

**Ethnically Transforming Neighborhoods and Violent Crime Among and Between  
African-Americans and Latinos: A Study of South Los Angeles**

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We would like to offer a warm thank you to the men and women of the LAPD's 77<sup>th</sup> Street, Southeast, and Harbor Policing Areas, the Los Angeles City Attorney's Office, the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment, the Community Development Department, the Port of Los Angeles, and staff from the *Los Angeles Times*. We are especially grateful to the volunteers who serve on the 77<sup>th</sup> Street, Wilmington, and Harbor Community Police Advisory Boards and the dedicated agents for positive change that comprise CAANDU, the Salaam Foundation, ShareFest, the Toberman House, Watts Labor Community Action Committee, Gang Alternatives Program, Work Source, Kenyon Juvenile Justice Center, Vermont Village, Gangsters Anonymous, and the Wilmington Task Force. We also thank the many local residents, stakeholders, and other research participants and organizations that wish to remain nameless. This research would not have been possible without their generous participation.

Finally, we dedicate this Research Report to the memory of LAPD's Deputy Chief Kenny Garner who left this world all too suddenly in the spring of 2009. Chief Garner worked tirelessly to make each and every community he served a safer and more civil place to live. Co-PI Tita is especially grateful for the chance to have worked with Chief Garner for nearly a decade on both the initial study of homicide in Watts and the development of innovative approaches to reducing gun violence as part of the Project Safe Neighborhoods initiative. As one strong proponent of the value of research and as a friend, he is deeply missed.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research study examines the phenomena of interracial violence in South Los Angeles. We use the area that the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) designates as “South Bureau” to define our research boundaries and focus specifically on several communities within this larger designation for more detailed analysis. Despite the current demographic shift whereby Latinos are supplanting African Americans as the dominant resident racial/ethnic group, and contrary to popular media portrayals of an impending “race war” between these two groups, we find little evidence that interracial crime is a dominant trend in South LA. Instead, both lethal and non-lethal violence continues to concentrate within racial/ethnic groups: Latinos mainly victimize Latinos and blacks mainly victimize blacks. In South LA, the majority of intraracial crime continues to be concentrated among African Americans.

We do not suggest that the area residents live in perfect harmony or that racially motivated crime is completely absent. In fact, there have been a small number of highly publicized murders that have been constructed in the media as racially motivated hate crimes. However, much more frequently we find that a careful examination of the circumstances surrounding what first appears to be a racially motivated homicide is, in fact, much more nuanced. For example, one of the large Latino gangs in the area feuds with both black and Latino gangs. Other area gangs that are primarily black or Latino sometimes have cross-race members. When members of this Latino gang fire upon a rival Latino gang and kill an African American, the inter-group dynamic is not one of race/ethnicity but of gang membership. Among the other examples (presented in Chapter 2) we see the interracial killing of an abusive step-father along with other intimate partner violence, strong-arm robberies the end in death, and the killing of perpetrator’s roommate. Our research demonstrates that even when interracial violence does occur, race/ethnicity rarely serves as the catalyst that sets events in motion. Rather, the many racial and ethnic groups that comprise Los Angeles share social space and the same social friction that causes intraracial violence often also causes interracial violence.

Our report also examines the perceptions of residents regarding race and violence in the community. We begin by presenting an analysis of available survey data on neighborhood satisfaction that highlights important similarities and differences between black and Latino residents in terms of how they view their neighborhood and how they view each other. While it is true that Latino residents in South Bureau have a more favorable view of their neighborhood’s trajectory (i.e., more Latinos think things are getting better) than their African-American counterparts, the results show many more similarities with regard to the major issues of concern. Both groups fear crime, gangs, and drugs. Both groups worry about the quality of education, the provision of public safety, and the fairness with which they are treated by society. Neither group listed race relations as the single most pressing issue in their local community. Furthermore, only a very small number of Latinos and no African Americans singled out illegal immigration as being an area of concern. Not only do blacks and Latinos appear to accurately perceive the social and economic inequalities that impact many neighborhoods in South Los Angeles, but these groups also appear to share similar burdens with respect to these inequalities.

Our funding also supported the collection of rich qualitative data focused on issues pertaining to race relations and the role that it plays in motivating violence. The data collected by attending local meetings and other community events, and by interviewing residents, law enforcement personnel, and other community leaders/stakeholders, presents a detailed picture of these important issues. Once again, a story emerges that contradicts the notion that the South LA

community is a “powder keg about to explode” into a war between Latinos and blacks, or alternatively, is actively engaged in “ethnic cleansing.” Instead, what emerges is the nuanced manner by which race/ethnicity shapes daily life, policing, and governing of the local community.

Interviewing civilians and conducting field observations in South LA has allowed us to understand cultural conflict as inevitable and pervasive, but seldom lethal. In a certain sense, a *lack* of conflict would be surprising given the demographic shift, language barriers, and struggle for resources. Coupled with the quantitative data, our research suggests, however, that crime is falling generally and that interracial crime is not, and has not been, very high. Many residents are both aware of and resent the racial conflict storyline as a substitute for confronting issues of entrenched disadvantage, which they hold out as the real culprit behind elevated levels of violence in their communities compared with more affluent areas. Although Latinos and African Americans disagree on many things politically, linguistically, and culturally, these issues tend to emerge symbolically and through accepted channels of dispute, as might be expected, rather than erupting in violence.

In talking with law enforcement personnel, we find that much of what is thought to be interracial violence is more accurately described as gang violence with racial trimmings. In fact, officers told us, only on rare occasions do they find that gang violence has racial motivations, in contrast to what has been suggested in the media. While gangs do contribute significantly to the level of violence in the city, only one violent crime consistently crosses racial lines: robbery. But neither are these crimes racially motivated. Rather, black gang members against middle-aged Latino bus riders perpetrate these crimes, officers surmise, for the ease of their perpetration, specifically saying that it is unlikely for undocumented workers in South LA to report their victimization to police for fear of deportation. In reality, interracial tension in South LA is composed of cultural conflicts in the everyday. Changes to the racial composition of the area have caused some sense of animosity between blacks and Latinos because blacks feel inundated, and to some degree invaded, by the rapid influx of Latino immigrants, who do not speak the language or conform to the local culture. Instead, Latinos adhere to their own forms of cultural expression—such as in the form of parties and loud Spanish music on the weekends, as officers describe it—which comprises the majority of calls for service as they relate specifically to interracial conflict.

While the formal grant period has ended, analyses on these important issues continue. In addition to the dissemination of these findings through scholarly publications and presentations at academic meetings, the results are shared on an on-going basis through local meetings with community groups and the command staff of the LAPD. The generous support from the Haynes Foundation has provided PhD students Luis D. Gascón and Aaron Rousell the opportunity to become active participants in the community. In addition to becoming the official photographers of LAPD’s Juvenile Impact Program (a boot camp for troubled youth) and 77<sup>th</sup> Street LAPD/community choir, they regularly attend local Community Police Advisory Board (CPAB) meetings in the 77<sup>th</sup> Street and Harbor Areas. The process of collecting both the quantitative and qualitative data has also led them to develop their own, independent graduate research agenda.

Thus Aaron’s dissertation will comprise a mixed methods approach to understanding and assessing community policing in LA. The anthropological field methods detailed above at 77<sup>th</sup> Street and the Harbor will provide invaluable insight into the ways in which social power is constituted and negotiated between residents and the LAPD, as well as yielding a unique opportunity to observe the differences in community policing between industrial and post-

industrial communities and how community access to resources helps determine this dynamic. Quantitative data collected from LAPD's community policing office downtown will allow the divergent LADP divisional approaches to be captured numerically and assessed against one another, which may help determine best practices in different contexts.

Danny's work, making use of qualitative methods, including participant-observation, intensive interviewing, and archival research, will focus on the community-police relationship as a site of conflict and contestation for the two communities—black and brown. Community policing, in this sense, can be viewed as a channel through which social and political power can be achieved for residents of a depressed region. He has found that the competition over resources and the claim of ownership to the space of South LA instigates views of crime where both communities view one another as instrumental to the outbreak of problems in their communities—for Latinos, as repeated crime victims of blacks, and for blacks, Latinos as illegitimate and illegal citizens. African American residents fought hard in days past to carve a place for themselves and they mean to keep South Central LA a place for African American cultural expression. This butts up against the desire of incoming Latino immigrants to find shelter and employment, using cultural expression not for its own sake, but as a means for survival. In this sense, the LAPD is used as an instrument through which these communities engage and criminalize one another. But the LAPD has a hand in reifying these divisions as well by creating two separate (English and Spanish) meetings, which legitimates residents' resentment and animosity toward one another in and outside the station.

Future research needs to explore more carefully the characteristics of neighborhoods that might mitigate violence, either within or across groups. The role that various institutions in the neighborhood might play in reducing this violence should be explored in more depth. Also, the role that community policing might play in mitigating this violence should be explored more carefully: exploring the actual implementation of this community policing across the neighborhoods of the city, and determining when it is most effective in engaging residents and therefore reducing crime, is an important area of future research.

While the entire team participated in the initial framing of the research and the writing of the Executive Summary, Introduction, and analysis/writing of the updated homicide analysis, Prof. Hipp deserves sole credit for crafting the section analyzing the survey data on local residents' attitudes (Chapter 3) and our more-than-capable research assistants, Aaron Roussell and Luis Daniel Gascón, collected and analyzed all of the qualitative and homicide data and together authored the sections on homicide files (Chapter 2) and civilian and law enforcement personnel thoughts on race and violence in the community (Chapters 4 and 5). Lastly, we would like to thank our undergraduate research assistants who transcribed most of the recorded interviews and conducted other research tasks. Thanks to Luz Acosta, Melissa Alvarez, Judith Cardenas, Seong-ah Cho, Taina Gamez, Silvia Gutierrez, Eddie Reyes, John Huntley, Jocelyn Koo, Yunchun Liao, Gerolyn Lopez, Leslie Lopez, Irina Maksimets, Sabrina Mirzaie, James Nah, Huy Nguyen, Jacqueline Orozco, Nicole Propst, Vanessa Pueyo, Cassandra Quagliarini, Eddy Reyes, Pedram Sabrkhani, Yannine Tajalle, Xilonem Tinoco, Nicole Yamaguchi, and Theresa Yang.

## INTRODUCTION

**George E. Tita, John R. Hipp, Aaron Roussell, & Luis Daniel Gascón**

Over the last three decades, Los Angeles has undergone a remarkable change in the racial and ethnic composition of its population. Though the historical presence of Latinos in Los Angeles pre-dates the arrival of non-Spanish European Americans and African Americans, only recently has their percentage of the city's population swelled dramatically. In 1980, Los Angeles was just over one-quarter (28 percent) Latino, but by 2000, Latinos comprised nearly half (47 percent) of the population. Some of this increase has occurred as traditionally Latino neighborhoods (e.g., Boyle Heights) become more populated, but Latinos have also become the numerically dominant group in many of the historically African-American neighborhoods of South Los Angeles. This black-brown ethnic succession had gone relatively unnoticed until recent media coverage of high-profile interracial killings raised the alarming prospect that Los Angeles may be on the verge of a "race war." Unlike previous instances of strained race relations between whites and blacks, tensions in the coming conflict are predicted to be between Latinos and African Americans.

In 2000, the National Consortium on Violence Research (NCOVR<sup>1</sup>) funded a research project that examined changing patterns and levels homicide in the Southeast division of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD). Southeast contains many areas of concentrated poverty, including the Watts neighborhood, and several large public housing developments. The area often leads the entire city in total homicides, many of which involve the members of the various well-established gangs that call Southeast home. In 1980, eighty percent of the residents of Southeast were black while the other residents were mostly Latino. By 1990, African Americans comprised only sixty percent of the population, and by 2000 represented the minority of residents (40 percent) with nearly sixty percent of residents now identified as Latino.

An earlier research project coordinated by PI George Tita conducted archival data retrieval from LAPD homicide files on nearly 2,000 homicides (n=1996) that were committed in the area from 1980-2000. For each event, the team coded features related to the incident (e.g., date, location, motive, weapon) as well as the participants (e.g., age, race, sex, gang affiliation).<sup>2</sup> The analysis of these data resulted in the striking finding that, contrary to what social theory and conventional wisdom might predict, violence remained concentrated within members of the same racial and ethnic groups. That is, even with the significant shift in racial/ethnic composition, blacks killed blacks and Latinos killed Latinos. Furthermore, even though blacks lost their numerical dominance in the area, their participation in homicides as victims and offenders continued to outpace Latinos.

Over the entire twenty-one year study period, there was a total of only 272 homicides (14 percent of all events) that involved participants from different racial/ethnic groups. With the exception of the high homicide period of 1990 through 1995 when the percent of inter-group murders hovered just over twenty percent, the proportion of inter-group homicide remained steady across time at just over ten percent of events. One might expect gang homicide to differ

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<sup>1</sup> NCOVR was supported under Grant SBR 951040 from the National Science Foundation.

<sup>2</sup> The PI of the original project, George Tita, is providing this data to the members of the Haynes' funded "Hyper-cities" mapping project. The research community and general public will soon be able to explore the spatial distribution of these nearly 2,000 homicides in the Southeast Policing Area will be able to simultaneously examine other variables related to social and economic change in the area.

from the overall patterns as the established black gangs attempted to fend off and protect their territory against encroaching Latino gangs. Likewise, the Latino gangs might have launched an offensive to wrestle away territory and establish their presence within the community. However, we actually find evidence that gang homicide is more concentrated among members of the same racial/ethnic groups than non-gang-related homicide, although the differences are small. Of the 511 homicides involving gang members, only 58 (11 percent) crossed racial/ethnic lines, whereas approximately 14 percent (214 of 1,485) of all homicides not involving gang members involved victims/offenders from different racial/ethnic groups.

The one type of homicide in which inter-group homicide was over-represented was robbery-homicide. Of the 385 homicides that occurred during the commission of a robbery, more than 25 percent (98) involved participants from different racial/ethnic groups. Of the 98 interracial robbery-homicides, 84 (86 percent) involved a black offender and a Latino victim. This strong black-on-Latino pattern is consistent with both social theory and conventional wisdom suggesting that new immigrants often make good targets. A distrust of the authorities, language barriers, or legal status regarding citizenship might dissuade victims from contacting the police after being victimized. Additionally, many immigrants lack access to consumer banking, and so may carry large sums of cash on their person.

In summary, this preliminary research demonstrated that, even as LAPD's Southeast Area underwent rapid racial/ethnic change, homicide remained firmly entrenched within these groups. That is, we find little evidence to support the notion that blacks were racially hostile towards Latinos and attempted, *en masse*, to defend their community against the encroaching Latinos through lethal violence. This was true for gang homicide as well as homicide not involving gang members. Instead of expressive violence motivated by racial animosity, we find that only when the homicide was motivated by money (robbery) did we see a "targeting" of Latinos by blacks. Again, this does not suggest racial motivation but rather a rational response by criminals hoping to maximize the gains of their robbery.

The goal of this immediate research is to determine if the original research might have missed important new trends in inter-group violence. We begin our report by building upon the original research and examining the commission of inter-group homicide and revisiting gang involvement by a targeted review of homicide files in relevant neighborhoods. Neighborhood context is also introduced as a potentially important element. We organized our neighborhood selection around structural differences (racial/ethnic change over time, poverty homeownership, unemployment) to help us understand the places where inter-group homicide occurs. Also, while the rising tensions so often portrayed in the local media might not result in homicide, perhaps other types of crime involving offenders and victims from different groups were increasing. Therefore, for each of our neighborhoods, we briefly note trends of inter-group interactions for non-lethal violence.

We also explore several important questions that were not considered in the original study. Using data from the Los Angeles Families and Neighborhoods Survey on neighborhood satisfaction, Co-PI John Hipp documents the differences between Latinos and blacks in terms of how they view their neighborhood and how they view each other. Understanding attitudes is taken a step further in what is arguably the most important extension of the current research. Research Assistants Luis D. Gascón and Aaron Roussell use qualitative methods to explore, in detail, the attitudes of local residents, stakeholders, and law enforcement regarding racial/ethnic relations in one South LA community. They also provide a detailed and thought provoking

account of the meaning of “race” and “ethnicity” as it pertains to the commission of crime in the 77<sup>th</sup> Street and Southeast Policing Areas.

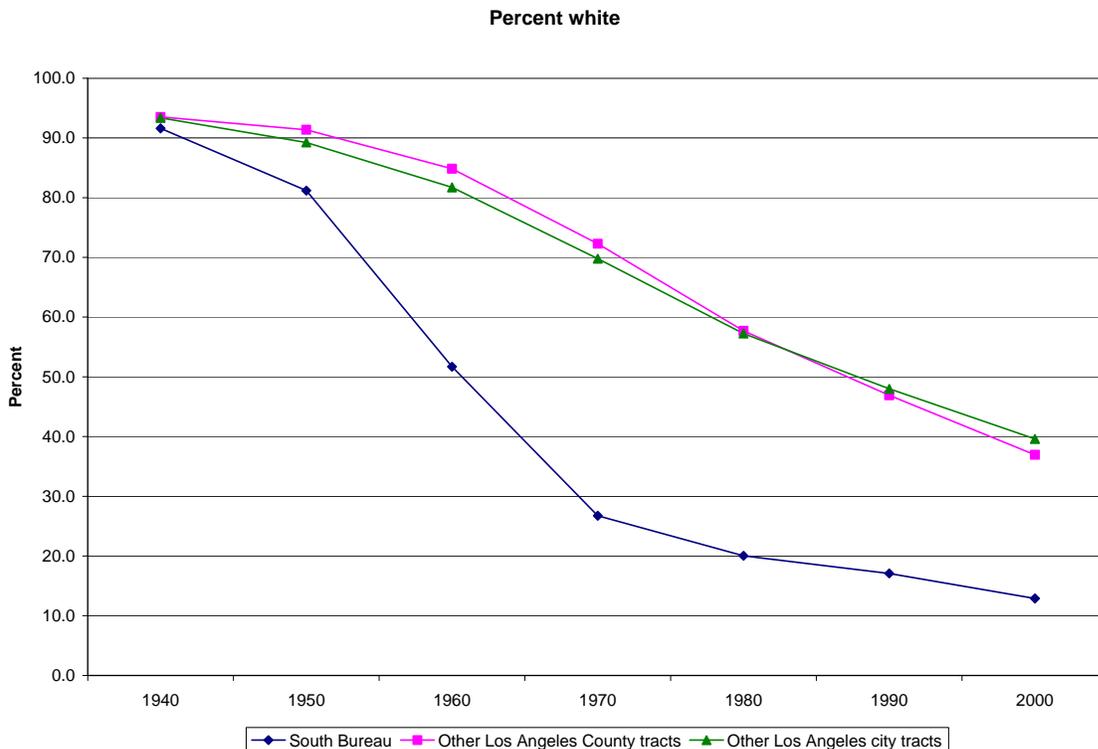
# CHAPTER 1

## Charting Demographic Change in South Bureau Census Tracts, 1940-2000

John R. Hipp

We begin in this chapter by describing and comparing the demographic changes that have occurred in South Los Angeles and the rest of the city over the last 60 years. Although Los Angeles in general has experienced large demographic changes over its history, and in particular the last 40 years, the changes in South Bureau are particularly notable. In this chapter, we describe some of these changes over a 60-year period from 1940 to 2000.

In this sixty year period, there were two large transitions in the racial/ethnic composition of the area. The first was the wave of white flight from the area that took place between 1940 and 1970. Figure 1.1 dramatically illustrates this change. In 1940, the average percent white in Los Angeles was 93 percent; similarly, South Bureau was 92 percent. From this point on, however, the racial composition of South Bureau tracts diverged sharply: by 1950 the average tract in South Bureau had fallen to about 81 percent white, by 1960 this had fallen to just over 50 percent, and by 1970 the average tract had just over 25 percent white. Over this same period, the percent white in the city and county of Los Angeles has also fallen, but at a much slower rate.



*Figure 1.1.* Percent white in tracts in South Bureau, Los Angeles city, and county, 1940-2000

It is notable that the exodus of whites from South Bureau since 1970 has continued, although the pace has slowed, as the presence of whites in the area heads towards zero. By 2000, the average tract in South Bureau had about 13 percent white residents. Over the same period

# Los Angeles

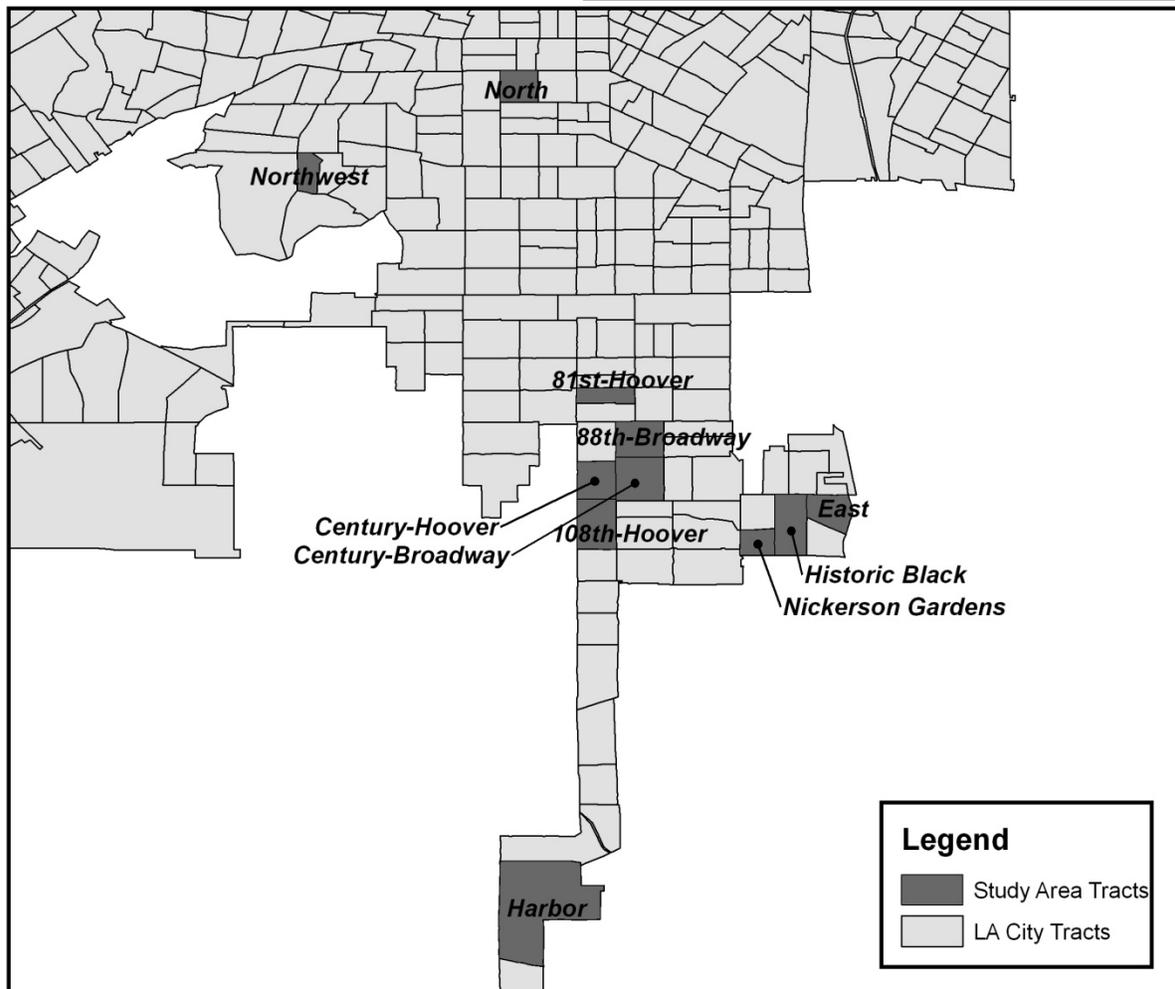
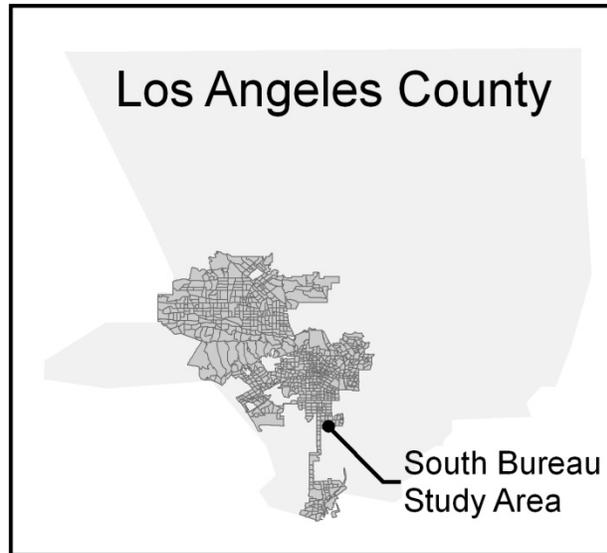


Figure 1.2. Map of Los Angeles' census tracts in South Bureau, with study neighborhoods highlighted and labeled

(1970-2000) the tracts in Los Angeles City have fallen from just over two-thirds white to just over one-third white. From 1970 to 2000, the percent white in the average tract in the city has been cut in half; the same can be said for the average tract in South Bureau.

