born Americans encountered new immigrants and racial minorities as they settled in cities in large numbers. However, the new racial frontier of the late 1900s and early twenty-first century reveal significant differences, not only because the overwhelming number of people are of color, but also because the issues that spark conflict and motivate cooperation are deeply influenced by legacies of a civil rights ideology and a commitment to inter-group collaboration in a diverse, multicultural society.

American urban history is replete with examples of how the native-born people reacted against new immigrants from diverse lands and domestic racial minorities as they encountered one another on neighborhood streets, schools, playgrounds, work places, and in other settings. New immigrants themselves were often as guilty in meting out discriminatory behavior toward other im-

23. Jeffrey S. Passell, "Estimates of the Size and Characteristics of the Undocumented Population," *Pew Hispanic Center Report* (Washington, D.C., 2005).

migrants and American minorities, especially blacks. Since the 1920s sociologists and other scholars have documented inter-group relations in myriad ways, both through qualitative research and through the use of surveys and other quantitative measures. Historically, social survey research tended to focus on white-black relations, but in more recent years, some studies have examined African American-Latino relations. This research tends to rely on attitudinal surveys and argues that negative perceptions, stereotypes, and ideas about competition over various types of resources influence the interactions of these two groups as they increasingly live together in the same cities and neighborhoods. Although several researchers who have focused on black-brown relations in Los Angeles conclude that no extreme racial polarization exists between African Americans and Latinos, they point to attitudes and perceptions, especially those held by younger and less-educated members of both groups, that affect inter-group behavior.

Much of the conflict that characterizes black and Latino relations in California cities such as Compton, East Palo Alto, Seaside, and Lynwood, and in cities elsewhere in the nation such as Chicago, Houston, and Washington, D.C., can be partly attributed to these dynamics.²⁴ From the perspective of African Americans, it is easy to understand how difficult it is to form common bonds with other minority groups, especially new immigrants. Over time, blacks watched as wave after wave of immigrant groups arrived in America, initially suffering discrimination in employment and housing but becoming, within a generation or two, accepted as part of mainstream American life, with access to jobs, housing, and education that Caucasians of the same class enjoyed. For a majority of African Americans, almost 150 years after the abolition of slavery, inclusion in American political, social, and economic life has been excruciatingly slow and painful. In addition, the sense of belonging to a community and living in a particular geographic space for decades or generations places great strains on inter-group relations when any new population is perceived to usurp

24. See Bobo, *et. al.*, eds., *Prismatic Metropolis*; Melvin I. Oliver and James H. Johnson, Jr., "Interethnic Conflict in an Urban Ghetto: The Case of Blacks and Latinos in Los Angeles," *Research in Social Movements, Conflict, and Change*, 6 (1984), 57-94. A recent book by Nicolás C. Vaca, *The Presumed Alliance: The unspoken conflict between Latinos and Blacks and what it means for America* (New York, 2004), examines African American and Latino relations in various contexts in several cities across the nation.

power and privilege, threatening the status quo. In many minority-majority communities up and down the state of California, both African Americans and Latinos have expressed anxiety over population changes that have upset their respective group's status quo.

Issues over the representation and control of resources, especially those involving political and educational institutions, are among the most common that divide black and brown in many minority-majority cities in California. The struggles have surfaced in many locales between African Americans, who gained control of city councils and related municipal committees and boards during the 1970s and 1980s, and new Latino majorities that seek political representation and a voice in local affairs. In East Palo Alto, for example, although blacks gained majority status during the 1960s as whites fled neighborhoods in great numbers (for example, blacks comprised 22 percent of the area's population in 1960 and 61 percent in 1970), it was not until the formerly unincorporated Santa Clara County area became an official municipality that African Americans asserted complete political control of the city. Since the 1970s the Latino population, mostly of Mexican origin, skyrocketed from 14 percent in 1980 to 59 percent in 2000, while during the same period the black population dropped from 60 percent to 23 percent of the city's total. The demographic changes in this Bay Area city of color set the stage for Latinos to question their lack of representation in all quarters of municipal government and civic participation as established black leaders held tightly onto the reins of political power.