Although the exodus of whites from South Bureau is dramatic, using the average area actually underplays how rapidly this effect occurs in individual neighborhoods. To illustrate this, we also plot these demographic changes for 11 neighborhoods (census tracts) of particular interest to us below. These tracts were chosen as five matched pairs in which the demographic changes were quite similar, but the inter-group crime rates were quite different. We also plot a tract in the Harbor area that has a recent history of highly publicized inter-group violence. We plot the location of these tracts in Figure 1.2 and label them with names pulled from their demography and geography.<sup>3</sup>

### **The First Major Transition: White Flight**

By focusing on these specific tracts, we can see that the exodus of whites from particular neighborhoods happened for most tracts over a short two decade span. Although scholars of white flight are aware that such changes can occur rapidly, it is nonetheless breathtaking to observe how quickly this can occur. It is also instructive to contrast this rapid change with the more recent demographic transition: the black-to-Latino transition is much more gradual at the neighborhood level.

Focusing on specific neighborhoods, we can observe how rapidly this most recent change occurred. For instance, the Nickerson Gardens (the neighborhood containing the Nickerson Gardens federal housing project) and Historic Black went from 34 percent white in 1940 to about 5 percent white by 1950. Even more dramatically, East went from 54 percent white in 1940 to 4 percent white in 1950. Among the tracts that were largely white in 1940, some took 20 years to almost completely transition, whereas others largely transitioned within a decade. For instance, North went from about 98 percent white in 1940 to 66 percent white in 1950 to just 17 percent white in 1960.

Overall, the sharpest drops in the white population occurred during the 1950s and 1960s. Thus, Century-Hoover and 108<sup>th</sup>-Hoover went from entirely white in 1950 to about 69 percent in 1960 to about 10 percent white in 1970. Even more rapid drops were observed in 81<sup>st</sup>-Hoover and 88<sup>th</sup>-Broadway, which went from entirely white in 1950 to about half white (81<sup>st</sup>-Hoover) or one-third white (88<sup>th</sup>-Broadway) in 1960 to about 5 percent white in 1970. The sharpest drops are seen in Century-Broadway, which went from entirely white in 1950 to 29 percent white in 1960 and shortly after entirely lost its white population, as well as Northwest, which went from 96 percent white in 1960 to just 12 percent white ten years later.

The one neighborhood here with a notably different trend is Harbor, which lost white population much more slowly than the other neighborhoods, remaining above 10 percent in 2000. This neighborhood is of particular interest to our study given that it is the site of recent inter-group violence.

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<sup>3</sup> Some of these names can be confusing. For example, although Harbor is its own LAPD division, as well as a geopolitical area within LA, “Harbor” in this analysis refers to a specific neighborhood within the Harbor division, not the entire division. Likewise, Nickerson Gardens is a housing project located within the neighborhood we label “Nickerson Gardens.”

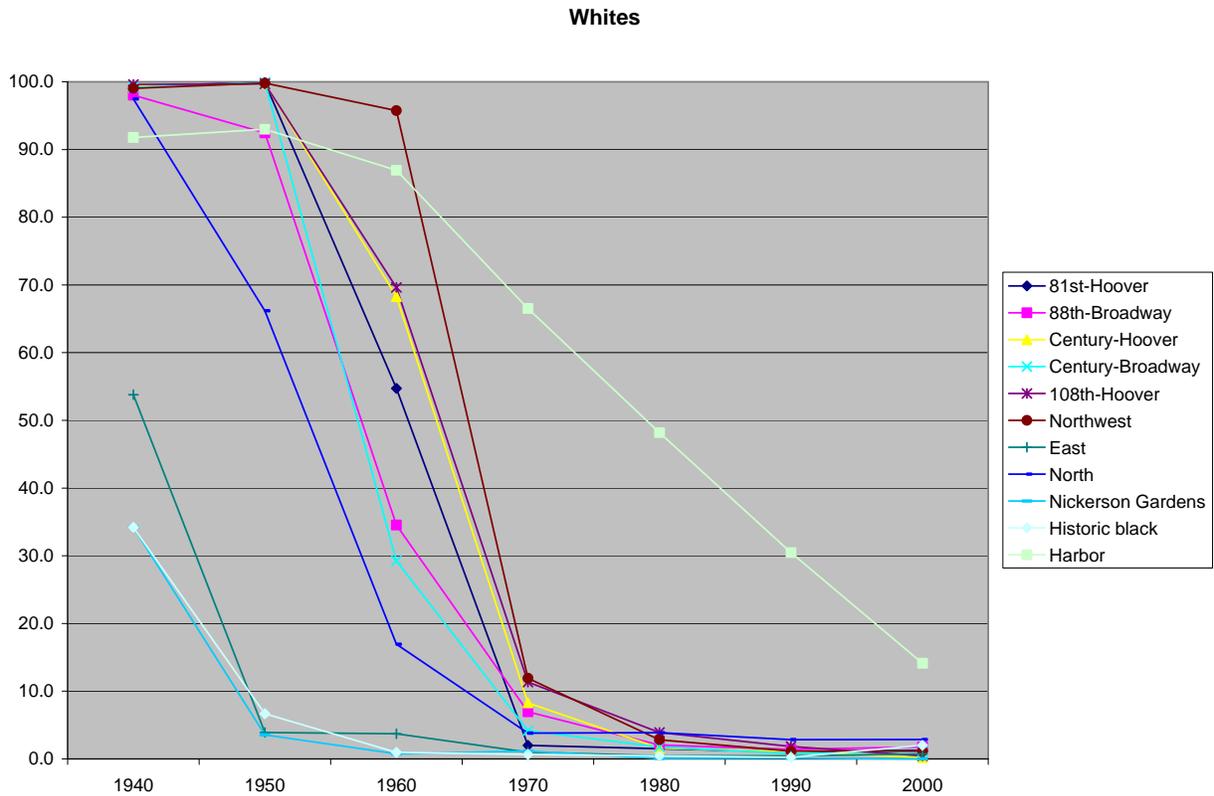


Figure 1.3. Percent white in 11 tracts in South Bureau, 1940-2000

The white flight that occurred during the first demographic transition from 1940 to 1970 was predicated upon a large influx of African Americans. This transition is vividly portrayed in Figure 1.4. In 1940, there was only a modest difference in the relative presence of African Americans in South Bureau tracts compared to tracts in the rest of the city. In 1940, whereas the average tract in the city contained about 2 percent African Americans, the average tract in South Bureau had about 3 percent African Americans. During the 1940s, South Bureau began a dramatic transition. By 1950, the average tract in the area was about 12 percent black, by 1960 the average was about 33 percent and by 1970 the black-to-Latino transition was complete as the average tract was over 50 percent black. The increase in African Americans in the other tracts in the city of Los Angeles was much slower over this same period, rising to just 7 percent.

### **The Second Major Transition: Black Decline and Latino Influx**

The black migration and white flight demographic transition ended in 1970. During the 1970s, the relative presence of African Americans in South Bureau remained unchanged. During the 1980s and 1990s, we see evidence of the second demographic transition that has occurred in South Bureau over the last 60 years, as the average percent African American in these tracts fell to 41 percent in 1990 and 34 percent in 2000.

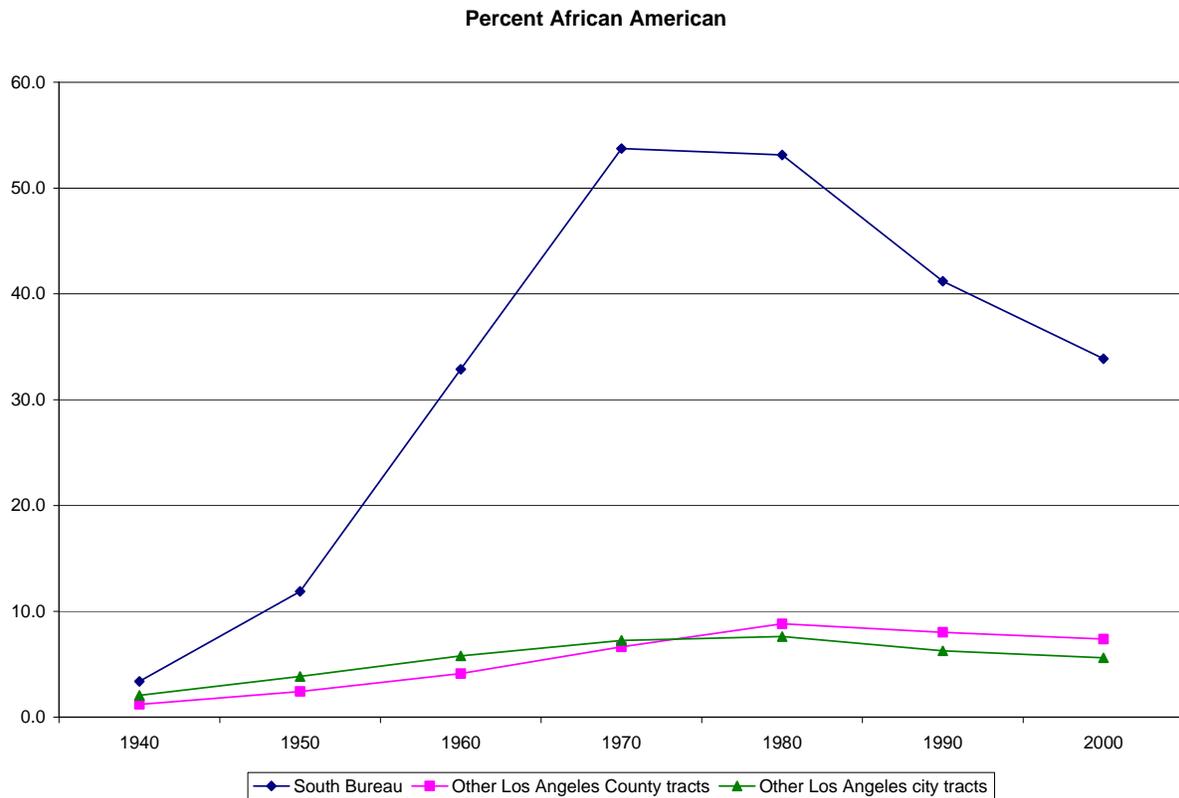
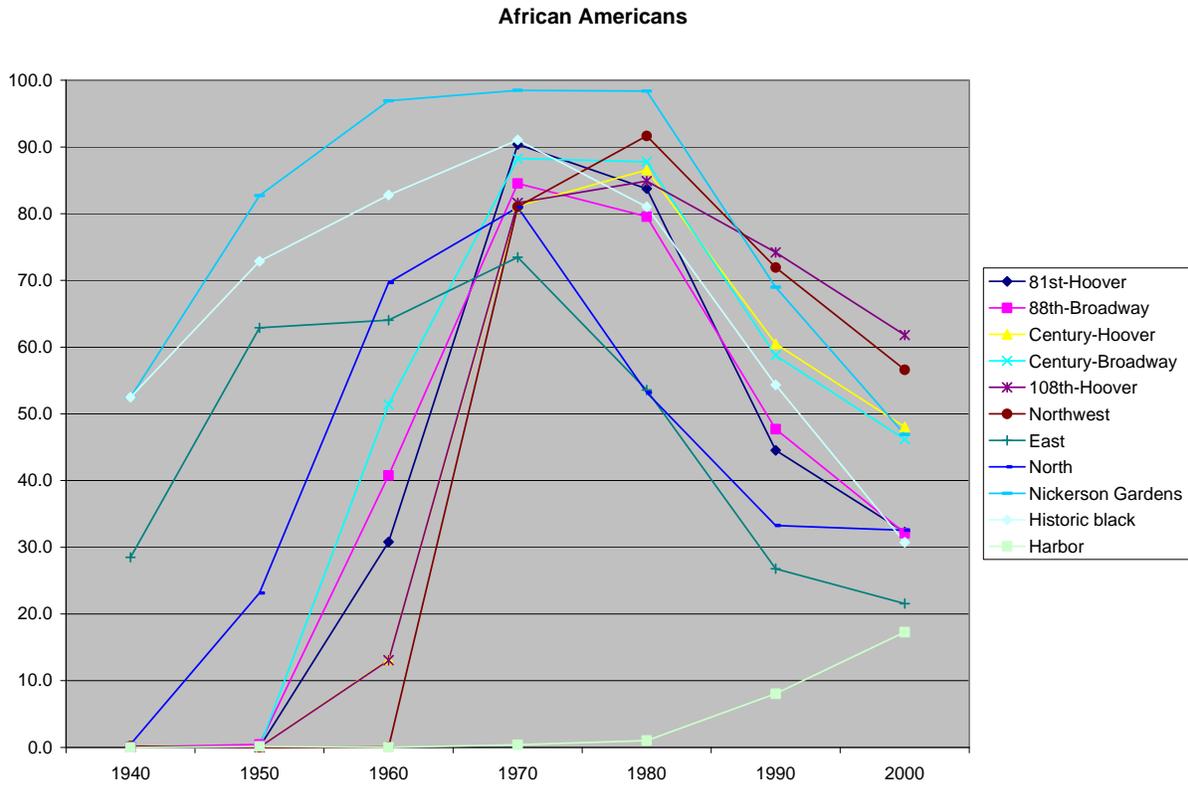


Figure 1.4. Percent African American in tracts in South Bureau, Los Angeles city, and county, 1940-2000

Mirroring the white flight discussion above, the influx of African Americans to specific neighborhoods often occurred in a short time period. This process is illustrated for our 11 study neighborhoods in Figure 1.5. During the 1940s and 1950s the change could be quite rapid: Nickerson Gardens went from about 50 percent black in 1940 to nearly entirely black by 1960. North likewise transitioned from no blacks in 1940 to almost 25 percent blacks in 1950 to 70 percent in 1960. The change was even more dramatic during the later time period, as Northwest transitioned from no blacks in 1960 to 80 percent black by the end of the decade.

The second demographic transition, dating to about 1980, is notable not only because the out-migration of blacks from these neighborhoods occurs much more slowly than did the initial influx, but also because the declines in percent African American in these neighborhoods since 1980 are relatively similar. For instance, Nickerson Gardens went from nearly all black in 1980 to about 50 percent black by 2000, and Century-Broadway has transitioned from 88 percent black in 1980 to about 50 percent black in 2000. Although these are substantial, they are not nearly as dramatic as the initial white flight/black in-migration. This pattern of similar slopes over similar years differs from the earlier transition where the years over which the changes occurred varied strongly from neighborhood to neighborhood. Some began the transition in the 1940s (e.g., North and East), some began in the 1950s (e.g. 88<sup>th</sup>-Broadway and Century-Broadway), and others began in the 1960s (e.g. Northwest).



*Figure 1.5. Percent African American in 11 tracts in South Bureau, 1940-2000*

The other major part of this demographic shift involves the influx of Latinos. As already noted, this transition had a very different character than the earlier one of white flight and black influx. As shown in Figure 1.6, the influx of Latinos into the area has occurred over a long period of time. From 1940 to 1960, the growth of Latinos in South Bureau tracts mirrored that in the tracts of the rest of the city and the county. In 1940, the average tract in the city contained about 2 percent Latinos. By 1950, this was about 5 percent, and by 1960 this was about 10 percent. It is interesting to note that from 1960 to 1980, the influx of Latinos into South Bureau actually lagged behind that of other part of the city: whereas the percent Latinos in the average tract in the city was about 20 percent in 1970 and 27 percent in 1980, South Bureau tracts lagged somewhat (about 15 percent and 22 percent respectively).

However, the second part of this shift began in the 1980s, as the percent Latino in the average tract in South Bureau caught up to the rest of the city and slightly passed them. This growth continued during the 1990s. By 2000, the average South Bureau tract was approaching 50 percent Latino.

### Percent Latino

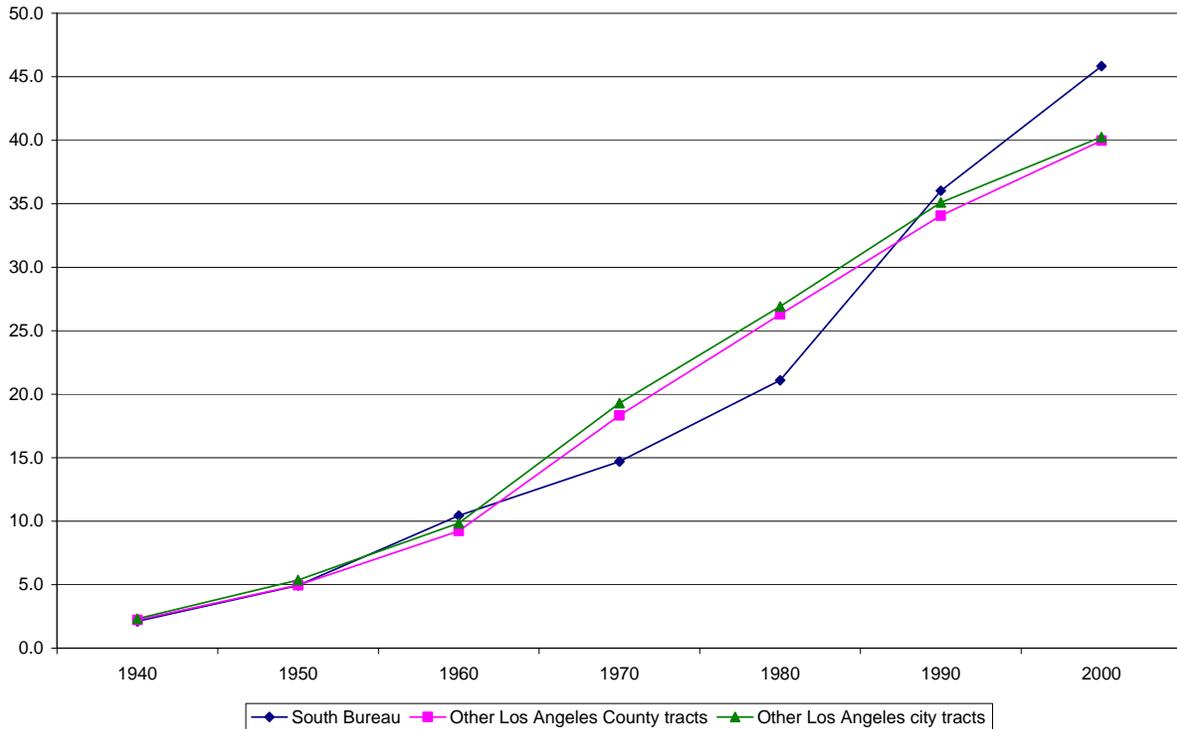


Figure 1.6. Percent Latino in tracts in South Bureau, Los Angeles city, and county, 1940-2000

Focusing on our specific neighborhoods, the increase in Latino presence is somewhat sharper than when averaging tracts, but nonetheless not nearly as dramatic as the increases in African American presence during the white flight of the 1940-70 period. Furthermore, the slopes of these lines essentially mirror the downward slopes of the lines shown earlier for the decrease in African Americans in these same neighborhoods. Thus, this transition can be characterized as a relatively relentless process, rather than one of highly dramatic shifts.

### Latinos

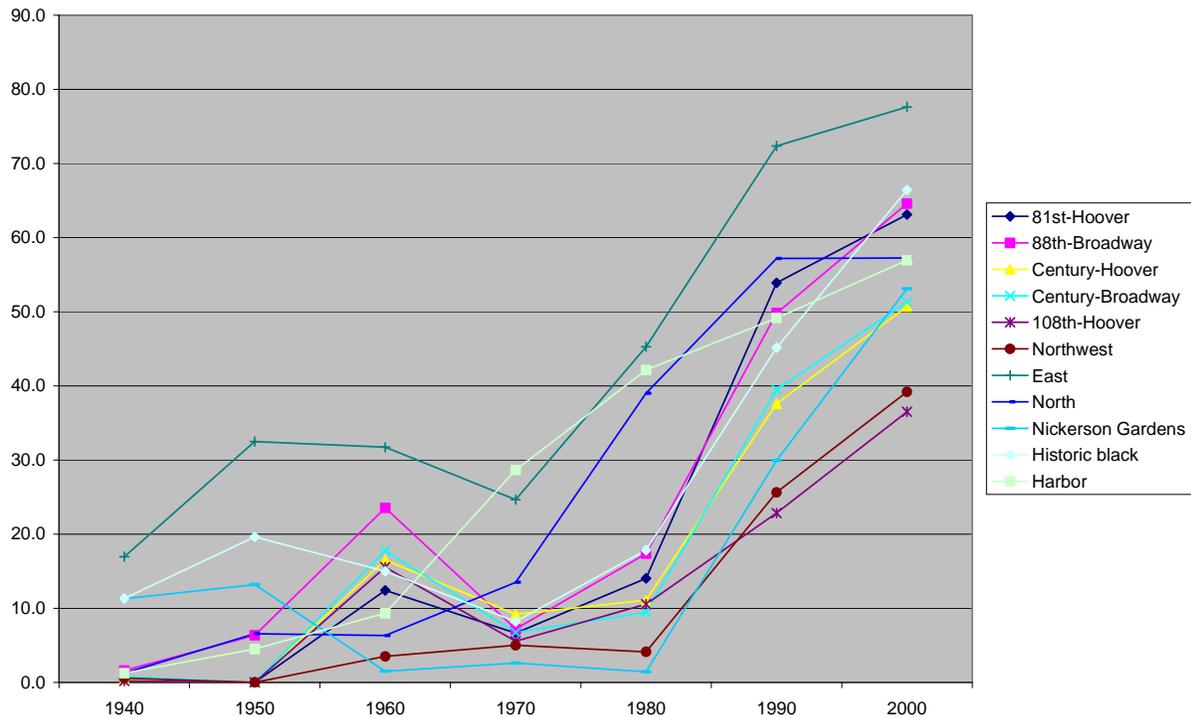
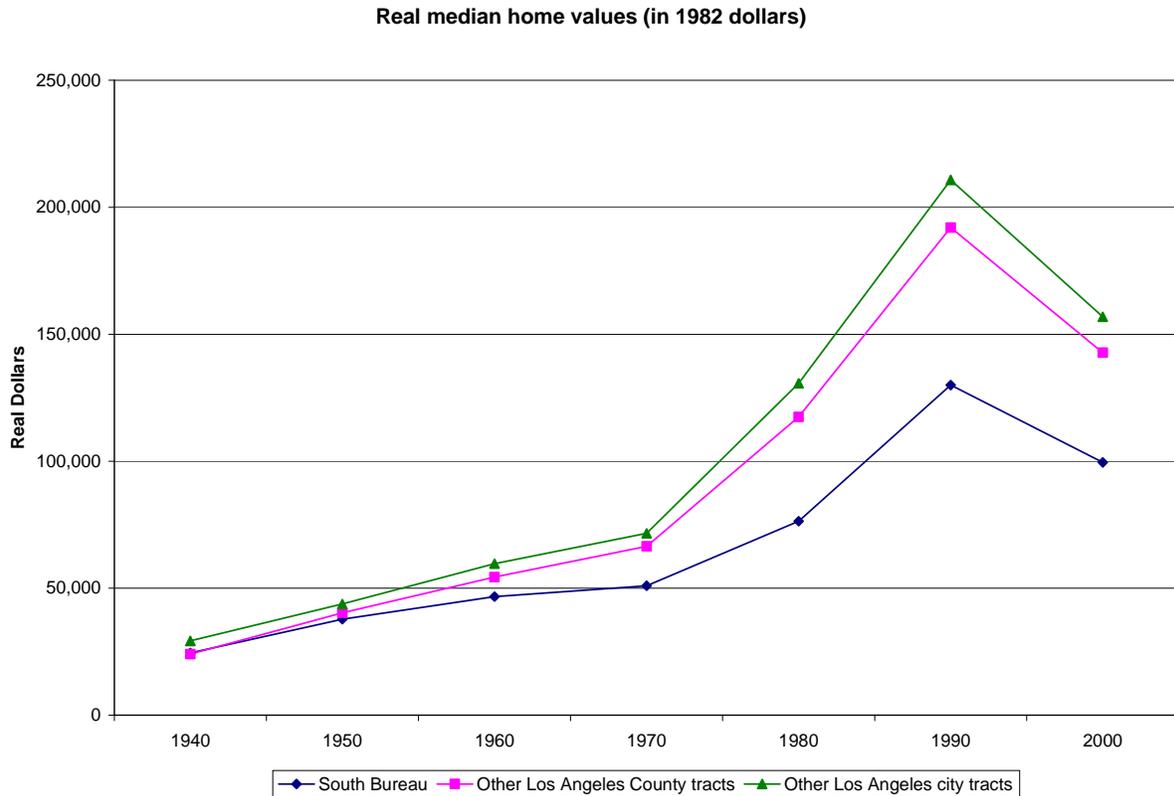


Figure 1.7. Percent Latino in 11 tracts in South Bureau, 1940-2000

### South Bureau Trends in Economic and Human Capital

Moving beyond racial and ethnic demographics, we next focus on the economic history of the region. Given the importance of home values for creating wealth for individual households, we focused on these across the neighborhoods of this area and the city. Home values have changed dramatically over this 60-year period, so we have normalized the median home values of neighborhoods home values based on 1982 dollars.

The pattern of home values is shown in Figure 1.8. As can be seen there, whereas the values of homes in South Bureau were slightly less on average than those of neighborhoods in other parts of the city in 1940 and 1950, this gap began to widen during the 1950s and 1960s. During the 1970s and 1980s the divergence became particularly pronounced: whereas home values increased considerably in the rest of the city and county during the 1970s and 1980s (approximately a 200 percent increase in the 1980s, and approximately a 300 percent increase from 1970 to 1990), the increase was much slower in South Bureau tracts (approximately a 50 percent increase during the 1970s, and 150 percent increase from 1970 to 1990).



*Figure 1.8.* Median home values in tracts (in 1982 dollars) in South Bureau, Los Angeles city, and county, 1940-2000

To make these gaps in home values between South Bureau tracts and tracts in the rest of the city, in Figure 1.9 we plot the ratio of home values in South Bureau tracts to tracts in the rest of the city. For example, in 1940, the median home value in the average South Bureau tract was just 85 percent as large as the median home value in the average tract in the rest of the city. As another way of interpreting this result, the average home in South Bureau was worth about 15 percent less than a typical home in the rest of the city. By 1950, the situation was largely unchanged.

It is notable that the prosperity of South Bureau homes began to fall relative to the rest of the city in the 1950s. By 1960, a South Bureau home was worth about 77 percent as much as one in the rest of the city. By 1970, a South Bureau home was worth only two-thirds the value of a home in the rest of the city. South Bureau Home valuation reached a nadir in 1980, as the median value of homes in South Bureau tracts were about one half the median value of tracts in the rest of the city. Since that point, the relative value of South Bureau homes has improved slightly. Nonetheless, in 2000 the median value of homes in South Bureau tracts was just 60 percent of the median value of homes in tracts in the rest of the city.

Home values: South Bureau relative to rest of LA city

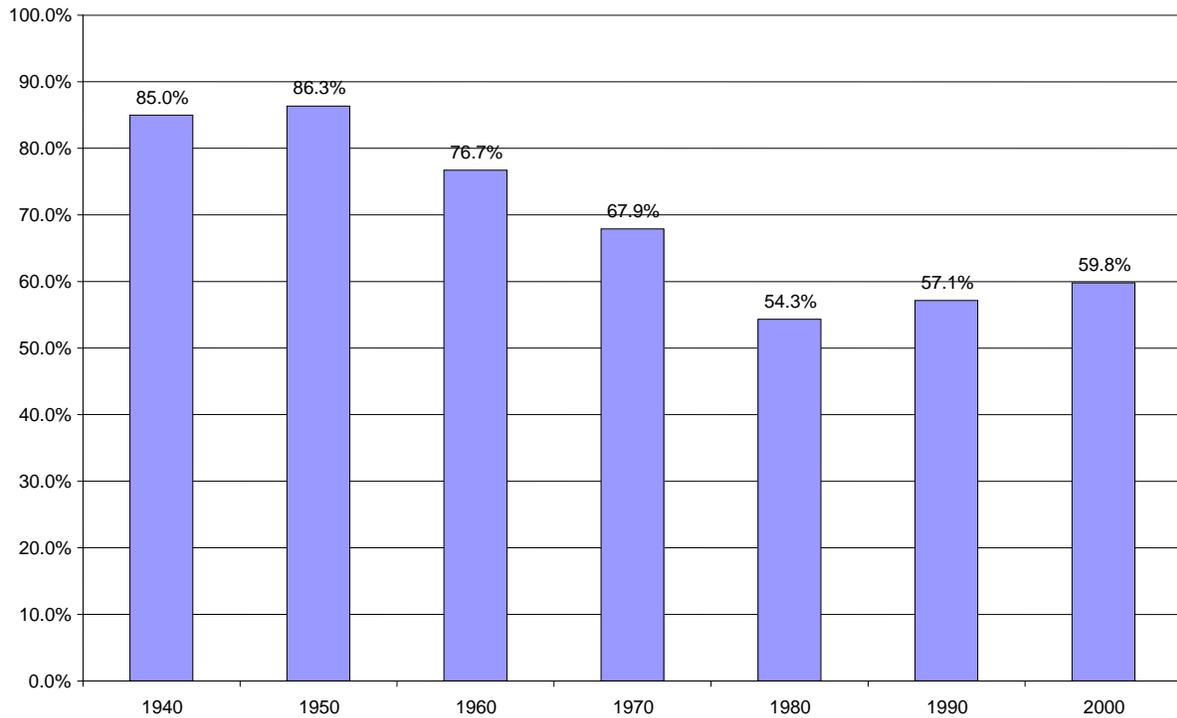


Figure 1.9. Ratio of median home values in South Bureau tracts (in 1982 dollars) to tracts in the rest of Los Angeles city, 1940-2000

Considering Figure 1.4 showing the influx of African Americans into the South Bureau area, along with Figure 1.9 showing the relative fall in home values in the area, suggests that the two might be related. We visually combine these two trajectories in Figure 1.10, which shows the percent African American in tracts of South Bureau compared to tracts in the rest of the city along the left axis, and at the same time plots the ratio of home values in South Bureau to the rest of the city along the right axis. The line with diamonds shows the dramatic increase in the percent African American from 1950 to 1970, whereas the line with x's shows the fall in relative home values in South Bureau over the same period. During the 1960s in which the percent African American remains constant, relative home values fall further. It is only from the 1980 to 2000 period in which the percent African American begins falling that we simultaneously see an increase in the relative values of homes in the area. Although we have not performed sophisticated tests for a causal effect, these simultaneous patterns are strongly suggestive of an interrelated process.

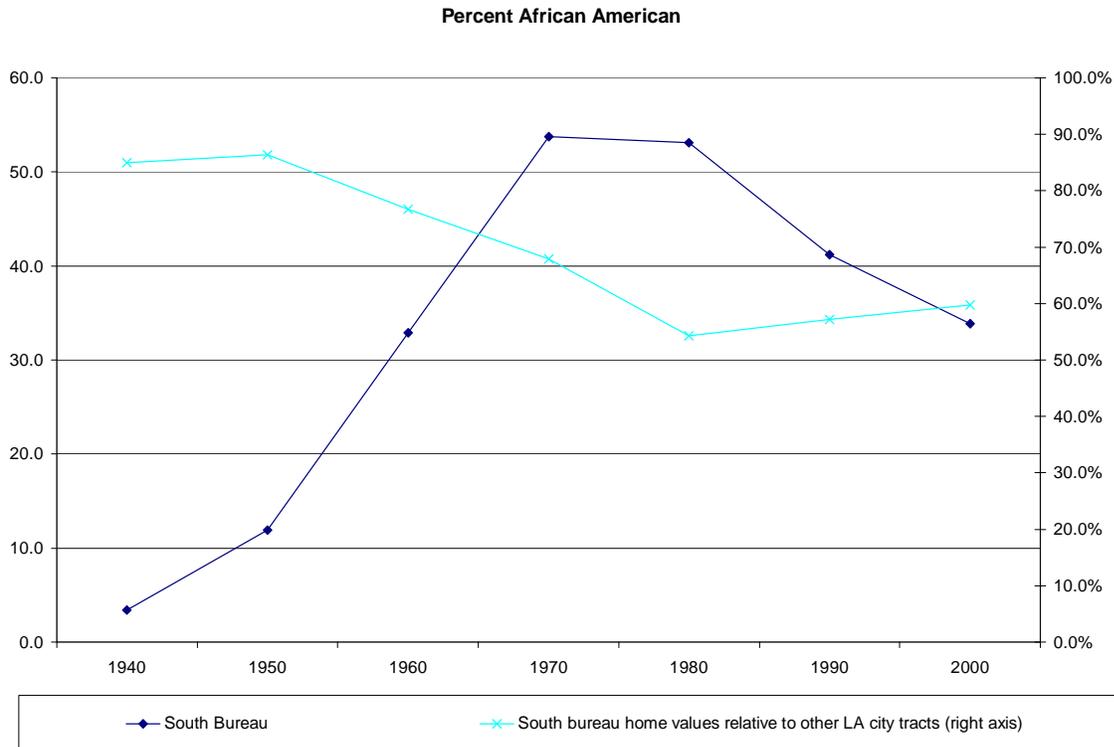


Figure 1.10. Comparing change in percent African American to ratio of median home values in South Bureau tracts (in 1982 dollars) to tracts in the rest of Los Angeles city, 1940-2000

Related to the wealth of the area (as measured by home values), the economic vibrancy of an area depends on the human capital of the residents. One measure of this is the level of education of the residents. We measure this based on the percent of residents with at least a bachelor's degree. In Figure 1.12, we can see that South Bureau lags considerably behind the rest of the city based on this measure. In 1940, although the percentage of South Bureau residents with a bachelor's degree is low (3 percent), it is low in LA as well (6 percent). During the 1940s, the increase in these highly educated residents in South Bureau tracts mirrored that of the rest of the city. However, in the 1950s we begin to see a divergence: from 1950 to 1970, the percent highly educated residents in South Bureau tracts declines slightly, while tracts in the rest of the city saw a 50 percent increase in the size of their highly educated population. From 1970 to 2000, although the presence of highly educated residents began to increase somewhat in South Bureau tracts, the increase was much sharper in neighborhoods in the rest of the city. In 2000, South Bureau remains below 15 percent.

Percent with at least a bachelor's degree

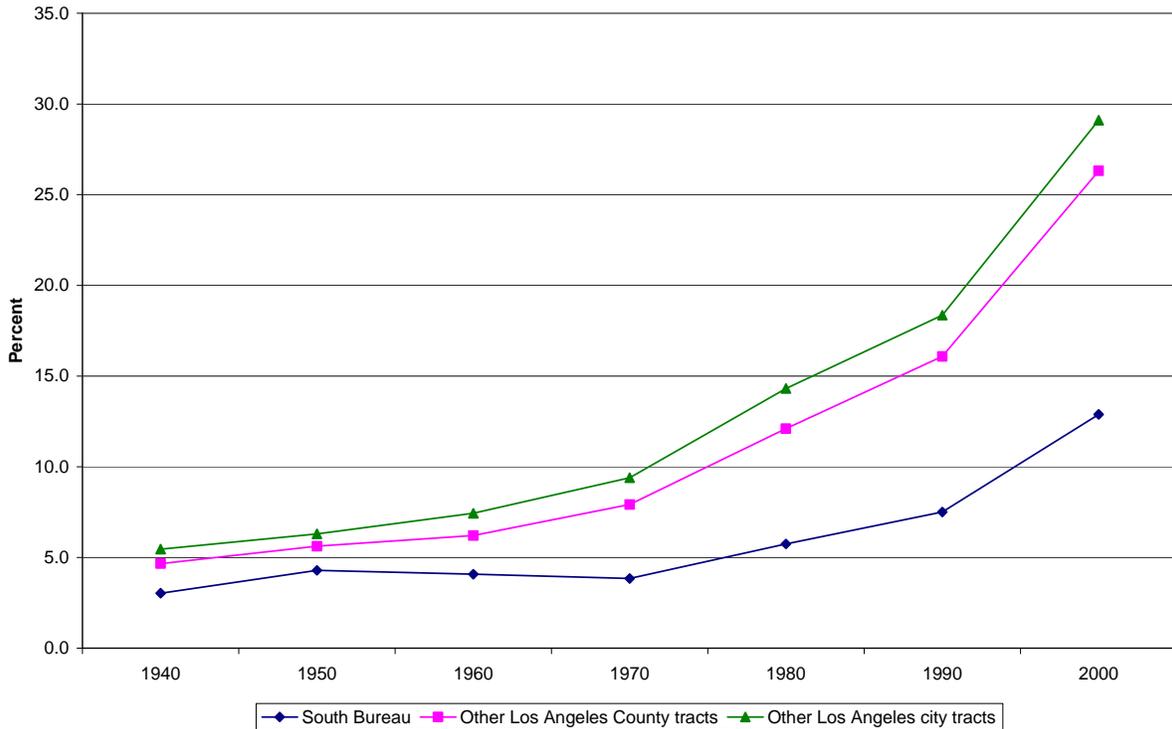


Figure 1.12. Average percent with at least a bachelor's degree in tracts in South Bureau, Los Angeles city, and county, 1940-2000

As another way of visualizing this change in the human capital in South Bureau, in Figure 1.13 we plot the ratio of the percent highly educated residents in South Bureau tracts to tracts in the rest of the city. This makes clear that South Bureau has been disadvantaged based on level of human capital relative to the rest of the city over this entire period. Even in 1940, the average tract in South Bureau had less than 60 percent as many highly educated residents as did the average tract in the rest of the city. This situation actually improved over the following ten years, and by 1950 South Bureau tracts had about 70 percent as many highly educated residents as did the average tract in the rest of the city. Beyond 1950, the situation deteriorates: in 1960, South Bureau tracts had about 55 percent as many highly educated residents as did tracts in the rest of the city, by 1970 this figure had fallen to 37 percent, and in 1980 and 1990 it hovered around 35 percent. Despite a slight uptick in the 1990s, it was still the case that the average tract in South Bureau had about 40 percent as many highly educated residents as did the average tract in the rest of LA. Such a difference has important implications for the economic robustness of the region, a theme that emerged in our interviews with South Bureau residents (see Chapter 4).

Education in south bureau relative to rest of LA city tracts

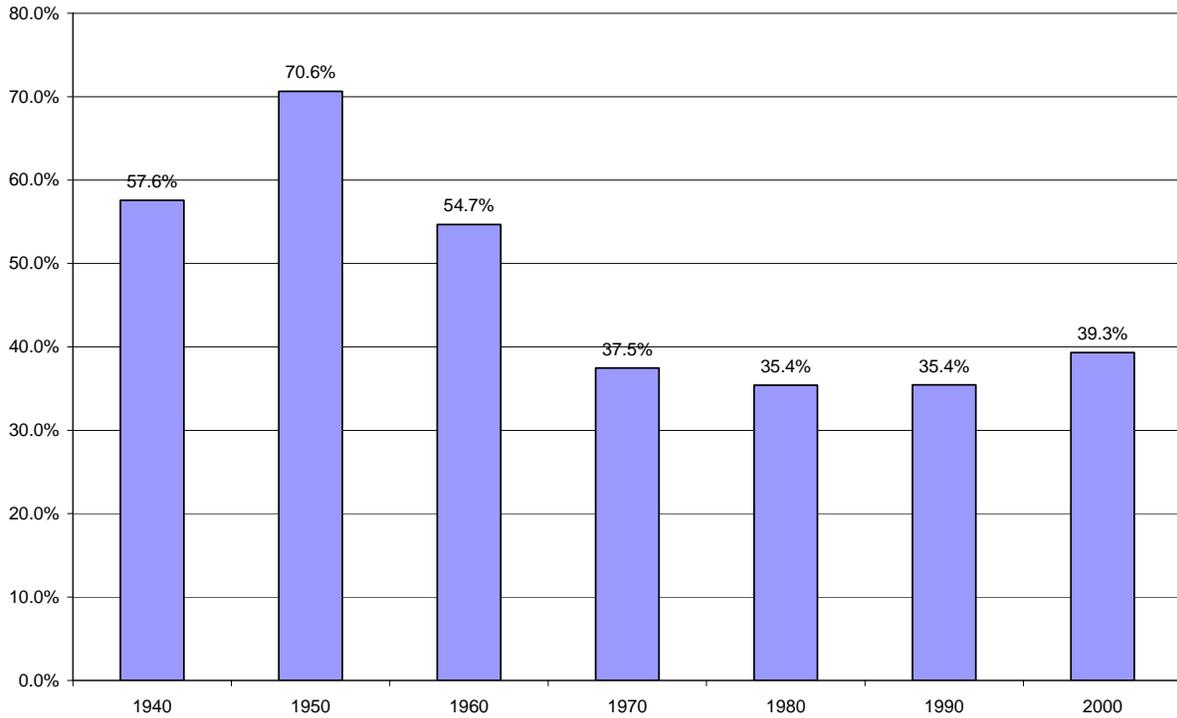
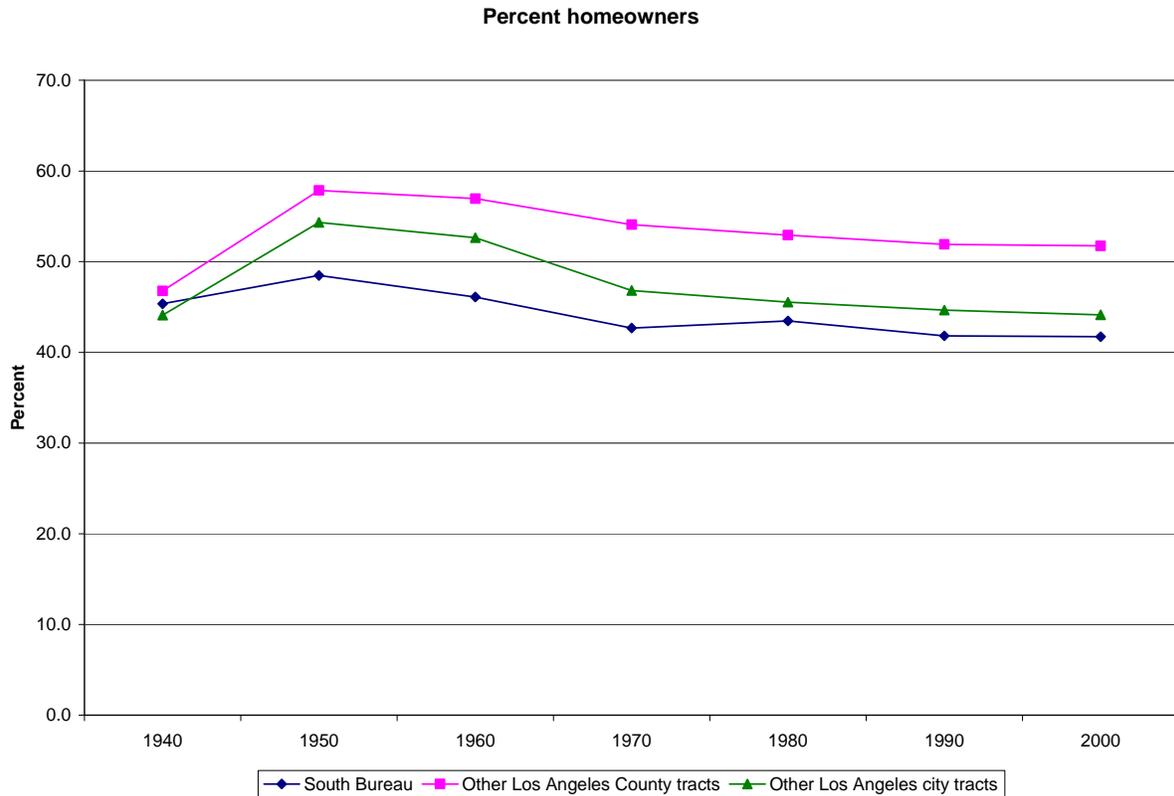


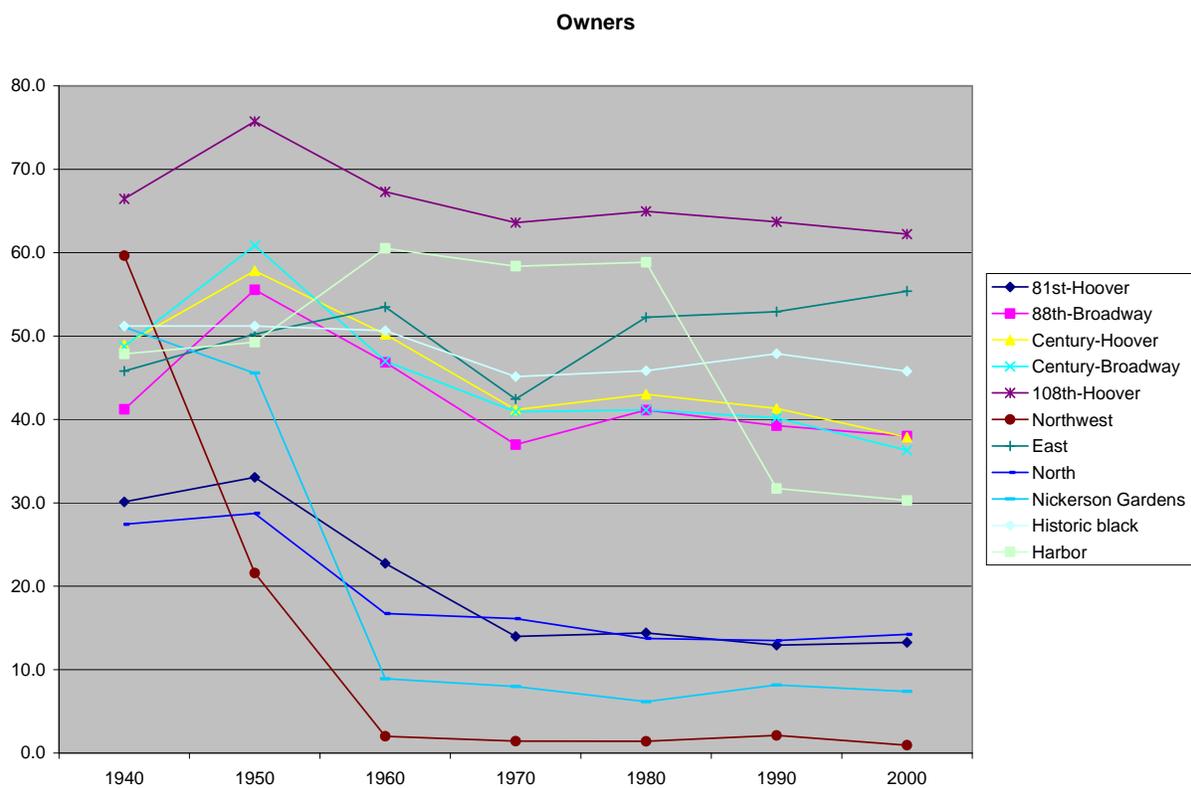
Figure 1.13. Ratio of percent with at least a bachelor's degree in tracts in South Bureau to tracts in the rest of Los Angeles city, 1940-2000

Longstanding social theory (Shaw & MacKay, 1942) suggests that the level of home ownership in neighborhoods is important for providing stability and a sense of resident attachment. Homeowners should be more invested in the community economically, and therefore more likely to provide for the general welfare. How does South Bureau compare to the rest of the city? Figure 1.14 illustrates that there was virtually no difference in the level of homeownership in South Bureau tracts compared to tracts in the rest of the city or county. This began to change during the 1940s. By 1950, whereas the percent homeowners in the average tract in the city had increased to 54 percent, South Bureau tracts lagged at about 48 percent. This gap has remained ever since, although it has narrowed slightly in recent years.