Since the city's incorporation in 1983, only one Latino has held a seat on the city council. Feuds over appointments to important city commissions and boards have led to charges of exclusion by Latino leaders and responses by black leaders that suggest the newcomers haven't put enough effort into mobilizing themselves in the ways that African Americans struggled earlier to achieve political power in the city. "They want us to hand them something on a platter," said Barbara Mouton, a long-time activist and the city's first black mayor. "Nobody handed us anything. Everything we got we had to struggle for."²⁵ Marcelino López, a newcomer to civic participation in the city, responded, "I know how the African-American community worked very hard, how they risked so much, how they fought so hard for the power they have." "But why,"

25. *San Jose Mercury News*, March 11, 2001, 1A-14A.

he questioned, “don’t they want to share it with us?” An article in the *San Jose Mercury News* in 2001, titled “Two ethnic groups collide over cry for new leadership,” summed up this matter: “The conflict over community board seats between Mouton, one of the city’s pioneering black leaders, and Lopez, a newcomer to civic affairs, may seem trivial to outsiders. But it is no less than a fight for the soul of the city.”²⁶

A very similar scenario emerged in Compton city politics between black and Latino leaders and advocates beginning in the 1990s in a city that mirrored the demographic changes of East Palo Alto. Frustrated by the total absence of a Latino voice in city hall, a Mexican American resident complained that “there’s no one to represent the Latino community. . . . [T]he mayor is black. . . . The city council is black. . . . There is not a single Latino representative on the council.”²⁷ Addressing the city’s all-black council in 1998 about this same issue, another Latino activist evoked the history of black-white politics from the 1960s as she stated: “It was not that many years ago when black people were at this podium saying the same things of white folks. How could you forget?” Commenting on the state of political affairs in the city in 1990, a *Los Angeles Times* journalist reported that “blacks control every public and quasi-public institution in Compton—the schools, City Hall, the Compton Chamber of Commerce, and the Democratic party machine—and show no sign they intend to share their power.”²⁸ In the nearby city of Lynwood, when the tide turned and the first Latino mayor gained power, along with a majority of Latinos on the city council, he soon fired several black city employees and terminated the city’s relationship with some black contractors. The latter action resulted in a discrimination lawsuit against the city. In reaction to this type of behavior by the mayor, a black resident, a former teacher and social worker, remarked, “A lot of them [Latinos] want to shut us out completely.”²⁹ The politics of exclusion, practiced by both groups, appeared to have a stranglehold on any potential for inter-group cooperation.

Unlike Compton and East Palo Alto, Seaside’s historic status as a military town provided many residents with a common bond.

26. *Ibid.*

27. *Los Angeles Times*, Feb. 13, 2000, D-1.

28. *Ibid.*, May 7, 1990, B-1.

29. *Newsweek*, July 10, 2006, p. 45.

Filipinos, African Americans, and Mexican Americans connected to the military had much in common for this reason. They were thus able to come together over divisive issues such as urban renewal in the 1960s and 1970s because they accepted one another as members of a military community, not just as communities of color. However, the new and more recent migration of Mexican nationals, who never had an affiliation with the U.S. military or Fort Ord, has created some of the same tensions and conflicts that developed in Compton and East Palo Alto.