*Figure 1.14.* Average percent homeowners in tracts in South Bureau, Los Angeles city, and county, 1940-2000

We plotted the homeownership rate in our 11 study tracts in Figure 1.15. There are some sharp differences among these tracts. Although most have shown relatively constant rates of homeownership, two in particular have seen collapses in ownership. For example, Northwest went from 60 percent homeowners in 1940 to 22 percent in 1950 to just 2 percent since 1960. Likewise, Nickerson Gardens went from 51 percent owners in 1940 to 46 percent in 1950 to just 9 percent since 1960. Although part of this change is traceable to the construction of large federal housing projects in some of these neighborhoods, rather than some migratory process, the analysis of the effects on the community remain unchanged. North and 81<sup>st</sup>-Hoover have also shown relatively large drops as their ownership rates have been about halved since 1940.



*Figure 1.15. Average percent homeowners in 11 tracts in South Bureau, 1940-2000*

These dramatic changes in South Bureau are an important backdrop to the story of the region. This context of change is important to understand as we move forward and ask about the genesis of inter-group violence in the area. As well, the economic context itself plays an important role in this story, as will become clear in the following chapters.

## CHAPTER 2

### **Murder Booked: Exploring Inter- and Intraracial Homicide in South Los Angeles**

**Aaron Roussell & Luis Daniel Gascón**

Murder is a fairly uncommon event, although the impact of a single murder can be great. It is often a highly sensationalized crime—a much higher percentage of murders make the papers than assaults or robberies, though these are by no means evenly distributed over race, class, or situation. Furthermore, a significant amount of violent crime is intraracial (e.g. Hipp, Tita, & Boggess, 2009), although it is the exceedingly rare interracial killings that have been highlighted in Los Angeles news media throughout the 1990s and 2000s. Given the historical American context of cross-race killing from the Old South, the category of interracial murder often generates levels of concern above those of intraracial murder. Certainly, some interracial violent crime exists, as does interracial murder. What characterizes these murders? Are they explicitly racialized, like Ku Klux Klan murders in the Old South, or is race merely incidental?

Although Chapter 1 documents the overwhelming black-to-Latino demographic shift in South LA, not all neighborhoods in South Bureau have experienced this shift to the same degree or experienced it in the same way. Still, the overall trend is undeniable, and this has provided fuel for media accounts of a rising tide of deadly “black-brown violence.” A legion of sociological hypotheses suggests that interracial violence *should* be affected one way or another by shifting demographics. Certainly, no prominent theory suggests that that interracial violence is independent from ethnic and racial demographic shift.

Also implicated in the discourse surrounding South LA black-brown violence is the issue of gangs. Denouncement of gangs is endemic to public meetings about the topic—in some circles (see Chapters 4 and 5), notably the LAPD, the two issues are seen as virtually coterminous. While there is undoubtedly some overlap between gangs and race, the extent of this overlap is a crucial question. Further, how are gang killings distinguished from racialized killings? Is a gang war between gang of different races gangs a racial war? To what extent are gangs, in fact, identified solely by race? Many questions are raised by this line of inquiry (many beyond the scope of this study), but at base, we want to understand whether the motivations for interracial murder are fundamentally similar or different from those of intraracial murder.

### **Methods**

Murder is the crime for which the best statistics have always been available and suffers from much less reporting bias than other crimes. Every questionable death in South LA is investigated to some degree or another by the LAPD. The investigating detectives compile as much information about each case as they can. When they finish investigating, whether they solve the case or not, homicide detectives combine all this information into a “murder book,” and file it for reference in future homicides, court cases, or to reopen should more facts become available. For an individual case, these books are the most complete reference sources available for aggregation. Documents available for inclusion (where relevant or appropriate) include case timelines, crime scene photographs, search warrants, case summaries, field information cards for involved persons, and criminal records of involved persons.

Despite their richness as a data source, these books remain quite limited in many cases. Important information is often simply not available, occasionally for the victim, but most often for the perpetrator. And although LAPD Homicide units put in their due diligence in investigating homicides, inevitably there are cases where the named suspect in the murder book is in fact innocent. In this analysis, we faithfully treat “suspects” as “perpetrators,” yet our justice system is the ultimate arbiter on that issue, and the courts themselves are of course not free from bias.

Homicide units work closely with gang units in the investigation and sharing of intelligence in gang homicides. We argue that this has the potential to lead to the over-attribution of murder to gang motives (Hallsworth & Young, 2008). By custom and unspoken mandate, any homicide involving a gang member or associate, either as victim or perpetrator, is marked as “gang-related.”<sup>4</sup> This frequently extends to unsolved homicides with unknown motivations that occur in “gang territory,” a highly problematic phrase, insofar as gangs of varying levels of influence have essentially claimed the majority of South Los Angeles as their territory. Although the “gang-motivated” label is officially reserved for cases where the crime was committed in the furtherance of the gang’s interests—i.e., murders committed for the purposes of expanding drug or gang territory or internal disciplinary reasons—we observe considerable slippage in its application. Where the application of these terms is highly contestable, we have attempted to rely solely on the facts otherwise reported in the book, although these facts are themselves subject to investigatory bias. If a more proximate cause presents itself (i.e., domestic dispute, robbery gone wrong, interpersonal dispute), we consider this information as well.

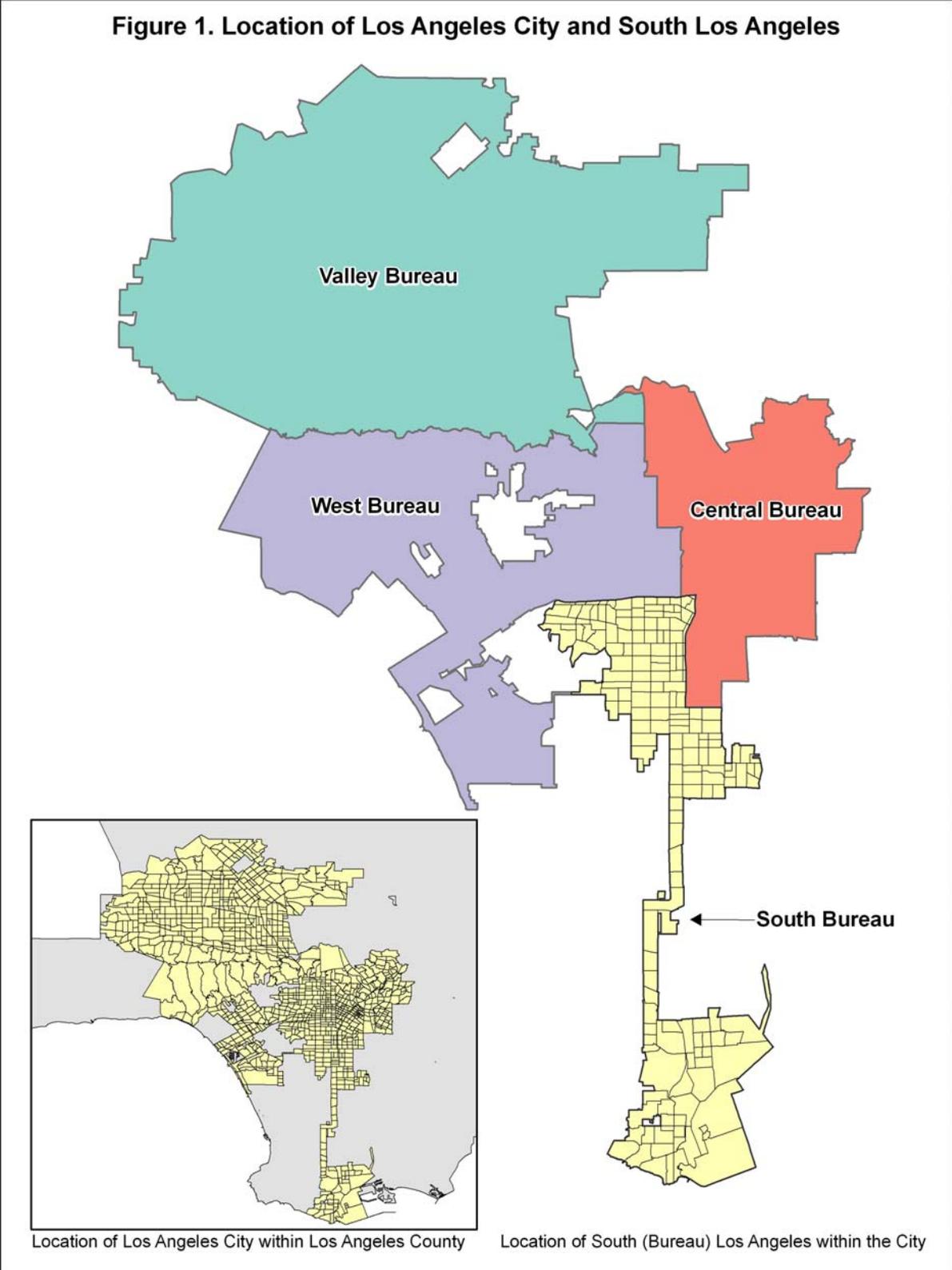
As noted above, we are especially interested in examining patterns of intra- and inter-group homicide and crime within its idiosyncratic context. Homicide is a rare event and interracial homicides are even rarer. Therefore, we decided to engage in purposive sampling and adopted a design that would permit us to examine the occurrence of intra- and inter-group homicides among matched pairs of neighborhoods presented in Chapter 1. A profile with respect to changes in the racial/ethnic composition was created for each neighborhood in South Bureau. The neighborhoods identified in Chapter 1 are census tracts, which also neatly map on to LAPD reporting districts. Pairs were statistically constructed such that the profile was the same for each pair (e.g., increasing Latino majority) but that the level of interracial violence differed sharply. Figure 2.1 depicts South Bureau among the other LAPD Bureaus and Figure 2.2 displays the location of each matched set of neighborhoods used in the analysis.

We coded murders books<sup>5</sup> on these five neighborhoods as well as a singular neighborhood (Harbor) where a particularly high profile interracial killing took place that embodied much of this controversy. We coded eight years of murders, from 2000 to 2007, yielding 198 homicides.

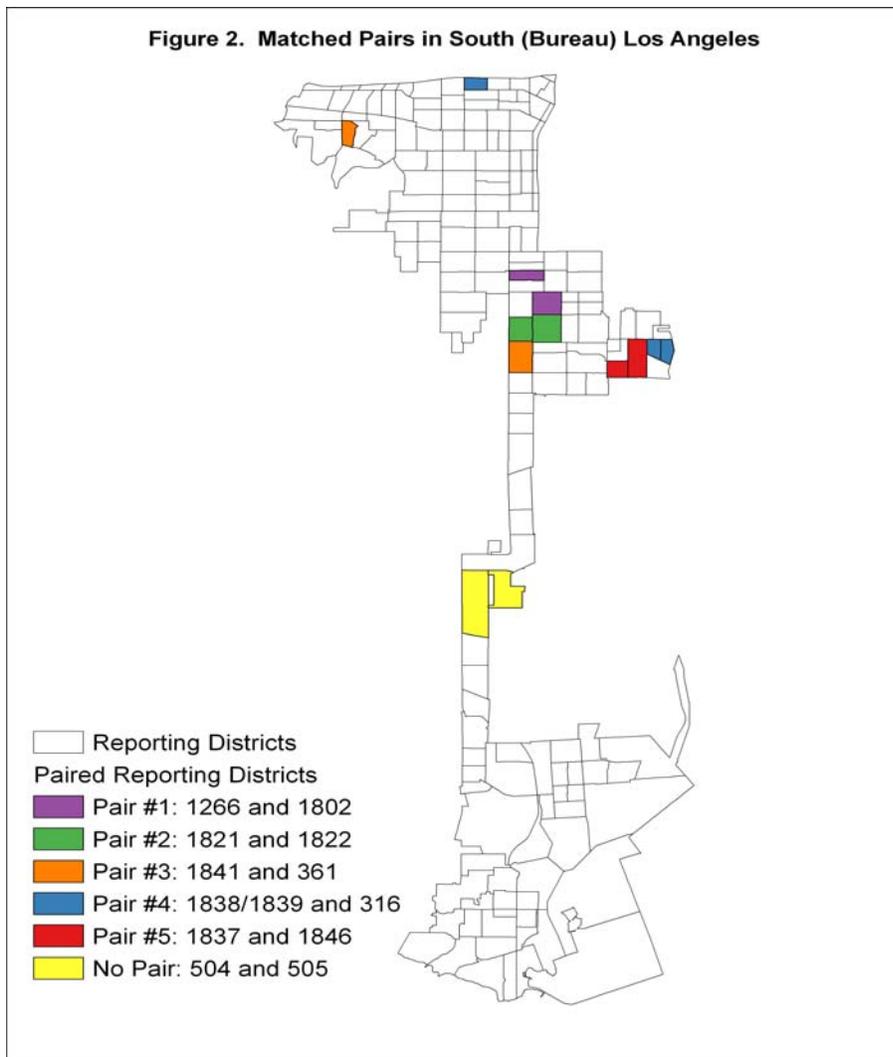
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<sup>4</sup> Although Roussell and Gascón explore this further in forthcoming work, we observed in the course of our research the tendency to attempt to connect most criminal activity, where even marginally related, to gangs. Whether or not this should be labeled “over-attribution” depends on the perspective of the reader, or perhaps information to which we were not privy.

<sup>5</sup> For several murders, particularly in 81<sup>st</sup>-Hoover, the murder books were unavailable for one several reasons. For these cases, we relied upon information in the Homicide Investigation Tracking System (HITS). Neither as complete nor as detailed as we would have liked, the database supplied basic demographics and case information, and we extracted what we could.



*Figure 2.1. Location of Los Angeles City within Los Angeles County and South Bureau within Los Angeles*



*Figure 2.2.* Matched pairs in LAPD's South Bureau

Given the strengths and limitations of the data sources and approach for this chapter, we refine our questions from above into two overarching themes. First, could considering the racial/ethnic profile of a neighborhood and other characteristics of place help explain differences in patterns of homicide? Second, we paid special attention to interracial homicides, addressing them separately and attempting to speculate about motivations given the data available in the murder books. Are they driven by a discernable racial animus? Are they incidental by-products of gang feuds?

Table 2.1 reports the number of inter- and intra-group homicides by year and Figure 2.3 depicts the trend graphically. Both homicide types follow a similar pattern over time, suggesting tentatively that the same forces that affect intra-group homicide also affect inter-group events. The numbers of homicides in each type hold fairly steady until 2005, where they all drop sharply before rebounding in 2006. After that, all appear to be in decline in 2007. As a contextual note, LA crime has been in decline for a decade, homicide in particular since 2002. In light of our purposeful sampling scheme and the over-sampling of inter-group events, it is worth noting that nearly 82 percent (162/198) homicides occur among members of the same racial/ethnic groups.

Table 2.1  
Homicides types by year

Year	All	Interracial	Intracial
2000	26	8	18
2001	27	6	21
2002	29	3	26
2003	28	5	23
2004	28	6	22
2005	15	0	15
2006	30	5	25
2007	15	3	12
Totals	198	36	162

Next we examined the role of gangs in inter-group violence. More than one-half (105/198) of all homicides involve a gang member as either offender or victim but was not necessarily motivated by gang issues. Of the 105 homicides involving gang members, 52 were gang motivated (50 percent). With respect to the race and ethnicity of the participants, we find that among all homicides involving gang members, 20 percent (21/105) were interracial. When we look only at those events that we could confidently label as “gang motivated,” we find that 13 of the 52 events (25 percent) cross racial/ethnic lines. At first glance, this number seems high and does suggest that gang motivated events might be racially driven. However, as we will show below, such a conclusion is premature.

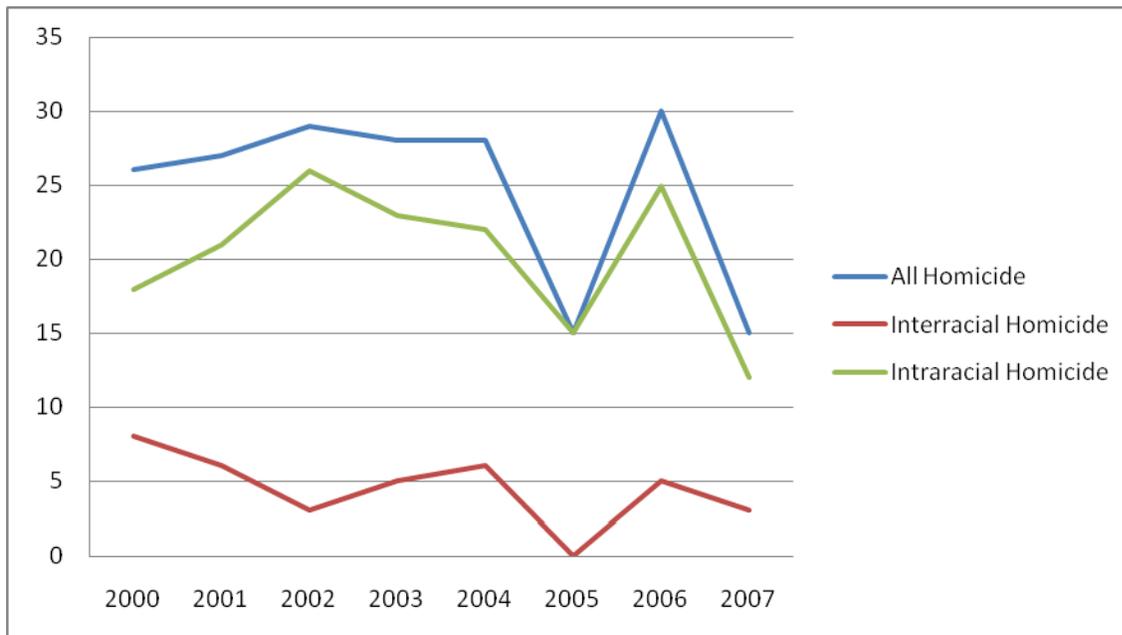


Figure 2.3. Homicides by type, 2000-2007

Table 2.2  
Percent racial/ethnic change in neighborhoods (1990-2000)

Neighborhoods	Latino 90	Latino 00	ΔLatino	Black 90	Black 00	ΔBlack	White 90	White 00	ΔWhite
<i>Pair 1</i>									
81 <sup>st</sup> -Hoover	53.3	66.5	13.2	44.8	30.5	-14.3	0.9	0.7	-0.2
88 <sup>th</sup> -B'way	50.3	64.6	14.3	47.7	32.1	-15.6	1	1.8	0.8
<i>Pair 2</i>									
Century-Hoover	37.6	50.7	13.1	59.8	48.1	-11.7	1.1	0.2	-0.9
Century-B'way	35.6	51.3	15.7	61.2	46.2	-15	1.4	1.1	-0.3
<i>Pair 3</i>									
108th-Hoover	20.1	36.5	16.4	76.3	61.8	-14.5	2.3	0.4	-1.9
Northwest	24.8	39.2	14.4	71.9	56.6	-15.3	1.4	1.1	-0.3
<i>Pair 4</i>									
East (4)	70.5	77.6	7.1	29.3	21.6	-7.7	0.2	0.7	0.5
North (4)	56.2	57.3	1.1	34.6	32.6	-2	3.1	2.9	-0.2
<i>Pair 5</i>									
Nick. Gard.	28.7	53.1	24.4	70.8	46.9	-23.9	0	0	0
Hist. Black	45.2	66.4	21.2	54.7	30.7	-24	0.1	2	1.9
Harbor	48.7	57	8.3	8.4	17.3	8.9	30.2	14.1	-16.1

Combining both quantitative data and narratives derived from reading through the homicide files, we examine homicide within its ecological context. Table 2.2 reports the change from 1990 to 2000 in the racial/ethnic composition of each neighborhood included in our study area. The neighborhoods are organized in terms of the matched pairs followed by the Harbor neighborhood, which was selected because of a high-profile interracial murder that became defined by media discourse on interracial crime. Table 2.3 provides 2000 U.S. census measures of social and economic well-being for each neighborhood. Crime data is summarized in Table 2.4, which includes a categorization of the recent violent crime trends (robbery and assault) as well as homicide breakdown for each neighborhood.

The murder books also allow us to provide descriptions of several homicides. The inclusion of these homicide summaries provides some insight into the motivation and circumstances surrounding the murders. It becomes clear that even in interracial killings, the role of “race” as a motivating factor is often complicated, unclear, and frequently, unimportant.

Table 2.3  
Economics and neighborhood stability (2000)

Neighborhood	Income	%Homeowners	%Below Poverty	%Unemployed
81st-Hoover (1)	15.6	13.3	54.2	51.7
88th-Broadway (1)	24.4	38	36.8	50.3
Century-Hoover (2)	24.5	37.9	32.5	53.7
Century-Broadway (2)	20.8	36.3	46.1	53.3
108th-Hoover (3)	25.5	62.2	30.9	53.7
Northwest (3)	18.6	0.9	38.9	42.9
East (4)	23.1	55.4	44.3	51.2
North (4)	18.3	14.2	29.9	50.4
Nickerson Gardens (5)	12.1	7.4	67.1	57.1
Historic Black (5)	20.4	45.8	44.3	52.7
Harbor	31	30.3	23.8	34.6

Table 2.4  
Inter- and intraracial crime profile (z-score determined)

Neighborhood	Interracial violence	Recent crime slope	All homicides	Homicides (interracial)
(1) 81st-Hoover	High	Up	19	1
(1) 88th-Broadway	Low	Down	15	2
(2) Century-Hoover	Low	Up	18	1
(2) Century-Broadway	High	Down	20	1
(3) 108th-Hoover	Low	Flat	22	2
(3) Northwest	High	Up	23	7
(4) East	High	Down	19	6
(4) North	Average	Flat	8	1
(5) Nickerson Gardens	Average	Up	24	3
(5) Historic Black	High	Up	21	7
Harbor	High	Up	9	5
Totals			198	36

### **Pair One (81st-Hoover & 88th-Broadway: Increasing Latino Dominance)**

The first pair of neighborhoods we examine saw an increase in the percentage of local residents who are Latino. In 1990, both neighborhoods had a slight majority of black residents of approximately 53 percent but by 2000, Latino population grew by 30 percent in each so that Latinos represented 65 percent of the local populations.