Seaside was the one community on the affluent Monterey Peninsula where new Mexican immigrants could afford to live in the 1990s. Real estate values increased dramatically everywhere else, but in Seaside the out-migration of African Americans from the poorest sections of the city kept rents and housing prices low, thus attracting Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans to these neighborhoods. The new migrant community seized the opportunity to settle, to buy homes, and to establish businesses as they became integral members of Seaside, changing the face of the city from black and white to increasingly brown. Seaside's first Latino mayor, Ralph Rubio, put it succinctly: "No one gives up political power without a fight." The growth of the Hispanic population, he stated, "put pressure on neighborhoods by increasing the density—Hispanics have bigger families, two families in a house, more people in small spaces. . . . Seaside was known for basketball, now soccer is big. Blacks come to city council meetings complaining about 'those people' who have too many kids and chickens in their yards."³⁰ The city's director of public works claimed that she received many of the complaints generated by non-Hispanics, mostly African American residents, about the new migration. "We were receiving a lot of complaints that the Mexican immigrants had a negative impact on the city, city services," she stated. "There were too many pedestrians—they walk everywhere. Hispanic stores were popping up everywhere. They brought their own food, music, clothing, religion."³¹ The mere presence of "so many Mexicans" has elicited almost visceral responses from many African Americans but also from Filipinos and whites who are struggling to contend

30. Interview with Mayor Ralph Rubio, by Carol McKibben, Carpenter's Local Union Office, Marina, Calif., Sept. 5, 2005.

31. Ingersoll interview.

with what appears to be a dramatic loss of city identity. According to a nun at the local Catholic church (a self-consciously multi-ethnic, multiracial, multicultural church in the heart of the city), “There’s always tension in this community. The thing is the numbers have increased, first with the Blacks, now the Mexicans.”³²

Tensions have played out politically in Seaside over development, housing, language—particularly the use of Spanish in the public schools—and day laborers. Conflict has erupted over the presence of Mexican immigrant day laborers in the city, as it has in so many other urban areas that are part of the new racial frontier. Day laborers responded to perceived police harassment in the summer of 2002 by marching on City Hall in protest. The police department had received frequent, even daily, racially charged complaints about the presence of day laborers in front of the 7-11 store since at least 2000, and almost all of these complaints came from Seaside’s African American community. A police department spokesperson explained: “I have to tell you that the most biased group in Seaside is African American. One man called . . . and said his wife was intimidated [by the presence of the day laborers] and that I should ‘get those Mexicans off the street.’”³³

Elsewhere, black-brown contentiousness surfaced in other settings, including the public schools, the main hospital serving residents in South Central Los Angeles, and among street gangs in South Central Los Angeles, East Palo Alto, and Compton. The most recent tensions involved incidents of violence pitting black students against Latino students mostly, but not exclusively, at several formerly predominantly black high schools located in South Central Los Angeles in 2005. A series of race-instigated fights and melees involving black and Latino youth broke out on more than twenty high school campuses. Violence also erupted at Santa Monica High on the west side of Los Angeles and at Taft High School in the San Fernando Valley. When the *L.A. Times* reported that the “Mexican Mafia has . . . [directed] Latino gang members to target blacks with shootings, beatings, and harassment,” and after rumors spread in May 2005 that Latino gangs planned to massacre blacks, parents kept thousands of students out of school on Cinco

32. Interview with Sister Carmelita, by Carol McKibben, St. Francis Xavier Church Office, Seaside, Calif., Nov. 10, 2005.

33. Interview with spokesman for Seaside Police Department, by Carol McKibben, June 15, 2006.

de Mayo, the day of the rumored attacks. Black and brown tensions had not been this high since the riots of spring 1992.³⁴

In nonviolent ways, parents and teachers also contributed to tensions over various education-related issues, especially over the allocation of scarce resources in cash-strapped schools. In East Palo Alto's Ravenswood School District in 2002, many Latino parents sided with the California Department of Education in requesting a U.S. District judge to order a takeover of the district's schools, run by a controversial African American superintendent, because of failures to serve special education students effectively, the majority of whom were Latino.³⁵ Similar complaints came from Latino parents in Compton in a district that had the sad distinction of being the first in California history, in 1993, to be taken over by the state. The state assessment team that routinely reported on the progress the district was making toward the goal of reinstating local control heard from parents who claimed the district was negligent in allocating resources for limited-English-proficient students who made up 41 percent of all pupils in Compton schools.³⁶ For some Latinos, the problems were so numerous in the Compton schools, which were run mostly by black administrators and staffed mostly by black teachers, that some filed a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education. They claimed that "school staff and administrators made racially disparaging remarks about students and/or treated students differently on the basis of race."³⁷ Yet the increasing attention paid to the needs of Spanish-speaking students in local districts has been difficult for some African Americans to accept. For example, a former Seaside councilwoman and new school board member expressed outrage when she was denied permission to distribute flyers for Martin Luther King Day in the public schools because they were available only in English and not in Spanish. "Is this America, Baby?" she asked, questioning whether it was appropriate to give Spanish language the same value as English in official school documents.³⁸

In Compton, the ongoing criticism by Latinos of the public schools, city hall, and the city's African American leadership

34. *Los Angeles Times*, July 6, 2005, A-1, May 19, 2005, B-1.

35. *San Jose Mercury News*, Jan. 20, 2002, B-1, B-9.

36. Fiscal Crisis and Management Assessment Team, "AB52 Assessment and Recovery Plans—Compton Unified School District" (Sacramento, Calif., Feb. 1, 1999), 11.

37. *Los Angeles Times*, June 8, 2000, B-1.

38. Interview with Helen B. Rucker, by Carol McKibben, Seaside, Calif., Jan. 9, 2006.

prompted Mayor Omar Bradley in 1998 to state, "I see this as a well-constructed attempt to utilize the historical context of the African American Civil Rights Movement for the benefit of a few people, who in fact probably don't even consider themselves nonwhite."³⁹ The tensions between African Americans and the increasing Latino population in cities such as Compton and East Palo Alto remind us, in some basic ways, of similar political tugs-of-war among earlier groups of native-born Americans who resisted the entrance of new European American groups into the body politic in the late 1800s and early 1900s (e.g., first the Irish and later Italians, Jews, and others). However, Bradley's comment regarding civil rights is illustrative of a distinctly new context for understanding contemporary relations among people of color. In contrast to conflicts between and among white ethnics, which were usually based on struggles for power and geographic space and did not draw on the language of rights and past injustices caused by prejudice, many black and Latino leaders both use the rhetoric and the premises of group rights as historically disadvantaged people to make claims to representation, political power, and control of institutions.

These claims surfaced in the realm of politics but also were manifested in tensions in other institutional settings. For example, in Compton in 1990 a group of Latinos proposed an affirmative action plan for the hiring of Latinos for city jobs and jobs in the school district where Latino children made up the large majority. A member of the Compton Unified School Board responded by claiming that affirmative action programs were established as reparations for black enslavement and were not "based on going back and forth across the [U.S.-Mexico] border 10 to 15 times a year."⁴⁰ Referring to an earlier era in the city's recent history when blacks protested against discriminatory treatment by whites, a veteran African American leader and councilman added, "I have walked many picket lines in Compton [and] I have yet to have one Latino walk the picket line with me. . . . They crossed it many times."⁴¹

Latinos, too, claimed a stake to the Civil Rights era, to the long struggles for inclusion by Mexican Americans, and to the protections guaranteed by law against discrimination based on race. Indeed, in numerous instances beginning in the 1980s, Latinos

39. *Los Angeles Times*, April 16, 1998, A-8.

40. In *ibid.*, May 7, 1990, B-1.

41. *Ibid.*

have used local and federal agencies to intervene on their behalf because of alleged discrimination against them by African Americans. For example, Latinos filed complaints with the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and the Los Angeles County Office of Affirmative Action Compliance (LACOAAC) in the 1980s and again in the 1990s, charging racial discrimination in hiring practices at the King/Drew Medical Center located in the Watts/Willowbrook area of South Central Los Angeles. Since its inception in the wake of the Watts riots, this medical center had become one of the primary black-run institutions in Los Angeles. But over time, the demographic changes in the hospital's serving area resulted in a majority of Spanish-speaking patients but few Latino employees. The investigation by the county's Affirmative Action Compliance office staff concluded, "the hospital and its overseer, the Department of Health Services, had done little to improve conditions for Latinos."