On other demographic characteristics, however, they diverge significantly. The median income for 81st-Hoover is just under \$16,000, while 88th-Broadway is about \$24,400. Even more divergent is the rate of home ownership—while only 13.3 percent of homes in 81st-Hoover are owned, almost 40 percent in 88th-Broadway are owned. While the percentage of people not in the labor force hovers around half for both neighborhoods, just over one-third of individuals in 88th-Broadway were below the poverty line, while 54 percent of the population in 81st-Hoover were below the poverty line. Although these neighborhoods have similar racial composition, 88th-Broadway is a demonstrably more stable area with more economic resources. The two areas are physically proximate to one another, but do not share a border. (See Figure 2.2.)

#### *88th-Broadway*

Despite showing greater socioeconomic viability in official statistics, crime in 88th-Broadway has been increasing over time and, compared to 81st-Hoover, also exhibits higher levels of non-lethal inter-group violence. LAPD investigated 15 murders in 88th-Broadway during the study period, only 2 of which were interracial (Latino on black). The vast majority of killings were perpetrated by blacks on blacks, and both victims and perpetrators often were members of various area Crip sets.

While the two interracial murders in 88th-Broadway may have gang connections, they both cross traditional racial and gang boundaries, comprising four participants—three Latinos and a black male for each. In the first case, the black victim, who was not in a gang, was standing on the street with a member of a traditionally black gang, when the two perpetrators approached and began shooting. While the main gunman was a member of a traditionally Latino gang, he was black. The gang status of the other, a Latino male, is uncertain. In the other case, a black male was also killed and a Latino male wounded by two Latino males in a confrontation regarding rival gangs, although the exact nature of the conflict is unknown. The black male was again a member of a traditionally Latino gang, although the gang status of the other three men is unknown. The police reports give few clues as to motivation and do not mention whether the race of the victims was a factor in their murders, but it seems likely that the killings were related to gang activity. Rather than demonstrating racist motives, the crimes appear to have been somewhat grisly examples of racial harmony, given that the victims of one shooting and the perpetrators of the other were from racially mixed gangs.

Although gang members are also involved in murders in 88th-Broadway (though in smaller numbers), the more complete information in the homicide files reveals many of these to have interpersonal disputes as motivating factors. Several older people, ages 38-63, were killed in unexplained drive-bys on separate occasions about which the police know little, but suspect gang involvement. More contextualized examples include retribution by gang members for providing information (or “snitching”) to the FBI, or an argument about an alleged attempted burglary that resulted in a killing (the perpetrator claimed self defense). Indeed, three are possibly killings of intimates—a schizophrenic gay lover, the accidental killing of a female partner who would “go crazy” and needed to be “kept in check” via strangulation, and the

unexplained drive-by shooting of a male where the suspect is female and possibly the victim's girlfriend. Only one was the result of an inter-gang feud; only one also was intra-gang, involving the botched "jumping in" of the perpetrator's brother. Although we cannot rule out the possibility that concrete gang interests were served by the unexplained violence, with a few exceptions, the pattern tends to involve gang members as individuals rather than as agents of a larger organizational structure. Even the case regarding the gang "jumping-in" was the violent reaction to the gang's actions as an individual, rather than as an agent of the gang.

### *81st-Hoover*

Although 81st-Hoover is a poorer, less stable community than the comparison neighborhood, inter-group violence there is also low and crime is falling. The police in 81st-Hoover investigated 19 murders between 2000 and 2007, only one of which was interracial (black on Latino)—almost identical the composition of events in 88th-Broadway. In both areas, the vast majority of the killings were perpetrated by blacks against blacks, and many of the victims and perpetrators were members of various Crip sets.

The singular interracial murder in 81st-Hoover was not gang related. Although details are lacking, it appears that the perpetrator, a black male, had a dispute with the victim, a Latino male, in the victim's driveway before pulling out a gun and shooting him in the back. It is not conclusive, but the shooting seems related to an ongoing dispute over parking in front of the victim's driveway. While the circumstances surrounding the crime may have had racial overtones, there is no data to support this conclusion, and simpler motive seems reasonable.

Intracial murders in 81st-Hoover take on a decidedly gang flavor. Of the 19 murders over eight years, 12 have potential gang connections, either on the part of the victim or the offenders. Rather than drive-bys, the majority are actually unsolved walk-bys or bike-bys, which sharply limits the available information. We can only assume a gang connection/motive for many of them, and given that the victims in several appear to have no gang affiliation, some are perhaps cases of mistaken identity. Alternatively, gangs may not be the only parties responsible for unexplained shootings.

\*\*\*

Although 81st-Hoover and 88th-Broadway both went from approximately half to two-thirds Latino over the course of ten years, neither have any significant record of interracial murder. The level of non-lethal inter-group crime increased through the 1990s, but that dynamic appears to have either reversed itself or is reflective of forces that are not applicable to homicide. The data available here do not suggest racialized motives for those interracial murders which did occur. Two seem to have explicitly gang motivations, while the third appears to be an interpersonal dispute. While murder generally has gang overtones in both places, it does not clearly take on a retaliatory character.

Both of these districts are majority Latino, yet about 85 percent of the victims are black. While somewhat puzzling, this dynamic may be the result of the timing of immigration. If the neighborhoods' Latino newcomers are first generation immigrants, they are likely to be past their prime crime years, more focused on gaining legal or illegal employment than joining gangs.

## **Pair Two (Century-Hoover & Century-Broadway: Increasing Latinos, Racial Parity)**

By 2000, both Century-Hoover and Century-Broadway had transitioned from one-third Latino (38 percent and 36 percent respectively) to over half Latino (50 percent and 52 percent). That same decade saw the black population reach virtual parity with the Latino population in both Century-Broadway (48 percent) and Century-Hoover (46 percent). Neither area has a significant percentage of whites. Socioeconomically, the areas are in some ways similar—in both, more than a third of residents own their homes and unemployment rates hover around 53 percent. Still, Century-Broadway is a poorer area than Century-Hoover, with a median income of \$20,800, compared to \$24,500 for Century-Hoover, and while 46 percent of residents in Century-Broadway live below the poverty line, poverty in Century-Hoover is nearly 14 percentage points lower. As demonstrated in Figure 2.2, these neighborhoods border one another.

### *Century-Hoover*

Century-Hoover, with 18 homicides, has a low interracial crime rate, but an overall increasing crime rate. The sole interracial murder in Century-Hoover was unrelated to gangs. The victim, a Latino male, was the stepfather of two of the perpetrators. Although the evidence is not totally clear, police reports suggest that he possibly abused his racially mixed (Latina, black, and Asian) stepdaughters (ages 14 and 17). Having skipped school that day, the older step daughter offered to exchange sex with a black male school friend (15) in return for either intimidating or killing her step father. Although actual intent remains unclear, the three returned home and threatened and shot the step-father. The fact that the actual shooter was black appears somewhat incidental, as the crime was engineered by the victim's stepdaughter.

Intracial murders were evenly split between gang and non-gang participants. Non-gang homicides varied in nature and included intimate partners, arguments among neighbors, and robbery-homicides. Several of the gang-related killings were retaliation for other shootings or were territorial in nature. The motivations for several others remain unknown, although the principals were clearly in rival gangs, or mistaken for such. The remaining few were perpetrated by various gangs but the connection with ongoing (or later) inter-gang feuds is unclear, and the murders sometimes occurred during robberies.

### *Century-Broadway*

There were 20 homicides in Century-Broadway during the study period. It also has a high rate of interracial crime, but its overall crime trajectory is falling. Like Century-Hoover, it is home to a single interracial murder that is gang-related, but not committed by members of a street gang. The perpetrators are described as two local Crip associates/"taggers" and were fired upon by members of a neighboring Crip set spray painted (or "tagged") in disputed territory. They returned fire, but accidentally killed a 14 year old pedestrian. The actual killer was Latino, as was the victim, but the other principals involved in the shooting were all black.

The other murders in Century-Broadway disproportionately have been listed as gang-related by police, but there is frequently little evidence contained within the homicide files that would permit us to reach the same conclusion. Many of the murders involve gang members, which justify the tag of "gang related" for local law enforcement. Despite the respectable closure rate (58 percent), many of the details regarding the gang status of various principals and the motivations for the crimes remain murky. Though closed, one case is marked as gang-related

because the shooter and the victim were members of opposite Crip sets. Yet the details of the case make plain that a previous, non-gang, verbal confrontation between the two was the major precipitant of the event. Although direct causes often are difficult to parse, it seems likely that gang affiliation was only incidental to the slaying, or perhaps contributed only underlying hostility.

Nonetheless, several murders in Century-Broadway related directly to gang issues, though at least one involved a drug deal gone wrong and several others were the result of mistaken identity or collateral damage. We can often more concretely assess intra-gang homicides. One, though technically intra-gang, involved the disputed record deal signing of the victim by a well-known hip-hop label. The shooter, representing a faction of the gang dissatisfied with this arrangement, possibly because of a snub or an economic dispute regarding the signing, also went on to shoot several others before being apprehended. Finally, a double murder, though perpetrated by shooters from a traditionally Latino street gang, concerns no gang issues and the victims were not gang affiliated. The killings took place at a private (non-gang) outdoor keg party.

The few non-“gang-related” homicides in Century-Broadway include an intra-family accident where a child killed her sibling, a domestic shooting between heterosexual partners who had dated for 5 years, and two redresses for robberies. One murdered female who worked for a court referral service was shot while at work and had no known connection with anyone who might wish her harm—the case remains open.

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Though the two neighborhoods do differ in income and poverty rate, they are otherwise very similar demographically. Their murder rates are also similar, and the overwhelming majority of both victims and perpetrators for murders in both areas are black. Although the Latino population increased significantly in the 1990s, they remain underrepresented among homicide participants.

Century-Hoover, a marginally better-off area than Century-Broadway with only slightly fewer murders, does not seem strongly characterized by gang-related murder. Many of the murders in this Century-Hoover involve conflicts among intimate partner; although no females were killed, five of the perpetrators were female, and several other murders were committed either over a sexual partner or for her perceived protection. Century-Broadway, however, has a preponderance of killings related in some way to gangs. Still, several of the murders in this neighborhood serve to underline the conceptual messiness associated with the gang concept. Tentatively, gang dictates may not directly motivate many of these crimes, though gangs may bring together more volatile individuals with a greater concentration of firepower than that to which they may ordinarily have access. Again, despite the increasingly Latino character of the neighborhood, almost 80 percent of the homicide victims were black, and interracial murder was virtually unknown.

While both areas were the setting for a single interracial murder, neither murder appears to have any racial overtones. The Century-Broadway murder is much more the result of gang territorial behavior than interracial malice, while the Century-Hoover murder was clearly a family situation that escalated out of control.

In a different vein, the Century-Broadway interracial killing helps demonstrate the difficulty associated with categorizing interracial killings. First, while the overall character of

the crime is gang-motivated, the perpetrators were not, in fact, gang members (they were simply Crip-affiliated “taggers”). Second, Crip gangs are traditionally black, but one of the associates involved in the homicide was Latino. This, and the fact that the area is heavily Latino, means that propinquity is the likely explanation for the inclusion of a Latino teenager in a Crip gang as well as the accidental killing of the Latina pedestrian.

### **Pair Three (108th-Hoover & Northwest: Early Latino In-Movement)**

Pair three is one of the two neighborhood pairs examined here that are separated by significant geography (see Figure 2.2). 108th-Hoover is in LAPD’s 77<sup>th</sup> Street Area, while Northwest is considerably further north in Southwest Area; the two have been brought together here due to their similar statistical profiles. By 2000, both areas had maintained black majorities (62 percent for 108th-Hoover; 57 percent for Northwest), although they fell from even higher 1990 levels of 76 percent and 72 percent respectively. This is due to steady Latino in-migration, below a quarter in 1990 in both areas, but well exceeding one-third in 2000 (37 percent for 108th-Hoover; 39 percent for Northwest).

Although the median incomes of the two neighborhoods diverge by almost \$7,000 (at \$25,500, 108th-Hoover has one of the highest median incomes of all the areas considered here), an even more striking statistic is the difference between home ownership rates. At 62 percent in 2000, 108th-Hoover had the highest rate of homeownership among all study areas, while Northwest had a less than 1 percent home ownership rate. Despite this, the unemployment rates for 108th-Hoover and Northwest respectively (54 percent and 43 percent) and percent below the poverty line (31 percent and 39 percent) differ by less than may be otherwise expected.

#### *108th-Hoover*

Interracial violence in 108th-Hoover is relatively low and there is no discernable pattern to its recent crime slope. While 108th-Hoover was home to 22 total homicides, only 2 were interracial. In the first, two roommates met the perpetrator and all proceeded to the victim’s house where they smoked crack cocaine together. After smoking crack and falling asleep, the perpetrator stabbed one of the roommates with a screwdriver. Although at least partly drug induced, the crime is interracial, as the perpetrator was black, while the victim was white. The other interracial murder appears to be gang related, as three Latino males were accosted by two suspects from a local Crip set, one black female driver and a black male passenger. The perpetrators affirmed the victims’ status as members of a traditionally Latino gang, established a mutual acquaintance, and misrepresented themselves as Bloods, finally opening fire on the victims, wounding one and killing one. The evidence available suggests that both crimes were unrelated to purely racial motivations. The rivalry between the Crip and Latino gang is not motivated by race *per se*.

Of the 20 intraracial murders in 108th-Hoover, 17 are black on black. Most are gang related, comprising many intragang killings or feuds between the Avon Bloods and a neighboring Crip set. Many of the homicides were concentrated among the different Blood gangs. For instance, an Avon Blood was killed by an older member (50) of the same gang, who was then himself murdered and found under a freeway rolled up in a blanket and burned. The killer of the perpetrator from the first murder is unknown. Two more killings were related directly to the movement for atomized Blood sets to join the “United Blood Nation” (UBN). In the first, a gang leader refused to align with Avon, which led to his murder by a prison Blood

leader, while in the other, while his gang made the switch, a Blood associate refused to align with UBN. Another intragang murder, unrelated to gang issues, was precipitated by the suspect alleging that the victim's girlfriend was a prostitute. After losing the subsequent fight, the suspect returned with a gun and shot the victim, although his thigh wound probably would not have proved fatal if the bullet had not hit an artery. In another murder similarly related tangentially to gangs, the son of the victim's ex-girlfriend shot the victim because he would beat his mother. The evidence suggests that the mother organized the killing in retaliation for these incidents and because the victim also stole money from her.

Several murders involved gang members, but the killings are set apart here because they were motivated by drugs. One Blood dealer of a different set, the Assassin Bloods, was shot because a rival intragang faction wanted a monopoly on drug sales in their housing project. Although the conflict was intragang, an outsider was contracted make the actual hit to avoid making the victim nervous—the victim had apparently suspected that members of his own gang wished him ill. In another event, Bloods from Avon also tried to extort drugs from a non-gang member who fired a warning shot when the gang members got too close. After a brief gun battle at the non-gang member's house, he and his friend killed an Avon Blood with a shotgun, though he was cleared by reason of self defense. Another had no gang connection but possibly a potential drug money argument, while the few other non-gang-related murders largely lack known motivations.

### *Northwest*

Northwest is characterized by high interracial violence and rising crime rates. At 23, it has one more homicide than 108th-Hoover, but 7 interracial homicides (30 percent). The interracial murders tend to relate to a prominent Latino street gang known as the 57th Street Gang. In one, a black victim was shot by 57th Street members—although he was visiting from out of town, he was a former member of a black gang with whom 57th Street had an ongoing feud. In another, members of a different Latino gang were killed by the same black gang, although they are not members of 57th Street. The case appears to be simply mistaken identity; having narrowed down the victims as gang members, black gang members then shot them with a handgun, not bothering to check their actual affiliation. While race here provided a partial cognitive shortcut, the perpetrators made sure to check that the victims were in fact gang members before firing. In another case involving 57th Street, two black males were murdered while walking home from a girlfriend's house by 57th Street members who shouted out their gang affiliation. The victims appear unrelated to any gang, but it is possible that they were mistaken for black gang members. At least one other event, the double homicide of two black victims, is connected with this gang.

As one of the strongest gangs in the area, 57th Street feuds with a number of gangs composed of both black and Latino members. While the possibility that 57th Street was specifically targeting blacks cannot be ruled out, these killings look no different from the murders of rival gang members from Latino gangs. Another killing possibly connected with this gang is the slaying of two black victims in the territory of a black gang that was feuding with 57th Street.

Another killing, this time involving a black offender and Latino victims, is inconclusive with respect to motive—the Latino male was killed in an alleyway while contacting his female lover. Since neither victim nor perpetrator can be connected with gangs, nor racial motivation determined, it is unclear how to assign this killing.

Several other “interracial” killings in Northwest are a challenge to a typical racial classificatory scheme. Principals in both killings were Belizean, or suspected to be Belizean; Northwest and surrounding areas may in fact contain or border a small ethnic enclave of Belizeans. Though nominally Central American, many Belizean immigrants look stereotypically black and sometimes identify culturally with blacks. Spanish is not the uniform primary language of Belizean immigrants, although many have Spanish surnames. This makes murders involving Belizean principals difficult to classify. The first murder, a black male (probably Belizean) shot a younger black male in the street where they lived. The victim was the former boyfriend of the perpetrator’s current girlfriend and had also used the perpetrator’s daughter as a dependant on his tax returns to increase his refund. The victim had been beaten up and intimidated by both the perpetrator and his girlfriend before, although the actual proximate motive for the killing remains unknown. Interestingly, the Belizean perpetrator was a member of a local predominantly black gang, although this appears incidental to the case. The second murder was a roommate dispute between a Belizean male and another male who is listed as “Hispanic,” but may also have been Belizean. Certainly the two were roommates and apparently had mutual Belizean friends, but we list it here due to this uncertainty. After evicting the Belizean perpetrator for delinquent rent, the victim went to the perpetrator’s new residence to retrieve his dog, which the perpetrator had removed from the premises after vacating. The victim was shot while banging on the door of the perpetrator’s apartment. Although the presence of Belizean murder principles complicates the idea of LA black-brown violence, the actual incidents appear to be unrelated to race.

The intraracial murders in Northwest, while less uniformly black than in 108th-Hoover, still involve a majority of black participants. In contrast to most of the interracial killings, most of the intraracial killings are not gang related. Several of these murders were family related. In one, a Latina infant was found in a trashcan, having been stabbed by her mother. In another, a man stabbed his kids and wife because he suspected that his 9 year old son had stolen money from him. The wife was killed and while the kids ran off, bleeding, to get help from the neighbors. Two others were armed robberies that turned deadly.

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Northwest’s interracial murders have a strong gang character while the intraracial murders have much less. The 57th Street Gang is responsible for much of the interracial killing and they tend to feud with many other gangs, both black and Latino. The interracial nature of the murders involving the 57th Street Gang may be a function of the fact that it is a Latino gang, and therefore a newer gang to the area, more focused on outward expansion, especially in an area that is still majority black. Furthermore, black gangs far outnumber Latino gangs in the area, so there may simply be not enough other Latino gangs in the area which whom 57th Street could feud, thus presenting misleading statistics for interracial crime.

The black-on-black murders tend to involve intragang disputes—the gangs in question, the Hole-in-the-Wall Gang and the Avon Blood set, are both older, well-established gangs, which have begun to splinter and factionalize. Ironically, the national UBN unification project, to which two murders have been connected, is an attempt to merge rather than split, but is being resisted locally. Indeed, the murders in 108th-Hoover appear to trace the breakdown of the Avon Blood gang through its factionalization, UBN unification struggles, divided drug sales, and

interpersonal disputes. One LAPD homicide detective we interviewed independently considers the Avon gang to be in decline, which these data certainly support.

The Belizean-involved murders neatly juxtapose some of the issues with the black-brown violence paradigm. In one, a Belizean man kills a black man—yet, but for his name and national origin, he could be mistaken for black. The other is perhaps incorrectly classified as interracial because a (probably) Belizean man is mistaken for Latino, probably due to his Spanish surname. Race is a fluid construction, and Los Angeles is a diverse city. Cases like these may not directly challenge the dominance of the black-brown narrative, but they certainly narrow the margins.

#### **Pair Four (East & North: Demographically Stable Latino Majorities)**

East and North are geographically distant, but demographically similar. Both areas experienced high but fairly stable Latino populations between 1990 and 2000 (71 percent to 78 percent for East; 56 to 57 percent for North) and black populations that remained stable at a sizeable minority level for those same years—about a quarter for East (29 percent to 22 percent) and a third for North (35 percent to 33 percent). Neither has a significant white population, although about 3 percent of North's population is white.

East is sandwiched between two housing projects to its north and south, although more than half (55 percent) of its residents own their homes, compared with 14 percent of North. Although housing projects tend not enhance real estate desirability, North is halved by an interstate, which may also make housing in the area less attractive. At \$23,100, residents of East out-earn residents of North by about \$5,000, although, strangely, 44 percent of individuals in East are under the poverty line, which is more than fourteen percentage points more than seen in Northwest. In other words, while East has more individuals in poverty, the variance in income is greater than North, containing presumably more middle class incomes.

#### *East*

This area has high levels of non-lethal interracial crime generally, though overall, crime is declining. Six of the nineteen homicides (32 percent) in East could be construed to be, or were potentially, interracial. Three gangs are primarily involved—only one case is potentially devoid of gang connections. The police classify one, La Norte, as a Latino gang, while a local Crip set is primarily black. While it is unknown what race/ethnicity, if any, primarily composes the third gang, South End, victims and suspects recorded in homicide statistics are both black *and* Latino.

Although two cases involve Latino victims from La Norte, only one is a clear cut drive-by perpetrated by another gang—South End—where the shooter was a black male. Even here, the driver and passenger in the car are reported as Latino, further confusing any evidence of racial/ethnic basis driving the murders committed by the South End gang. Even the intra-gang killing involving South End was interracial, as the black shooter shot the Latino victim in front of the victim's house, and then sped off in a car with another South End member, who was Latino. Another La Norte member was killed by a black male from a local Crip gang, but the social interactions between members of the two gangs were jovial and originally interpreted as non-threatening. A member of this same Crip gang also killed, for unknown reasons, a non-gang Latino male.

In an even more confusing case, a male Latino non-gang member was standing in his yard when a car drove up. He fled but was shot in the back of the head. Different witness accounts describe the car as containing 4 black males or 2 Latino males, making the crime

indeterminate as inter- or intraracial. It remains open. In one case involving a gang from outside the neighborhood, a member of 57th Street Gang was killed by La Norte ostensibly for being in their territory. Normally, this would be intraracial, but this particular member of 57th Street happened to be black.

East's intraracial murders are more heavily Latino (31 percent) than many neighborhoods, but are still predominantly black. While there appear to have been several ongoing feuds, only one murder is directly attributable to gang motivations. Having thrown up a gang sign at a member of a rival Crip set, a gang member recruited two friends and performed a drive-by on the victim, presumably because of a territorial feud. The victim and the suspects are not known to have had any prior relationship besides that of rival gang members. Many of the other murders in this area have all of the trappings of gang homicides (e.g., drive-by, use of assault weapon), but a close reading of the evidence often suggests that it was the extenuating circumstances (unpaid debts, love triangles, etc.) that proximally motivated the event.

### *North*

One of the least deadly neighborhoods, North, by comparison, shows only moderate rates of violence and no discernable recent crime pattern. Indeed, North experienced to less than half the number of murders (8) than did East (19) and only one of them involved an interracial incident. In this case, a racially mixed group of gang members (black and Latino) were fired upon by a group of Latino males from 57th Street Gang. A black male and a Latino male were killed, while the 57th Street members shouted "Fuck Slobs!" a derogatory slang term for Bloods. Police theorize that the killing was in retaliation for a prison murder between the two gangs. It is unclear how they arrive at this conclusion, however, as the gang members who were killed, and the gang that committed the prison killing, were not Bloods, but a local Crip set.

The intraracial murders in North are split almost evenly between black on black and Latino on Latino; the black-on-black killings mainly involve two Crip sets in the area: 2<sup>nd</sup> Street Crips and 4<sup>th</sup> Street Crips. Details on all four potentially gang-related murders are lacking, but essentially involve drive- and walk-by shootings where the victims or the shooters were 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Street Crips, and kill or are killed by unknown black males. The others do not obviously involve gangs: first, a woman killed her attempted rapist in an apartment with a knife; second, a store clerk was shot after failing to give armed robbers enough money from the till; third, a woman killed her rapist after the fact to "show her loyalty" to her lover.

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The numbers of homicides differ between the two highly stable Latino neighborhoods, but in both areas the victims were equally likely to be black as they were Latino. Although far from conclusive, it appears likely that the 57th Street Gang is committing expansionary territorial killings. Much less conclusive, however, is the role that racial bias plays in motivating these homicides. When murder books are complete and cases solved, the story line behind the event is clear, and categories such as "gang-related" or "gang-motivated" seem natural. Incomplete cases where investigators make little progress, or cannot stitch together a storyline (sometimes even when the case is closed), however, reveal the messiness behind these neat categories. The confusion generated by a killing where black and Latino victims are shot by a Latino gang shouting inappropriate epithets because of a prison killing involving unrelated gangs reveals the simple inability of labels such as "gang" or "feud" to fully capture the dynamic of the event.

### **Pair Five (Historic Black & Nickerson Gardens: Traditionally Black Neighborhoods, Rising Latino Majority)**

Our fifth pair of neighborhoods share a common border. The borders of Nickerson Gardens are essentially coterminous with a well known housing development project and much of Historic Black abuts this project. Still, Historic Black contains no part of any project and thus does not suffer from the extreme poverty and disadvantage that often characterizes public housing developments. For instance Nickerson Gardens has a median income of only \$12,100, contains 7 percent owners, a 57 percent unemployment rate, and two-thirds of its population under the poverty line. Median income in Historic Black has almost twice as high, 46 percent of the residents own their homes, unemployment is slightly less at 53 percent unemployment, and less than half of its population lives under the poverty line.

Historic Black and Nickerson Gardens are included because they are historically black neighborhoods that have experienced dramatic racial/ethnic turnover (the percent black population decreased from 55 percent to 31 percent and 71 percent to 47 percent respectively).

#### *Historic Black*

Historic Black's recent crime rate is increasing and its interracial crime is high. There were 21 murders during the study period, almost evenly split between black and Latino victims. Fully one-third of these murders were interracial. Of murders with multiple perpetrators, almost all were black, implying the group character of many of the homicides.

Most of the interracial murders were black on Latino and several were associated with the local Blood gang, the Assassin Bloods. Only one involves another gang—in this instance, the shooter engaged the victims, rival gang members, in a dispute involving graffiti. The others involve Assassins victimizing non-gang members. One was a home invasion robbery where the Assassins shot one of the homeowners as they left. The other occurred when two Latino victims walked through Assassin territory and were stopped. After the ensuing fistfight, the victims returned to the scene to recover a key when they were shot by the same Bloods who had fought with them; one of the victims was killed.

Another murder, perhaps possessed of the most potential racial animus, was also Blood related, although through a different gang than the Assassins. This case involved individual factors more than organized gang activity, as the perpetrator and the victim were only loosely affiliated with gangs through relatives. The black male perpetrator was known locally as a street fighter who took on mainly Latinos—he had engaged in several altercations with the Latino victim and the victim's brother, a gang member, in the previous month—the killing appears to be an extension of that animus. Police notes indicate a possible sense of neighborhood racial threat as well as “disrespect,” but these are vague and difficult to parse. The gang connections seem largely incidental.

The rest of the interracial killings in Historic Black are related to various robbery events. In one, a Latino male and a black male shot another black male over a vehicle that they accused the victim of having stolen. In a similar case, two older male Latinos pursued a younger black male with a shotgun for having robbed and stolen from them in the past, shooting him several times even after he was on the ground. Finally, a male Latino was robbed at gunpoint while in his car by black males on foot. After attempting to drive away, the victim was shot and the robbery was completed.

The intraracial killings are split almost evenly between gang and non-gang, although given the dearth of information for several, this is somewhat indeterminate. Several of the gang killings are retaliatory. One involves a complicated relationship between two Crip sets and the Assassin Bloods—while the Assassin killed a Crip, it's possible that the victim was mistaken as being associated with the other Crip set, which had killed an Assassin previously. Another example is a classic retaliatory murder, where a South End Latino killed a member of another Latino gang that had killed his brother, also South End, previously. Other gang murders involved drugs. In one example, an Assassin Blood killed a Blood from another set after he had copped drugs from an Assassin drug house—no motive could be discerned, save that the Assassin felt threatened somehow.

### *Nickerson Gardens*

Although this neighborhood is more disadvantaged than the comparison area—being composed solely of a public housing project—and also shows an increasing crime slope, interracial violence is not especially high. Of the 24 murders in this neighborhood, only 3 were interracial. The overwhelming majority of (21/24) of the victims were black, even though by 2000 Latinos were the dominant ethnic group in the neighborhood.

The three interracial homicides each were of a different racial character—black on Latino, Latino on black, and black on white, all males. The Latino victim died as a result a robbery, refusing money to his black assailants who subsequently beat and kicked him to death. The black male victim was a transient who had the misfortune to walk through the project courtyard while two teenagers—black and Latino—were assaulting a passersby with a BB gun. Having already shot three younger children (non-fatally), the pair shot the transient man in the chest which ultimately killed him. The white victim, who owned a recycling center in the area, was killed by an Assassins Blood associate while flattening boxes next to his business. Police reports reveal that the previous owner left because he was subject to a “protection” scheme by local Assassins; the new owner had been presented with a similar ultimatum but refused.

The story behind gang-related homicide in Nickerson Gardens is almost exclusively a story of the victimization of others—gang and otherwise—by the Assassin Bloods, as well as their implosion. Fifteen of the 24 murders involved Assassins. The murder books for two of these do not contain enough information to present them fully, but involve the shootings of non-gang members, either by mistake or for unknown reasons. Another murder of a non-gang member was the result of a new gang member being required to “put in work.” Although gang literature is replete with references to this sort of homicide, only one other in our sample shares these characteristics; here, the victim was targeted by his rival gang status.

The five intergang murders in Nickerson Gardens comprise three with Assassins as the perpetrators, and only one where an Assassin is the victim—the other victims are from various gangs surrounding the project. One is a black member of a traditionally Latino gang. The fifth appears to be spillover between gangs not based in the neighborhood.

Fatricidal Assassin Blood violence began as early as 2000, but reached a head in 2003, and continued until 2005, claiming the lives of seven gang members within the neighborhood alone. At least three involved drugs. Interestingly, in one of these, a Latino family was housing the black victim who dealt drugs from the house in return for a cut of the profits. The victim was murdered by another Assassin who hung out there and perhaps robbed the victim after killing him. A fourth murder involved “a large sum of money,” which may well have been related to drugs as well. This particular incident also was related to an apparent “disrespecting” of the

murder site of another previous victim—the shooters also opened fire on those who were playing craps near the site. Although the earliest murder involved drugs, several in succession were related to disputes over women, which may or may not be the origin of the subsequent internecine conflicts. Only one is chalked up to pure retaliation.

The non-gang homicides are strongly domestic in character. In three cases, a husband, ex-boyfriend, and a co-habiting male murdered their significant others, all in states of high anxiety. Another murder was committed apparently because the victim had killed the perpetrator's brother some 15 years prior.

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Although murder rates are comparable, Historic Black had far more interracial homicide than its partner. This may be simple propinquity—by 2000, Historic Black had many more Latinos than Nickerson Gardens, even though both areas were majority Latino. Given their geographical proximity, it makes sense that a similar cause might be responsible for similar outcomes—almost half of the murders in these two neighborhoods directly involve the Assassins Bloods, either through victimization by the gang or through the factionalization of the gang that seemed to occur through the study period. If the Assassins, as a traditionally black gang, were to victimize blacks and Latinos indiscriminately, but contribute high levels of intraracial homicide through self-victimization, the levels of racialized killing might be similar to what we see here. The income discrepancy between the two areas does not seem to drive up interracial killing. If anything, it seems to have the opposite effect.

### **Harbor Neighborhood: Rising Blacks, Falling Latino Majority, Falling Whites**

This neighborhood represents an exception to the above pairing of areas. We created this exception because of the intense media scrutiny afforded this area following an infamous interracial murder of a black teenager by a local Latino gang, the Latinos Locos. Harbor is different from many of the other areas studied for various reasons, the first of which is that it is a geographically self-contained—even isolated—neighborhood, rather than the somewhat arbitrary groupings that census tracts often represent. Demographically, it is the only neighborhood which is actually increasing its black population, up from 8 percent to 17 percent over 1990 to 2000. Interestingly, the Latino population also increased during this time, from 49 percent to 57 percent which had the effect of increasing its proportion of recent migrants—most of the historical Latino population in the area is not first generation. Part of the demographic change in this area is driven by “white flight”: whereas only North in our selection even approached 5 percent white in 1990, Harbor's white population in 1990 was over 30 percent transitioning down to just over 14 percent in 2000.

This section of the city is strongly industrial, which helps isolate the neighborhood, bordering one side with warehouses and another with a large freeway. Perhaps due to the proximity of industry, unemployment is the lowest in our study (35 percent) and the median income is the highest for all the areas we examined (\$31,000). Almost one-third of residents own their homes and just under a quarter of individuals live below the poverty line.

Interracial non-lethal crime in the area was high and rising between 1990 and 2000. From 2000 on, there were 9 murders; 5, possibly 6, were interracial. Although homicide rates are not high compared to many of the areas studied, the fact that more than half of the homicides

were interracial is unusual. Among the interracial homicides, known Latino perpetrators vastly outnumber the known black perpetrators, 7-1 (multiple perpetrators).

Some of the interracial murders are clearly connected to Latinos Locos, and possibly other black gangs as well, although this is difficult to fully unpack. The earliest murder involved the shooting of two Latino youths by a black Crip member from an area outside of the Harbor neighborhood. This Crip member had previously killed another of the youths' friends. Recognizing him, they ran, and one was shot in the back. No gang affiliations were mentioned on the part of the victims. Not too long thereafter, a Belizean male was killed walking to a bus stop after visiting his girlfriend who lived in the area. The perpetrators, all members of Latinos Locos, apparently thought he looked as though "he would try something," possibly because he looked phenotypically black. The actual shooter was 15 years old and his compatriots were 15 and 22.

The third inter-group murder took place immediately after a highly-anticipated, televised Latino-black boxing match, in which the officiating was disputed. Three black males pulled up to the house of one of the victim's sister and exited the vehicle. A lone Latino male detached himself from a crowd of about a dozen other Latinos on the street corner and opened fire, killing one and wounding the other two males. Witnesses state that they heard him say, alternately, "I got a nigger" and "I got one nigger because of the calls of the fight." LAPD suspects that he is a member of Latinos Locos, but the perpetrator denies this, as well as having any knowledge of the boxing match or its outcome. A few years later, a group of blacks of various ages (11-24) left a family party to get snacks at the corner convenience store. After being questioned as to their gang affiliation (none) by Latino males at the store, they grew nervous and called for a ride home. After entering the vehicle, a suspected Latino Loco pulled a gun and killed the driver, a black male.

The next two murders may be related. The first involved the shooting of a 34 year old Mexican man by an unknown figure. The perpetrator is thought to have been black; though no one actually saw his face or any identifying marks because he was wearing black clothes and a mask, witnesses said that he "sounded black," when he shouted either "Fuck Latinos Locos!" or "Fuck Mexicans!" depending on the witness. Ten days later, two Latinos Locos on foot fired into a crowd of blacks in the victim's driveway killing a black teenage girl. The suspects stated that they were responding both to the aforementioned killing as well as an incident earlier that day when a suspected black gang member had pulled a gun to protect himself from a crowd of Latinos at the corner liquor store. After fleeing at the sight of the gun, the perpetrators went looking for him and claim to have found him in the crowd of people in the driveway. The shooters missed and killed the teenager instead.<sup>6</sup>

Two of the three unambiguously intraracial murders in the area involve a Latino gang external to the Harbor area. In the first, a car full of young Latino males were pursued by another car full of young Latino males from this non-local Latino gang. After a car chase, the occupants of the pursuing car flashed gang signs and opened fire on the victims, killing one and wounding another. Though the case was closed, the murder book contained no obvious motive. Another Latino male was killed in his driveway by a Latino male; although the motive remains unconfirmed, it seems likely that drug sales were involved. The final murder was a drive-by, but no details were available.

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<sup>6</sup> As an intriguing footnote to this case, the actual shooter—convicted in 2010 of murder and a hate crime—appears to have been of mixed black and Latino ancestry.

The media-driven discourse surrounding Harbor is that Mexican prison gangs have given a “green light” (direct order or permission) to the Latinos Locos to indiscriminately kill blacks to preserve the historically Latino demography of the neighborhood. Some media outlets have even used the words “ethnic cleansing” to describe the violence. The census figures, however, reveal that the neighborhood was actually increasing in Latino population as well, surpassing 50 percent sometime in the 1990s and that blacks were not threatening to become the dominate group. While the black proportion of the population also increased, the main demographic shift occurred among the white population, which was halved over the course of the decade. While the perception may have been that Latinos were losing ground to blacks, there may be other forces at work that cannot be addressed by these data. Likewise, any indications of a relationship between Latinos Locos and Mexican prison gangs are absent from our murder book data and cannot be addressed here.<sup>7</sup>

What is clear, however, is that “indiscriminate” or “ethnic cleansing” are inappropriate characterizations of the killings. First, over an eight year period, at total of four murders of blacks, or victims mistaken for black, is hardly evidence of a systematic attempt to eliminate the black community through genocide. Further, several of the murders appear to be retaliatory in nature—there is a perception that there was a running feud with a local black gang, and this appeared to fuel several of the murders in question, although this cannot be confirmed. Where available, statements from suspects and witnesses point to the likelihood that Latinos Locos were attempting to target either specific individuals or gang members generally. Only the murder of the Belizean man did not involve an inquiry into the gang association of the victim. It is possible that the rising black population in the neighborhood brought with it something of an increased black gang element where none had previously existed, which may have provoked a fear response from the established Latinos Locos gang.

## Discussion

The comparison of sets of tracks at differing levels of in-group migration enables an interesting look at issues of violence “tipping points.” Pair 1 ended the decade as majority Latino neighborhoods, but there was no significant interracial homicide, even though interracial crime rose in general. Perhaps most crucial, Pair 2, embodying racial parity, also evinced a distinct *lack* of racialized murder. And although Pair 3, composed of neighborhoods experiencing early Latino in-migration, demonstrated increased interracial crime, most of this can be traced to the expansion of a single Latino street gang that has no other area Latino gangs against which to expand. Propinquity then better explains interracial homicide here than racial animosity. Finally, only one of the two “historically black” neighborhoods showed signs of interracial homicide, but these are likewise traced to a single gang. This gang, unlike the insurgent 57th Street Gang, appears to be slowly disintegrating, and killings by this gang also include many intraracial and inter- and intra-gang killings. Although particularizing each crime can obscure broader patterns, many, if not most, of the interracial murders in these neighborhoods appear to be explainable without recourse to language of “ethnic cleansing” or “race wars,” (or, for that matter, gang wars).

As has been suggested in several places, this analysis underlines that fact that interracial homicide may bear little relationship to other interracial violence (i.e., assault, robbery) if this

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<sup>7</sup> Interviews regarding this case specifically and gang members/associates of Latinos Locos also revealed no connections to the Mexican prison gang in question.

generalized violence is dependent on different motives or social forces. Although the data here is inappropriate for confirming or disconfirming this theory, one suggestion is that interracial robbery (and potentially robbery-related assault) by blacks on Latino “soft targets” such as day laborers is driving the general interracial violence, but failing to register on the homicide statistics.

This analysis revealed complications regarding dichotomous classifications such as “gang-related,” “gang-motivated,” “hate crime,” or “racially motivated.” Perhaps most squishy is the term “gang-related” which is applied almost uniformly to cases involving gang members or associates. Several murders detailed above appear to have motivations quite unrelated to the fact that one or more of the principles may have a gang affiliation. The label, in that case, would then have to serve some purpose other than explanatory. Still, it cannot be ignored that gangs can facilitate homicide by providing easy access to weapons or extra hostility to other gang members. Are these considerations enough to warrant the label? Future research should pursue the meaning and validity of this classificatory schema.

Although the very pursuit of this research project reifies the idea of a “Latino” group and an “African American” group while exploring the issue of violence, several cases problematize this conception of “race relations” in South Bureau. Ethnic groups such as Belizeans demonstrate the fissures in the term “race” (or, for that matter, “ethnicity”) in the sense that it is used in the discourse of a “race war.” Possessed of “looks,” culture, language, and naming practices that confound easy classification, we took care to specially document these homicides so as to underline the confusion. Also complicating the discourse of interracial hate crime is the fact that the case in our sample which is presented as the *sine qua non* of hate crime against black Angelenos was committed by a person of mixed black and Latino descent. Moreover, although the actual 2010 trial turned up different results, the data available to us suggests that intergang or mistaken identity explanations are equally plausible.

## CHAPTER 3

### Gauging the Attitudes of Residents in South Bureau and the Rest of Los Angeles

**John R. Hipp**

The analyses in this chapter focus on the attitudes of residents at large in the community. We focus on such issues as general satisfaction and quality of life, attitudes regarding safety and the quality of policing, opinions of the economic situation, evaluations of neighborhood institutions and problems, and civic engagement behavior.

Asking about residents' general sense of satisfaction, we found that in the rest of the county, 86 percent report being satisfied with their community whereas just 14 percent report dissatisfaction. Things are quite different in South Bureau: just 60 percent report satisfaction with the community, whereas fully 40 percent are dissatisfied. Whereas 60 percent of African Americans in the rest of the county report satisfaction with their community, a paltry 25 percent of African Americans in South Bureau report such satisfaction. In contrast, nearly 70 percent of Latinos living in South Bureau report satisfaction with their community.

When asking about how their quality of life is changing, although African Americans in the rest of the county tend to perceive the trajectory of change similarly to members of other races (23 percent perceive that things are getting better, 55 percent perceive them staying the same, and 22 percent perceive them as getting worse), African Americans living in South Bureau have a particularly dim view of the direction of change: virtually *none* perceive that things are getting better in their community. Instead, one-third feel that things are getting worse. Fully 31 percent of Latinos in South Bureau feel that things are getting better in the community—in contrast to no African Americans feeling this way. Nonetheless, nearly one-third of Latinos in South Bureau also perceive that things are getting worse. Thus, these findings represent a group that is particularly polarized in its views of recent change in the community.

African Americans living in South Bureau are twice as likely to view the quality of life in the broader county area as going very badly compared to African Americans living in the rest of the county, and half as likely to view things as going very well. About 63 percent of African Americans living in South Bureau feel that the quality of life in the county is going somewhat or very badly. On the other hand, Latinos have a much rosier view. Whereas just 7 percent of Latinos in nearby areas and the rest of the county feel that things are going very well, fully 19 percent of Latinos living in South Bureau feel this way. Instead, it appears that the residents of South Bureau have a somewhat polarized view of how things are going in the county in general. Indeed, nearly half of Latinos feel that things in the county are going somewhat or very badly, despite the relatively large number feeling that things are going very well.

When asked asking about the direction of change in the county, while 40 percent of African Americans in other parts of the county report that things are headed in the right direction, just 8 percent of African Americans living in South Bureau felt that way. In stark contrast, over 50 percent of Latinos living in South Bureau felt that things in the county are headed in the right direction. Whereas just 19 percent of African Americans in South Bureau felt that the county will be a better place in the future, nearly half of Latinos in South Bureau had such an optimistic view.

Focusing on the local neighborhood, whereas 82 percent of residents in the rest of the county report being satisfied or very satisfied with their neighborhood, just 60 percent of South

Bureau residents report feeling this way. African Americans in South Bureau are much more polarized in their views than are Latinos. Almost twice as many African Americans as Latinos in South Bureau reported being very *satisfied* with the neighborhood; however, over four times as many African Americans as Latinos reported being very *dissatisfied*. In South Bureau, 42 percent of African Americans reported being dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their neighborhood (recall that 75 percent reported being dissatisfied with the larger community). In the rest of the county, only 17 percent of African Americans are similarly dissatisfied. On the other hand, just 28 percent of Latinos in South Bureau report being dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their neighborhood.

There is some evidence of polarization in intra-neighborhood intercourse on the part of African Americans in South Bureau. Although a higher percentage of African Americans in South Bureau report talking to 6 or more neighbors in the last 30 days compared to African Americans in the rest of the county (16 percent versus 11 percent), it is also the case that a much higher percentage of African Americans in South Bureau report speaking to none of their neighbors compared to African Americans in the rest of the county (20 percent versus 10 percent).

It is striking that South Bureau residents are *more* likely to report that they view their neighbors as close friends (40 percent) than are residents in the rest of the county (30 percent) or similarly disadvantaged neighborhoods (26 percent). This pattern holds across racial lines.

Turning to questions assessing residents' perceptions of safety, whereas about 37 percent of those living in the rest of the county felt that crime is a big problem, fully 65 percent of South Bureau residents felt this way. However, there are striking differences in the assessment of crime as a problem in South Bureau based on the race/ethnicity of the residents. Among African Americans in South Bureau, an astonishing 93 percent felt that crime is a big problem, and the other 7 percent felt it is somewhat of a problem. Virtually *no* South Bureau African Americans felt that crime is not a problem. Although a majority of Latinos in South Bureau (61 percent) feel that crime in the area is a big problem, this is not appreciably higher than the percentage of Latinos in the rest of the county who feel this way. Furthermore, whereas *no* African Americans in South Bureau felt that crime was not a problem in the community, 13 percent of Latinos in South Bureau felt this way.

Latinos living in South Bureau are polarized regarding their views of how crime has changed in recent years. Whereas 23 percent of Latinos living in other neighborhoods in the county feel that crime has improved recently, 29 percent of Latinos living in South Bureau feel this way. On the other hand, whereas about one-third of Latinos living in other neighborhoods in the county feel that crime has gotten worse, one-half of Latinos living in South Bureau have this grim assessment.

Whereas 68 percent of residents in the rest of the county rate their local police protection as either good or excellent, only 36 percent of residents in South Bureau rate the police protection as good or excellent in 2004-05. Furthermore, about three times as many residents of South Bureau rate the police protection as "poor" compared to residents in the rest of the county. Fully 59 percent of South Bureau residents reported that it is somewhat or extremely dangerous to walk around in the neighborhood, whereas just 27 percent of residents in the rest of the county felt similarly.

We find considerable evidence of a lack of trust between neighbors in South Bureau. Almost twice as many residents in South Bureau compared to the rest of the county disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that people in their neighborhood can be trusted (43

percent versus 22 percent). There are also sharp racial differences in levels of trust. Latinos in South Bureau are only minimally less trusting than Latinos living elsewhere. On the other hand, African Americans in South Bureau have deep suspicions about their neighbors. South Bureau African Americans are twice as likely as African Americans living in the rest of the county to report not trusting their neighbors (54 percent versus 25 percent). And they are half again as likely as Latinos also living in South Bureau to express such mistrust.