In 1995 the Los Angeles County Civil Service Commission similarly found that the medical center "has an unwritten policy of maintaining itself as a black institution, and of placing black candidates in positions of leadership within the institution, to the exclusion of non-blacks."⁴² In education, Latino parents, as in the cases of Compton and East Palo Alto, sought intervention by the state when they deemed their children had suffered discriminatory treatment in districts administered primarily by blacks. And, as mentioned previously in the case of Lynwood, when blacks found themselves in the minority in a Latino-dominated city, they too resorted to lawsuits claiming discrimination based on race.⁴³

In the post-Civil Rights era, these claims served to open the divide even wider among many African Americans and Latinos, especially among many political leaders and advocates. Yet conflict and adversarial inter-group relations—the issues considered most newsworthy and those we tend to hear most about—do not tell the other story, one of cooperation, collaboration, and the possibilities of coalition building. When one looks deeper into cities of color, many examples surface of African Americans, Latinos, and others forging respectful, meaningful, and important initiatives of cooperation. There are many grass-roots activists, non-profit organizations,

42. Susan Goldsmith, "Blacks Only," *New Times Los Angeles*, Dec. 12, 1997.

43. *Newsweek*, July 10, 2006, pp. 44–45.

and ordinary citizens in nearly every locale that hold a belief that people of color share a common destiny in a diverse society and that principles of fairness, justice, equality, and self-determination—ideas from the wellsprings of the civil rights and ethnic nationalist movements—are the foundations upon which various groups can rally rather than fight. Some draw their inspiration from Christian religious beliefs, while others base their efforts on a realist perspective about how an ethnically and racially diverse community can function effectively.

Omwale Satterwhite, one of East Palo Alto's pioneering black community activists, remarked several years ago that "The oppressed must free themselves. . . . but then those that happen to be in power have to be open and conscious of ways to provide opportunity and not be unnecessary or unduly resistant to the process."⁴⁴ Bob Hoover, a resident of East Palo Alto since 1959, who runs an after-school golf program for children in the community, looked back on his days as a Stanford graduate student and remembered how he was refused rentals in nearby communities because he is black: "We [African Americans] ought to be the most understanding of prejudice and denial of any people on the planet. . . . We ought to be working to create unity."⁴⁵ Many non-profit groups in the city, including One East Palo Alto and the East Palo Alto Mural Art Project, are about creating understanding, communication, trust, and cooperation as they promote and encourage civic unity among African Americans, Latinos, and Pacific Islanders.⁴⁶

Much like their counterparts in East Palo Alto, individuals and organizations in Compton are working to counter the black-brown conflict and tensions that have characterized the city since the late 1980s. In some instances, religious leaders helped pave the way for reconciliation between the two groups. For example, the Rev. William R. Johnson, head of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church in the city, made the case in 1994 that black city political leaders should work to include Latino representation based on a common experience of exclusion by race. "We [African Americans] are today the entrenched group trying to keep

44. Interview with Omwale Satterwhite, East Palo Alto Project/Dreams of a City Production Team, Harmony House Archives, Stanford University.

45. *San Jose Mercury News*, June 14, 2004, 1-9A.

46. For One East Palo Alto, see the organization's website: www.epa.net/oepa. For the East Palo Alto Mural Art Project, see www.epamap.org.

out intruders,” Johnson declared, “just as whites were once the entrenched group and we were the intruders.”⁴⁷ “Latinos should have a voice,” a local black resident remarked after witnessing a Latino protest at a city council meeting. “We went through the same thing when blacks came into the city and it was all white,” he added.⁴⁸ The Rev. B. T. Newman is pastor of the Citizens of Zion Baptist Church and a key participant in an unprecedented ecumenical coalition, Pastors for Compton (PFC), a collaborative initiative by black Protestant and Latino church leaders. Newman claimed, “It’s [the PFC] trying to preserve this transition [from majority black to majority Latino] to where it don’t end up in war.” “I’ve learned if we have it right we can share power,” Newman commented; “The power can be shared.”⁴⁹ As an advocacy organization, Pastors for Compton pushed elected leaders to consider several issues to give equity to blacks and Latinos alike.