Although African Americans living in the rest of the county generally see neighbors “getting along” (82 percent agreed or strongly agreed with this statement), just 61 percent of African Americans living in South Bureau felt this way. For Latinos, these values were 67 percent and 56 percent, again suggesting that those living in South Bureau see fewer persons getting along.

Regarding the economy, whereas almost 20 percent of African Americans living in the rest of the county rated the county economy as either good or excellent, only 7 percent of those living in South Bureau rated the economy that favorably. African Americans in South Bureau have a particularly gloomy view of the county economy, as almost half rated the economy as poor (compared to about one-third of African Americans living in the rest of the county). The story for Latinos is quite different, as those living in South Bureau do not view the economy any more unfavorably than do Latinos living elsewhere in the county. Thus, it is the African Americans living in South Bureau who perceive the existence of county economic problems, and not the Latinos living there.

Whereas just over one-third of residents living in the rest of the county perceive the lack of opportunities for well-paying jobs as a big problem, 73 percent of the Latinos and 81 percent of the African Americans living in South Bureau see this as a big problem. Virtually no African Americans in South Bureau felt that things have improved for such well-paying jobs, whereas over 60 percent perceive that things have worsened. In contrast, Latinos living in South Bureau do not appreciably differ from Latinos living elsewhere in the county in their perceptions in the change in opportunities for well-paying jobs. Again, it is African Americans who most acutely perceive these economic woes, and a worsening of these woes.

Regarding the quality of schools, whereas about half of residents in the rest of the county assessed their local schools as either good or excellent, just one-third of South Bureau residents had a similar assessment. On the other hand, although 22 percent of residents in the rest of the county perceive their local schools as poor, 42 percent of South Bureau residents shared this strong assessment. The perception of schools in South Bureau differs considerably across racial lines. Virtually no African Americans in South Bureau rated the schools as excellent, and only 4 percent even rated them as good. Over 60 percent rated their schools as poor. Although Latinos also have a somewhat dim view of the quality of the local schools, it is not nearly as scathing as the assessments of African Americans. The percentage of Latinos in South Bureau rating the schools as either excellent or good is similar to the perceptions of all residents in the rest of the county. There is some modest evidence that a sizable percentage of Latinos feel that the schools are quite poor (31 percent), but again this is half the number of African Americans who have such a dim view.

Whereas over half of African Americans in the rest of the county felt that local public recreational facilities were good or excellent, less than 20 percent of South Bureau African Americans felt this way. On the other hand, South Bureau Latinos do not really perceive the local recreational facilities to be particularly notable.

When residents were asked to label the single biggest problem in the neighborhood, crime and gangs are particularly salient issues. In South Bureau, 14 percent of the African Americans named crime as the single biggest problem, whereas 16 percent in the rest of the county named it as the single biggest problem. However, the reason this figure is somewhat lower in South Bureau is not because it is not an issue, but simply because the problem of gangs is an even bigger problem. Whereas 12 percent of African Americans in the rest of the county identified gangs as the single biggest problem facing the neighborhood, nearly one-third of South Bureau African Americans listed gangs as the single biggest problem. Furthermore, drugs are a particularly salient problem, as African Americans of South Bureau are three times as likely to list this as the single biggest problem compared to African Americans in the rest of the county.

Latinos are similarly concerned about crime. Whereas 11 percent of Latinos in the rest of the county identified crime as the single biggest issue, 15 percent of Latinos in South Bureau listed this as the most salient problem. Gangs are also particularly troublesome to Latinos in South Bureau, as 26 percent listed this as the single biggest problem (compared to 15 percent in the rest of the county). Drugs are also three times more likely to be listed as the biggest problem in the neighborhood for Latinos in South Bureau compared to the rest of the county. Although African Americans in South Bureau were much more likely to list the police as the single biggest problem in the neighborhood (7 percent) compared to African Americans in the rest of the county, Latinos were particularly unlikely to list this as the single biggest problem (2 percent).

The second main issue identified by residents as problematic were local schools. About 15 percent of African Americans in the county identified this as the single biggest problem. Latinos were somewhat less likely to list this as the biggest problem, as only 9 percent in South Bureau (compared to 14 percent of African Americans) listed this as the biggest problem.

Given our focus on race relations and the possible spawning of intergroup violence, it is particularly telling how few residents listed race relations as the single biggest problem. Just 3 percent of African Americans and 1 percent of Latinos in the rest of the county rated race relations as the biggest problem; tellingly, virtually *none* in South Bureau labeled this as the most pressing problem. Crime and the economy are clearly issues considered more pressing to these residents. Even more striking are the persons who rated illegal immigrants as the largest single problem: again, virtually no African Americans in South Bureau rated this as the biggest problem, and just 2.4 percent in the rest of the county felt this way. Instead, it is some *Latinos* in South who rated this as the biggest problem: nearly 2 percent felt this way.

Asking about volunteering one's time to work with others in the community to address a particular problem, half of African Americans in South Bureau have volunteered their time to such activity, and this figure is actually slightly higher than among African Americans living elsewhere in the county. In contrast, only 17 percent of Latinos in South Bureau have engaged in such activity. Latinos in general do not engage in such behavior in Los Angeles (just 24 percent in the rest of the county have done so), and this predisposition is even more pronounced in South Bureau.

It is notable that more than twice as many residents in South Bureau report race relations as being poor compared to residents in the rest of the county (35 percent versus 16 percent). What is striking is how negatively Latinos in South Bureau assess race relations: whereas 21 percent of Latinos in the rest of the county rate race relations as poor, 46 percent of Latinos in South Bureau rated them as poor. Although African Americans do not take quite as dim a view as Latinos, they nonetheless are not pleased: 38 percent in South Bureau rated them as poor compared to 28 percent in the rest of the county.

When asking whether police treat racial/ethnic groups fairly, the views of South Bureau residents are quite dim. Whereas 12 percent of residents in the rest of the county feel that police never or almost never treat all racial and ethnic groups fairly, fully 35 percent of residents in South Bureau felt this way. These perceptions are shared across racial groups. Latinos in South Bureau are about twice as likely as Latinos in other parts of the county to report that police never or almost never treat all groups fairly. African Americans are even more emphatic, as more than twice as many in South Bureau feel this way compared to African Americans in other parts of the county (56 percent versus 25 percent). Furthermore, fully 25 percent of African Americans volunteered the answer of “never” even though the scale presented to respondents only had “almost never” as the lowest category. Such a response reflects particularly strong feelings regarding this issue.

Finally, it is interesting to note that the two questions regarding attitudes towards immigration did not elicit answers from South Bureau residents that differed very much from residents in the rest of the county. Although Latinos in South Bureau are twice as likely as African Americans in the area to label immigrants as a benefit to the county (44 percent versus 21 percent), they are also slightly more likely to label them as a burden. It thus appears that Latinos in the area have a quite polarized view of immigrants. It is the case that South Bureau Latinos are somewhat more sanguine than African Americans regarding illegal immigrants: 37 percent of Latinos in the area labeled them as not a problem, while no African Americans did so. Thus, it appears that it is illegal immigration, rather than immigration per se, that African Americans respond to most viscerally in such a survey format.

### **Conclusions**

Thus, we can see that the attitudes of residents in South Bureau do not always match the image of them depicted in the media. Economic issues are of particular importance to the residents, whereas concerns about racial/ethnic differences *per se* are not articulated in these survey responses. Concerns about crime and disorder appear to cross racial lines. Nonetheless, there are important differences between Latinos and African Americans in how the future of the community is perceived. Arguably, these differences are rooted in different historical trajectories: for first- and second-generation Latinos, the situation that they assess in South Bureau is perhaps being compared to the community situation from which they immigrated. Logically, it is possible that their antecedent situation was part of their decision to immigrate. For African Americans, the long legacy of racial conflict and prejudice in this country (as well as their historically contentious relationship with the LAPD) likely influences how they perceive their current situation, as well as their vision of the future. These differences may well have important implications for how these residents interact with each other, and with their community.

## CHAPTER 4

### **“It’s Amazing the Microscope They Put on it”: Civilian Interviews and Observations in 77<sup>th</sup> Area and Watts**

**Aaron Roussell & Luis Daniel Gascón**

Most of the research discussed in previous chapters centers around various parts of LA’s South Bureau, but the media attention to the “black-brown violence” problem has perhaps its strongest roots in the area known colloquially as “South Central.” Hipp and his colleagues’ 2008 quantitative study suggests that interracial violence in South Bureau is a relatively rare phenomenon. However, this by itself does not do sufficient justice to the question of inter-ethnic tension, leaving many more questions than answers. Accordingly, our task was to interview and observe African American and Latino community leaders, service providers, residents, and other stakeholders from South LA, as well as relevant members of the LAPD, regarding the tension between racial and ethnic groups. We attempted to capture not only their orientations towards interracial violence, but also reactions to the media discourse more generally. Finally, given the shifting demographics of the area, we explored perceptions and issues of local political power between the two groups.

Interpretations and impressions expressed herein and for Chapter 4 derive from more than two years of fieldwork comprising interviews with police and community members, and observations of meetings and other community events (See Appendix for a list of contacts). One major source of information was the Community-Police Advisory Board (CPAB) meetings held by LAPD and attended by community residents and other stakeholders, although we attended many other events and observed many community service programs as well.

The interviews primarily provide the data for this section, although excerpts from fieldnotes are sprinkled throughout to demonstrate points unexpressed in recordings. The stakeholders that we talked to—community leaders, organizers, social service providers, and the police—are clearly a self-selecting group. Interviewees were largely educated, involved, energetic, and generally optimistic, at least about their place in the community. Even those that were negative about neighborhood trajectory, police relations, or other issues seemed confident in expressing their own agency. On the other hand, their unique positions as community leaders brought them into broad contact with others in the community, thus enabling a larger range of views to be expressed. When confronted with our simplistic questions regarding of race, race relations, violence, and media theories involving interracial crime, our interviewees painted complicated and nuanced pictures of the respective symbolic worlds in which they reside and which we gratefully try to reproduce here.

### **Methods<sup>8</sup>**

#### *Setting*

“South Central,” as it is commonly known, is the region of Los Angeles that runs along the Harbor Freeway corridor (Interstate 110), bordered by Interstate 105 to the south, Interstate 10 to the north, Inglewood to the west and East Los Angeles to the east. The main thoroughfare is Central Avenue, running north to south, right out of the heart of the city. Racial tension is a

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<sup>8</sup> The methodological approaches discussed in this section apply to both this and the succeeding chapters.

salient part of the ethnohistory in this part of Los Angeles (Vigil, 2002). We concentrated our observations in the 77<sup>th</sup> Street Division (henceforth “77<sup>th</sup>”), where the South Bureau is headquartered, and which has an active Community Police Advisory Board (CPAB)—this meeting later served as a springboard for interviews and observations. In addition, 77<sup>th</sup> had also experienced a number of interracial crimes in the recent past, so it was singled out for its potential for conflict.

### *Access*

In mid-June of 2008, the research team visited the 77<sup>th</sup> station to meet with then-Deputy Chief Kenneth Garner. There, we discussed the prospect of looking through the department’s homicide files in order to get, in addition to statistics and figures, a larger pool of information about interracial homicide in South Los Angeles. Deputy Chief Garner was more than willing to accommodate and assured us that detectives in the homicide unit would be equally disposed and available to interview. Principle Investigator Tita additionally requested permission for the ethnographic team (the authors) to insert themselves into community policing programs to learn from officers and residents. This would help us gain the “on the ground” knowledge we sought.

After spending the summer coding the murder books in South Bureau Homicide units (see Chapter 2), we began our interviews and observations. Officers were the first to be interviewed as we worked closely with them, but we soon began attending community police meetings to widen the sample of interviewees to include residents.<sup>9</sup> Initially we employed purposive and snowball sampling procedures, looking for residents who held leadership positions within the community and officers who worked in the homicide and gang units who had intimate knowledge of the dynamics of interracial violence. We were also introduced to the community stakeholders of the CPAB and we conducted interviews with them and others using more snowball sampling. We soon learned that there was also a “Spanish CPAB,” which was held separately. We then began attending those meetings on a regular basis, developed a rapport with the cultural broker there and began interviews and observations of this community as well.

### *Observations and Interviews*

Observational approaches for this work comprised dozens of participant observation sessions conducted both together and separately at these community meetings and other community events (i.e., Summer Night Lights, National Night Out, CPAB Summits and Forums, and community carnivals). Police-community meetings were held regularly, so we attended 2 meetings a month (English and Spanish), and spent between two to two and a half hours at each session. In addition, we also conducted over 40 semi-structured interviews with police officers and administrators, community residents and stakeholders, and other non-police personnel

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<sup>9</sup> The original methodological design described a three-stage interview process. We were first to interview 10 homicide and gang detectives to provide insight as to the nature of interracial violence in South Bureau’s communities. This was to aid in the construction of an interview guide, which we were to use to interview 100 residents (10 from each neighborhood) and within a 3-month period. Finally, we would return to the station to re-interview those officers to discuss and legitimate our findings from the community interviews. Although elegant, this approach proved impossible to execute. Detectives difficult to isolate, and few were willing to speak on the record about interracial tensions beyond well-tread platitudes. The plan for residents also proved difficult to implement, insofar as cold-calling and going door-to-door proved non-optimal for gaining trust and rapport. Although we did gain several productive interviews in this manner, the methodology that provided the bulk of our findings comprised snowball and purposive sampling.

working as gang interventionists or community organizers. These interviews lasted anywhere from 30 minutes to more than 3 hours, although most lasted about 1 hour.

Throughout the observation and interview process, we relied on ethnographic techniques, which include the use of participant observation, fieldnote writing, and intensive interviewing. Participant observation, as Emerson (2001, p.18) suggests, is method of making meaning together with subjects to produce an interpretive understanding. This requires the researcher to be immersed in the subjects' social field (Walter et al, 2002, p.2). By making use of fieldnotes, participant observation, and interviewing, ethnographers attempt to extract an understanding of social meaning of a particular social setting, and by reading and re-reading notes and memos, to gain insight while still in the field that can propel the research forward. Qualitative researchers refer to fieldnotes and other field-collected data as "living documents," because researchers actively write, think, and analyze events throughout the research process simultaneously (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). After every observation, we poured over our fieldnotes, often together, attempting to understand and productively interpret our subjects' behavior, culture, and general social conditions (Abbott, 2004).

Qualitative interviewing can take several different forms, ranging from structured, which is similar to survey research, to unstructured, which is basically a conversation. In this work, we chose to employ semi-structured interviews. These are conducted in a very conversational style using an interview guide with words or short phrases to guide the discussion, as opposed to using a rigid set of questions. This method allows for freedom in response among participants; they are able to expand where they feel necessary and because of their deep local knowledge, take the conversation to places that could not have been anticipated by researchers. Ethnographic techniques like the ones described here have been used successfully in examinations of police culture, conflict, and community violence (cf., Bourgois & Schonberg, 2009; Conti, 2009; Rodgers, 2007).

We began by keeping field journals, which comprised notes, phrases, key words, and if we were lucky, whole conversations that we witnessed in the field. After each session, we each typed 5 to 10 pages of fieldnotes, which are elaborated narratives constructed from the field journals. In all cases, "native" language and concepts were privileged over our own researcher-constructed terms to maintain a level of authenticity throughout the writing process. Further, we also exchanged fieldnotes to corroborate our findings, sometimes co-authoring a set of notes. In most cases, the observational data overlapped considerably, with little variation, except during Spanish meetings.<sup>10</sup>

As our fieldnotes mounted, we examined them periodically using "focused coding" (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). This involves the selection of repeated concepts, phrases and themes that are highlighted because they fit the purposes of the research, drawing relationships of similarity and difference between these and other apparent themes. The patterns and themes that emerged were used to elaborate analytic constructs and hypotheses could then be investigated in greater depth.

Once interviews were conducted, we enlisted the help of trained undergraduate students, both fluent English and Spanish-speakers, to transcribe the interviews verbatim. Spanish

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<sup>10</sup> While Aaron speaks and understands Spanish, his language proficiency and fluency are admittedly limited. Residents enjoyed and encouraged his attempts to engage them in Spanish nonetheless and often complemented his progress over the study period. When possible, I would clarify things during observations and elaborated on specific cultural meanings that are often lost in translation. For the most part, however, Aaron was able to pick up on what was being said and was able to maintain congenial relationships with several participants in the field.

interviews were translated first into Spanish directly and only then into English. Analysis of the interview data was similar to that of the fieldnote narratives, where the transcripts were treated as fieldnote narratives and were coded and elaborated. These themes are articulated below. Following the initial stages of coding and categorization, the researchers constructed more extensive codes that repeatedly emerged in the data. This process of categorization generated our conceptual understanding of the nature of interracial violence in South LA.

### **South LA demographic shifts**

The issue of interracial violence, exaggerated or otherwise, is predicated upon the notion of racial and ethnic demographic shift. Throughout its history, LA has been in racial and ethnic flux, from Asian immigrants and white ethnics of the late 1800s and early 1900s, to the influx of African Americans, and the indigenous and migratory streams of Latinos that have overlapped throughout the time period. Residents of South Central are aware of much of their demographic history as well as the current transition from majority black to majority Latino.

Interviewees discuss black flight, gang injunctions, and increased Latino labor migration as working together to shift the interethnic balance in favor of Latinos over blacks. As one community organization's director puts it succinctly: "[South Central is] predominantly Latino, anywhere between 60 percent to 70 percent and it is growing and it has a declining African American community." Residents also discuss the growth and change of the Latino community—as immigrants gain resources, they move away to other neighborhoods, often out of the city, making space for more recent immigrants.

Some residents describe the process in terms of social networks. Demographic change, then, is not randomly scattered, but occurs by families, friends, and acquaintances populating geographic areas together and sequentially. Rick Rinaldi, an African-American community program director:

*Rinaldi:* You'll see more Afro Americans on one side or pockets of them because they have been here for 30 years. Second or third generation of [black] parents and then the Latino moves in and your apartment building complex changes... Where you have an eight unit next to an eleven unit and then there's all Latinos in the eleven unit and then all black in the eight unit and then eventually you will see two [Latino] families in the eight unit but you won't see any blacks moving into the eleven apartment unit.

Though Latinos are perceived as lagging behind somewhat in political power relative to their numbers, both black and Latino residents see a political balance shift on the horizon. This debate seems likely to commence primarily over the issues of immigration and legality, and accordingly, representation.

Residents tend to agree on the facts of the demographic shift, as well as the historical roots of black-brown association, cooperation, and spatial co-mingling. Additionally, there is an understanding of the market forces of real estate, finance, and economic elitism that help drive these spatial shifts by population groups.

Below we address the general themes that emerged in our interviews and observations of community residents and stakeholders regarding the issues of interracial/ethnic violence specifically and interracial/ethnic conflict more generally.

## Normality of Life in Violent Places

Nearly everyone we spoke with underlined the fundamental normality of everyday life in any neighborhood, even one with an officially high crime rate. This should not be interpreted as downplaying the effect of crime on neighborhoods and individuals and the negative social pathology that it can produce, but rather a reaffirmation of the basic idea of human sociality. In other words, no matter how high the crime rate might be, it is a statistical abstraction—most of the time, even a highly dangerous community is a community like any other. Mike Elston, a legal official, puts it exactly that way: “You know what? [South Central]’s like any neighborhood.” Antoine Johnson, a non-profit project director, suggests that no one wants to hear about the everyday life in South Los Angeles:

*Johnson:* Nobody wants to hear about anything positive or constructive. You know, [you and I], we’re here and nobody got shot and we aren’t seeing a lot of Mexicans and blacks [engaging in violence], and you’re in the heart of Watts right now. It’s where we’re at. We’re all neighbors, man.

Mr. Rinaldi, as well as many others, juxtaposes the inflated image of racialized violence against a backdrop of everyday normalcy. This does not provide an explanation for violence so much as it downplays it, suggesting that it is more productive to examine the hundreds of thousands of daily interactions that are peaceful and productive than to dwell on the few that are not—no matter how many they are, they are inevitably dwarfed by a greater sense of sociality. Vera Fisher, a 77<sup>th</sup> CPAB officer, echoes a similar sentiment:

*Roussell:* Is [interracial violence] like the way the L.A. Times likes to talk about?

*Fisher:* No, either way, the L.A. Times thing is—they just find a spot...Once they see something happen in a small spot they might go and think that it had happened some time ago and then they say, “This is what’s going on.” ...You know, it’s basically a statistics game because for the most part, most of these kids around here hang out with each other.

Residents tend to view their communities as their homes rather than as the “war zone” that some media outlets have labeled it. Characterizing an area solely by its crime rate, they suggest, is simply inappropriate.

## “Unwelcome Consequences”: Poverty, Crime, and Race

Rather than disparage other racial groups or ascribe tension to cultural factors (but see next section), almost every interviewee situated their respective discussions within a framework of disadvantage. As neighborhood council member Gerry Torrance suggests, “Economics is the basis of the entire thing,” and this view is echoed by vast majority of the interviewees. Indeed, when asked specifically about interracial violence, interviewees almost universally directed the conversation towards the issues of poverty and underprivilege. Adriana Sanchez, a Latina child care worker, suggests that observers confuse violence caused by a general exposure to extreme poverty with race-specific clashes:

*Sanchez:* Because there are so little resources in the area, I think that people tend to confuse race problems or problems between the races as being racial, when it’s actually more economic. A lot of the issues around the area, I think the whole idea of race is sometimes put out there in the media especially...“Oh, such-and-such happened, there was a big problem, there was a fight because of

race.” It’s not necessarily always the case that it’s race, it’s actually more of resources I think than anything else.

Rinaldi describes the chronic neglect that he has witnessed in a lifetime of living and working in South LA (emphasis added):

*Rinaldi:* I believe that over the years, South LA has been neglected, because I guess the whole community—you have a poor infrastructure, lack of economic development opportunities, lack of commercial space, lack of available services... [this] creates *unwelcome consequences*. Which is poverty, high density, you have high crime...lack of education, lack of resources, lack of direction, and sometimes lack of solution.

Rather than implicate cross-race villains, as a race-motivated interpretation might suggest, interviewees were quick to understand violence, particularly interracial violence, within the context of reduced opportunity and a scramble for scarce resources.

### **Media Concerns: Reactions to Hyperbole**

As Sanchez alludes to above, almost no interviewees were in agreement with the statements made by LA County Sheriff Baca in his 2008 editorial: “In LA, race kills.” The competing viewpoint, put forth by former LAPD Chief Bratton, is that interracial violence results from gang conflicts, not race directly (Blankenstein & Rubin, 2008). Gang conflicts, according to Bratton—“wars,” even—are over such things as drug money and territory, but are not directly motivated by racism. Most interviewees reject the Baca contention unequivocally, but only a few pick up on Bratton’s counterframing, although, predictably, no one rebuts the claim that gangs do cause violence. Instead, interviewees focus on popular (though cynical) wisdom such as “if it bleeds, it leads,” the discourse surrounding prison gangs as explanations, and finally suggest that the media itself drives some of the conflict. The section ends with an example of reactions to specific events: high school “race riots.”

#### *If It Bleeds, It Leads*

The immediate negative answers often focused around the “if it bleeds, it leads” adage, suggesting that while there may be a grain of truth to the hyperbole, it is no more than a grain. Or as Gerry Torrance put it succinctly: “The ‘race wars’ for now are being way too blown up by the media.”

Besides providing a useful heuristic for understanding the media relationship to interracial violence, “if it bleeds, it leads” is often tangled up with the neighborhood normalcy theme. Rinaldi’s observations are telling:

*Rinaldi:* It’s the way it is, but if we do have a rash of shootings, bam bam bam over the summer and bam, all the focus is on South L.A. But nobody shows love at the game in the [*inaudible*] graduation where 17 former gang members graduated and end up saying they knew each other...