In addition to religiously oriented groups, some organizations outside the city stepped in to help ameliorate the growing conflict between Latinos and African Americans in Compton. For example, the “Unity Summit” in 1994, co-sponsored by the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), allowed both groups to air grievances. In another “Unity Rally” that same year that drew a large crowd of Compton residents, both black and brown, one of the organizers of the event, the Rev. Reuben Anderson, stated, “We recognize the ethnic diversity among us, yet we realize we have more in common that binds us together than issues that divide us.”⁵⁰ New groups continue to form, such as the Compton Community Partners, a group of African American and Latino grass-roots activists committed to launching a biracial organization to advance the educational welfare of black and Latino youth in the city.

In Seaside, the Coalition of Minority Organizations was formed explicitly to bring the new Latino population into conversation

47. Quoted in Regina Freer, “Black Brown City: Black Urban Regimes and the Challenge of Changing Demographics, A Case Study of Compton, California (unpublished paper, 2004; permission to cite this paper was granted by Professor Regina Freer, Occidental College), 12.

48. *Ibid.*, 12.

49. Quoted in *ibid.*, 33.

50. *Ibid.*, 33.

with the NAACP to work together for social and political justice. As a result, Latinos and African Americans worked together to help elect two African American women to the Monterey Peninsula Unified School Board. Groups such as the Yellow Jackets and the Seaside Concerned Citizens Committee (SCCC), organized in the 1990s to raise awareness about increasing crime in Seaside, included blacks, whites, Asians, and Latinos. A former Seaside mayor, Jerry Smith, who is African American, led the SCCC and spearheaded a political coalition with the current Latino mayor, Ralph Rubio, to push commercial and residential development projects forward that are helping Seaside recover economically from the losses brought on by the closure of Fort Ord. Under the radar of news media and out of the public eye are many small but significant acts of collaboration between Latinos and African Americans in Seaside. For example, although the city council meetings often attract the vocal and the angry, according to anecdotal reports from Seaside residents, most new Latino immigrants live in quiet harmony with their white and African American neighbors.⁵¹

In the emerging cities of color in California and across the nation, sweeping demographic changes have created challenges for communities of diverse people to find ways to coexist in peace in the new multicultural settings in which they live. These struggling, working-class cities face many daunting challenges as they grapple with multiple problems, typically with scarce resources. The intergroup conflicts and tensions we routinely read or hear about are part of the realities of the new racial frontier in minority-majority cities, but so are the efforts engineered by individuals and organizations to develop collaboration, cooperation, and understanding among and between diverse groups. From East Palo Alto to Seaside to Compton to Lynwood, examples of these efforts abound. Lynwood's mayor, Leticia Vásquez, a former schoolteacher and the daughter of Mexican immigrants, views herself as someone who can bridge the divide between Latinos and blacks in her city. According to city council member Rev. Alfreddie Johnson, "The unique thing about her [Vásquez] [is that] she has this huge affinity for black people." The *Newsweek* article that gave national exposure to

51. Interviews by Carol McKibben with the following Seaside residents: Al Glover, Feb. 2, 2006; Estela MacKenzie, June 1, 2006; Antonio Morales, Aug. 25, 2006; group interview with white and Asian American Seaside residents, Sept. 10, 2006.

Lynwood as one of the many new cities of color groping for solutions to vexing inter-group relations aptly concluded: “Lynwood is a case study in the power of prejudice, the pitfalls of ethnic conflict and, perhaps, ultimately, the potential for interethnic cooperation. It may also foreshadow America’s future—one that will increasingly see blacks and Latinos fighting, sometimes together and sometimes each other, to overcome a history of marginalization.”⁵²

52. *Newsweek*, July 10, 2006, p. 44.