As Jamal Kwame, an African imam, wryly observed, “Sometimes the media exaggerates, because really if there is as much racial tension [as the media suggests] then we would all be in trouble.”

## *Prison Gangs*

Another major theme that emerged from the interviews was the attribution of racialized violence to prison gangs. California's prisons, thanks to decades of racial segregation as well as popular movies such as *American Me* and lurid press accounts, are characterized by a noted predominance of racially aligned prison gangs. The common wisdom presented by print and electronic media is that these gangs, particularly the Mexican Mafia ("Eme"), control, to a contested degree, the exercise of violence by the Latino street gangs.<sup>11</sup> The most extreme theory, promoted by several LA Times reporters and other media outlets, is that Eme has "greenlighted"—assigned to members to harass and kill—African Americans as a group in South Los Angeles, regardless of gang membership status, in a sort of ethnic cleansing. Prison gangs are theorized to hold power over street gangs through the prison exchange process—to be treated well in prison, street gangs obey orders that come from prison through parolees who are paroled back to their old neighborhoods. Prison is seen as inevitable by street gang members, who obey out of fear for their future incarcerative treatment as well as for those compatriots and family members who remain behind bars.

Given the mystery surrounding prison life by those on the outside, particularly non-incarcerated community members, this theory has gained some adherents who strongly or weakly frame the issue in this manner. This theorizing, however, tends not to come from direct or even indirect experience. Jaime Vargas, director of an association of direct service providers explains:

*Vargas:* When I read about prison gangs, it sounds like it's really hairy. And it is... They come back, have a big party, everyone is eating *carne asada* and he starts telling them stories. War stories, about how he got in a big fight, he didn't think he was going to make it and he's got the little kids going "Wow!" and it starts planting seeds. Now the little kid may go back and play with his best friend, next door neighbor who happens to be black and it doesn't register at that point until like I said at some point or maybe he gets jumped by someone pissed off that someone said something to them...

Here, Vargas uses the media-adopted prison gang frame to explain what he perceives to be spontaneous outbreaks of violence. In his view, the "war-story"-fed youth are like time bombs, waiting to go off until they are triggered by a racializing event. The figures from prior studies, as well as our own research into South LA murder books, however, suggest that spontaneous racial violence is a rare or non-existent phenomenon, so we ask, in essence, why this doesn't seem to be occurring:

*Gascón:* [You seem to be describing] the same thing that happened in Venice Beach, with the all-out race war... there were [black] community leaders posting signs saying, you know, "Stop our community members from being shot by Mexican bullets." Then this was in '93, '94... why isn't this happening today?

*Vargas:* Well, it's not that it can't. It could happen. I don't know that... You know, when that [local high school] riot happened, I was very aware that—I did have that sense and I'll be honest with you, I'm not totally completely, absolutely sure about a lot of the [media] speculation, from my point of view. But at the time, I said, "Oh shit!" maybe this is what they're talking about.

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<sup>11</sup> It is perhaps relevant to note here that it is not impossible that Sheriff Baca—as the director of the LA County jail system—drew from the same well of localized incarceratory knowledge when penning his editorial.

While Vargas is not directly affiliated with the criminal justice system, many of those who endorse the prison gang theory of racial violence are, either as LAPD officers, or court officials. Indeed, none of the gang-affiliated people we interviewed ever brought up Eme or any other prison gang. One former Latino gang member, “J”, involved intimately in one of the most media-exposed interracial homicides (although not a suspect) actually laughed at the question as we watched a television special on his gang together. He would not allow us to audiotape him, so excerpts from one author’s fieldnotes are below:

*Aaron’s fieldnotes:* [The television special states that] gangs have been given orders (“greenlighted”) to kill blacks, gang members or not. [The special] makes explicit reference to [J’s gang]—implying, if not outright stating, that [victim] was killed on Eme’s orders. J laughs at this, calling it absolutely not true. He’s never met a member of Eme and [J’s gang] takes orders from nobody and never has. He reiterates that the killing was accidental. [i.e. the victim was not the intended target] The media are partly complicit in the retaliation, he says. The post-incident period was punctuated by several retaliatory killings on both sides.

### *Violence as Media-driven*

The hostility displayed by J towards the media’s reporting on interracial violence is a strong undercurrent in many of the interviews. Many of them, like J, feel as though the media not only exaggerates interracial conflict, but also has a hand in causing it. Mr. Torrance, a member of the neighborhood council who also belongs to a motorcycle club, explains how this works: “If I feel I’m going to get media coverage for killing someone, then I’m going to kill him. I’m going to kill him and get rid of him!”

Torrance is not simply arguing that people join gangs to see themselves on TV, but rather that notoriety is an integral part of the gang experience. While most gangsters’ infamy is localized, wider exposure cannot be discounted as a benefit for having committed a publicized crime. In this respect, many interviewees express frustration with a media discourse that in some ways becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Acknowledging the role that the media play in “pumping” up sensational stories, Johnson links media cycles to a perpetual discourse over racial violence:

*Roussell:* What motivates [interracial] violence?

*Johnson:* The media...My understanding of it was there was an incident between two people that got killed and it went...the media had to pump. They just had to throw boards on the fire and they come out with their interpretation of who’s who and what’s what, you know...And people react to it and it just perpetuates.

...

*Johnson:* In high school, we talked about “surviving summers,” because everybody’s coming home, the jails are getting full and they pushing people out, and you know, you’re waiting for the media to start talking about this bullshit-ass race conflict. If you were Caucasian and you lived next to me, it’s possible, as neighbors, that we could have disagreements. You know, I may play my music too loud and you may not want to have barbeque smoke coming on in your window.

Johnson neatly joins the discourses of de-sensationalization and media-driven violence with a strong perception of the universality of racism. As critical race scholars have long suggested (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001), racism is an everyday experience for many minorities. Here, Johnson’s commonsense suggestion is that a media-fueled microscope could find racism any place it decides to look. It is everywhere, particularly in places where there is rapid cultural turnover. Quite simply, this should not be surprising. But this does not mean, he suggests, that

virulent racism is *causing* a wave of interracial violence, or that this is anything out of the ordinary for the human experience.

### *High School “Race Riots”*

One method for explaining to us how the media and race play out was to use personal or well-publicized examples. Incidents of local high school violence proved fertile in this respect, as residents reinterpreted them through the points they were making or overlaying their own experiences. While one such “race riot” had taken place just before the majority of the interviews and was referenced often by interviewees, the issue of high school “race riots” generally proved a handy archetype either to argue against or as an instrument to debunk racialized media stories. A volunteer at one of LAPD’s youth programs and a CPAB member, Dr. Cynthia Stacy explains:

*Roussell*: ... The LAPD and the sheriff, but particularly the LA Times, has really been playing up [racial violence]. Do you think that move is reasonable? [*responding to shaking of head*] No?

*Stacy*: No, and I have a real big bone to pick with the LA Times, because they don’t want to deal with the reality of what it is and the economic differences and cultural barriers that—if they would play that up and then we could deal with reality of life here. Instead, they want to sensationalize things. For example, the quote, unquote “race riot” at Fischer High School a few years back—

*Roussell*: Yeah, I keep hearing about that.

*Stacy*: Right, you keep hearing about—it was about none of that, actually. If you talk to the kids—we had a focus group with the kids and none of them—

*Roussell*: The kids [directly] involved?

*Stacy*: Yeah. As in the football team who came in and had to break it up, and the kids that were involved, we had them in a focus group.

*Roussell*: So what was it about?

*Stacy*: It was—half of it being—I don’t remember exactly how it went, it was either a Latino girl hitting on somebody’s boyfriend or a black girl hitting on somebody’s boyfriend and the girl just happened to be the opposite race [*inaudible*]. Now what happened when that happened, then you’re going to get the black kids backing up the girl, because they are friends, so it didn’t start...

*Roussell*: So it really was started by crossing those boundaries anyway.

*Stacy*: Right! No, no, because interracial relationships are going on within the *opposite* of that mentality. So what about that? The football team comes in and they are multiracial and they’re just pulling people off, they just broke it off.

Stacy here is contextualizing the blanket term “race riot” by carefully acknowledging the races of those involved, but locating the cause of the incident within the realm of an interpersonal romantic relationship, and explicitly referencing that relationship as a dyadic example of interracial harmony. She explains the extant interracial violence through social networks—the incident itself was sparked by romantic jealousy, but the subsequent escalation was the result of racialized networks of friends and acquaintances. Because of the homophily of the student body—itsself not necessarily a negative thing—the resulting violence occurred. Stacy, however, finds her remedy also within the realm of social networks: The football team, which intervenes, is a multiracial network, organized by definition around non-racial criteria.

## **Race and Culture**

In this section, we explore the cultural clashes that inform—rather than necessarily motivate—perceptions of interracial violence. Two African American figures, Antoine Johnson and Dakari Hendricks, provide an example of the ways that differently positioned individuals can

interpret similar facts. Johnson directs a community service program which no doubt colors his views. Hendricks is no less affected in his role as a legal official:

*Johnson:* So as neighbors we have conflict, but it's amazing the microscope they put on it...Some of the conflict is true. It's gang related, it's with racism, as within any community. If I go to Santa Monica and I go to Hermosa Beach, there's racism, but...you don't have to deal with 20,000 new arrivals...culturally. Like Hermosa, if you imagine Hermosa Beach, maybe 15 to 20,000 new people over a course of so many years, they don't speak the language, they have cultural differences, they just moved in, do you think that there would be conflicts?

Johnson clearly articulates one theme that reverberates through most of the interviews: the normality of cultural difference. Hendricks, on the other hand, paints it as tension, expressing Johnson's statement in much sharper language, perhaps due to his position in mediating the two groups legally (emphasis in original):

*Hendricks:* In South Central, unfortunately, I'm getting a crash course in racial politics between two groups who have not yet learned to play together.

*Gascón:* Why?

*Hendricks:* Because people are stupid. Because the African American community that has been there historically—and remember, they pushed out the whites. You know, most of South LA was white at one time. So the African Americans—well, they didn't push out the whites. The whites fled. African Americans who in reality—

*Gascón:* Everybody left en masse.

*Roussell:* Yeah, you have a word for that, it's called "white flight".

*Hendricks:* That's exactly right. There was white flight. And so the African Americans have been here since the 60s, you know, who came after the white flight—it's almost as if there's a sense of "This is ours. This is our community. This is mine." And when there are other groups that are coming in, moving in en masse, there is push-back. You know, why are you in our community? Why are you buying all of our houses? You know, every time I walk down the street, I have to hear your music. When I go to the park, I got to see your kids playing. Why are you in my—it's  *fucking*  absurd. It's nothing more than invidious racism in its worse form.

*Gascón:* On the part of the black community?

*Hendricks:* It goes both ways. It's invidious racism and it goes both ways. And as law enforcement we have to pay attention to that as we're getting complaints from the community. We get complaints, "Oh, this family is driving me crazy." Then we find out, you know, she's not even playing the mariachi that loud. It happens to be that  *what*  she's playing is really offending her neighbor.

Hendricks and Johnson illustrate the ways in which similar facts can be interpreted in different ways. Johnson, who grew up in the area and is involved with cooperative community improvement sees underlying cultural tensions as normal flotsam through which residents navigate through the course of everyday life, while Hendricks, a outsider who deals with criminal justice complaints, sees this as derailing everyday life. This dynamic can be seen as another facet of the media "microscope" discussed by Johnson—there is always turmoil to exploit as explanatory, but those living the experiences may not see it the same way.

### *Language*

One major issue that becomes racialized is that of language differences. Rick Rinaldi, an African American, talks about the mistrust engendered by language differences:

*Rinaldi:* You know, if I walk into a Latino store and there's no prices listed anywhere, then my price will be different from her price or his price [from Latino customers] and I can't see it because there's no price listed anywhere because of the language barrier.

This discomfort expressed by Mr. Rinaldi is taken up by Mrs. Fisher, who identifies as an African American. Fisher articulates her own sentiments and those of some of her constituents who see many Latinos as fierce anti-English, anti-American nationalists, to the point of not teaching their children English. We quote her at length below to demonstrate the cultural pushback that she espouses against the nexus of the Spanish language, "separatists," the perceived *Reconquista*, and her perception of a Latino sense of entitlement. This constellation of racial imagery is echoed by other interviewees and in other aspects of the research, but Mrs. Fisher is uniquely verbose. Fisher first invokes the discourse of "manifest destiny" to explain her hostility to the claims of Latino ("Mexican") immigrants. She then elides the English language with national prosperity:

*Fisher:* Now first of all, when you had it [California] you didn't know what to do with it and I used to tell them all the time and I still tell them, if your country is so great why did you leave it? If it's so important for California to become a Spanish speaking country, to become a Latino country, then why did you leave what you had there? Why did you come here? And then everybody is talking about their piece of the pie. That's the American pie, that ain't the Mexican pie.

Fisher is able to justify her hostility towards Latinos as non-racist because her issue is not with "them" per se, but with their culture that they bring with them. The undercurrent of her thought is that Mexican culture (and she directs her comments primarily at Mexicans, although some of her personal grudges are against subjects that we know to be Central American) is incompatible with her perception of American-culture-created America. Mexican culture, for Fisher, is an alien, arguably primitive, culture against which American culture had to struggle for progress (Steinberg, 1988)—naturally, to bring that element back in through non-assimilative immigration is regressive.

Fisher illustrates her Spanish-only points with a personal anecdote regarding the youngest son of the family that used to live next door to her:

*Fisher:* Now this boy, his parents made the oldest one learn English and the daughter was getting into it because she started talking to my granddaughter on a regular basis and they would sit there with their homework and my granddaughter would kind of help her with words, but the third one, they wanted him to learn Spanish.

*Roussell:* So the other ones weren't fluent in Spanish or were they bilingual?

*Fisher:* They were bilingual.

*Roussell:* So what changed their mind?

*Fisher:* They changed their mind because was they thought he wasn't getting too far because the older one, that might have changed their mind because the older one was smart, he was really smart, you know then the daughter she was doing really good and so here is the son, the third one struggling because the language barrier.

*Roussell:* So why didn't they just decide to let him learn English and then be like his siblings?

*Fisher:* Because he started hanging out with my granddaughter and she was talking and he didn't talk back but he wanted to. He wanted to hang out with the kids that was around the area and for the most part it was at that time, it was mostly black kids...It was messy. He was ESL but they wanted him to be taught in Spanish because at that time in the Latino community there was a big push by the Latino community for them to only be taught in Spanish. See that's when the [school

district] got involved with the separation of the languages, where you're trying to teach Spanish only and English in the same classroom.

In Fisher's recollection, the older neighbor children were allowed to learn English because they were not in danger of becoming too assimilated—as soon as the youngest child began to hang out with African American children, the parents reverted to Spanish-only education.

Although beginning her thoughts on the language issues with the attitudes of Mexican immigrants, Fisher connects those attitudes to the political power that she understands them to have. Even though the ballot measure she refers to below did not pass, in the subsequent quote she connects the political issue of bilingual education to the joblessness experienced by her mother. In a classic example of race as a proxy for labor market advantage (Bonilla-Silva, 2003), the issue of bilingual education becomes personalized.

*Fisher:* This is the key and it's a smart move on a lot of them, many of them started realizing it's not so swift, not knowing English, and I'm making my child only learn in Spanish because there have been those that have moved out of the state and see they're not teaching them, okay? Right, they're not doing that anywhere but here and when they go out of state they realize that they're at a disadvantage because the kid, because the United States of America will never be a Spanish speaking country and they were under that assumption. I don't know if you knew this they actually had a proposal to vote on because they tried to make Spanish the language, the official language of California.

*Roussell:* But that didn't do well at the [polls].

*Fisher:* No, that didn't do well at all. It was on the ballot, but see, here is the key: None of them could vote for it, they're all illegal.

...

*Fisher:* My mother actually lost a position and raises because she didn't speak Spanish. So here she is with her education for teacher's aide, you know, she's got her certificate and everything as a teachers' aide. Now it [was] Martin Luther King elementary, but now its Santa Barbara Avenue because Martin Luther King Boulevard. used to be Santa Barbara Avenue...But during that time period in the 80s they start having the babies and didn't want them to speak English, they only wanted them to speak Spanish. They went and sued and somehow got it where the school had to teach Spanish and English.

This antipathy does not go unnoticed by the Latino community. Mendoza, a bilingual community leader, expresses his frustration with issues of social advancement as well as the racism that he encounters on the part of blacks:

*Mendoza:* I don't know if it's ignorance, [but] I feel that it's ignorance, overall. If they see that they have more of an opportunity and it is easier to excel over us. Be it that they were born here speaking this language, they have rights as citizens and they have the support of various organizations geared toward them. The fact that they don't overcome is not because it's not their destiny, if that's how they see it. They see us in a certain way. It bothers them that there are certain jobs where a bilingual person may be preferred. That's why we feel threatened. Many of the homes we live in, in South Central, are owned by blacks. If they felt we were displacing them, why didn't they sell the homes to other black people? In other words, I don't see the reason why they resent us. We are empowering ourselves, but in a legitimate fashion, in an honorable fashion. As if it were necessary, they also criticize the fact that we live in groups. If we can't purchase a home, we gather aunts and uncles and we collaborate and we buy the home. I think that certain of our traditions offend them.

*Gascón:* So then, they are not racist; they simply don't like our culture?

*Mendoza:* No, in certain ways it has to be racism because the simple fact that someone speaks Spanish makes them uncomfortable...and then you hear the comments. I hear it all of the time, “We’re not in Mexico.” “Why don’t you want to speak English?” “English is the law! English is the law!” And things like that. They feel uncomfortable knowing that a person expresses themselves in their own language. And in some cases you can feel that resentment. That thing will always affect our relationship, the fact that we all live together and are all equals.

Mendoza interprets the social progress of Latinos in a traditional American context, implying that African Americans have failed to do as well with what he considers to be the same opportunities. Moreover, he implicitly ties this progress to the Spanish language bond of Latinos insofar as progress is a result of collective work by Spanish-speaking immigrants, as well as valorizes these accomplishments because they come even while Latinos are unable to speak the native tongue. Blacks, he suggests, ought to do better than they do—or better than Latinos—because they speak English.

### **Race in Local Institutions**

One overwhelming impression that we gleaned from several years of fieldwork is that many important political and administrative positions are held by African Americans, even in areas that have become largely Latino. We observed this directly and began incorporating it into our interviews to attempt to understand how both African American and Latino residents perceive the issue. This social inertia occurs for a variety of reasons and has a variety of effects that we explore below.

One way to observe demographic transition is in the youth of a community—immigration brings young, married or marriageable people and their children, while the children of a diminishing group move away and reproduce elsewhere. Thus we saw this dynamic quite clearly in the interviews with teachers at the local high schools. One school in particular, Binford, represented itself as 93 percent Latino and 7 percent African American, while another, Fischer, was at an earlier stage of the transition, although still close to three-quarters Latino. Theresa Velasquez, a Latina teacher we interviewed, taught at Binford, but recently had transferred from Fischer and conveniently was able to compare the two:

*Velasquez:* I taught 9<sup>th</sup> graders in one class and 11<sup>th</sup> graders. With my 9<sup>th</sup> graders, 30 percent of students in the fall are black, the rest are Latinos. I have a couple periods of [what] we call “primary language instruction” speaking in Spanish to the newcomers. That classroom was 50 percent Latino. Some from Mexico. Mostly from Central America and some from South. I had a U.S. history class and in that U.S. history class, I would say probably half and half, black and Latino.

*Roussell:* Is that pretty much the way the school was, half and half?

*Velasquez:* No, not at all. After the time, people thought it was black school, but it wasn’t. It was mainly Latino. I don’t remember the ratio. It was like 75 percent and 25 percent.

*Roussell:* That’s what I learned. Way more black than Binford.

*Velasquez:* More black than Binford. Significantly more black than Binford. Binford doesn’t even have 10 percent. Fischer definitely has more than that. But I don’t remember exactly....Yeah, Binford does still think it’s a black school.

She continues, demonstrating the cultural holdovers of being a “black school” and how that remains largely unchanged, despite the ethnic turnover:

*Roussell:* What does that mean when you say it’s a “black school”?

*Velasquez*: Historically, that was a black school. Especially Fischer.

*Roussell* (confused): Historically, they're also...you know, Italian, too...

*Velasquez*: That's what I am saying. When you talk about Fischer, Fischer was still linked to the early '70s. It came to life as a black school. The population, until recently, had always been black. Because of that, there's a big tradition around that. You have things like bands. They are really really important. Football being really important. Most of the members of the football team being black...most of members of the band being black. The band leader being black and being a real source of pride for the school...A choir that was more of a gospel choir than anything else.

*Roussell*: The band thing is interesting. So it's a "black band"?

*Velasquez*: It's not...the band at Fischer is really good. The music program at Fischer is really strong. Not every student in the band is black. But...most of them were. The director definitely was. And it wasn't like the stand up marching band that marches in the Rose Parade—the beats that were played, the way that it was played, the way that students performed was something that you would think of as culturally being black.

### *Representing Latinos: Inertia and the two sides of big brothers*

Confronted with the fact that local institutions remain outposts of African American political power, we began to explore in our interviews the perceptions that blacks themselves had about representing Latinos. Many seemed very comfortable doing this, although several, like Vera Fisher, represented themselves as looking for more Latino participation in volunteer organizations. Much of the discourse of representation was couched in language suggesting solidarity—blacks who had “been there” portrayed themselves as uniquely suited to help Latinos in their struggles. Johnson here transitions smoothly from solidarity to representation:

*Roussell*: As I've been talking to people that are in the certain positions, or on town councils, who are black, right? They're representing a lot of Latinos, it seems like. How does that work exactly?

*Johnson*: A lot of that is just show shit. It's kind of like when you get to the city of Los Angeles they're just doing their programs. It's like we need this to present this. And then if you flip it the other way around like if you didn't have a lot of immigrants who didn't speak English running it, you would have guys that are like that.

...

*Johnson*: So what I would say to you is if they're allowed to do it to the Mexicans, we're next. So when they had the protest downtown about immigration reform or what not, I was on there. They didn't show my picture, they didn't show my face and I know other black people down there too. And some of the Mexicans were confused.

*Roussell*: Were they?

*Johnson*: Yeah. They were like “Damn, where'd he come from?” And I think the biggest problem they had was that they thought, “Hey we can go at it alone,” like, “We don't need them.”

Many of the African Americans that we interviewed came of age during the civil right era and the immediate aftermath and share an underlying understanding of themselves as a socially conscious identity group. Through a push-pull process with and against the status quo, their activism came to constitute much of the way in which modern social change is generated. Consequently, they regard Latinos as a group that is somewhat naïve with respect to political action and seek to help them understand what might be best for them. Although this can come across as patronizing, more gentle encouragement can potentially be valuable. Mendoza, for example, recognizes this encouragement as formative for his own social activism:

*Mendoza*: I've been a volunteer in several civic activities. More than anything, the areas that have most concerned me have been public safety and education.

*Gascón*: How did you get involved?

*Mendoza*: I felt the necessity and there were various people, a school administrator, of the black

ethnicity, that inspired me, more than anything she pushed me. I learned that I could give more to my community. She used to say, “Why don’t you get off your family and help others? Others may follow your example and would get motivated to help their kids do better in school, help them be more responsible, and take care of their city?”

Adriana Sanchez, a Latina community worker, notes the tie-in between political inertia and familiarity—blacks, in her view, are valuable to Latinos because they know how to get things done in a hostile sociopolitical environment. However, the significant caveat to this that she notes is that, at base, blacks are simply not Latinos, and, more specifically, do not understand the unique challenges that come with immigration.

*Sanchez:* It’s historical. [African Americans] were here for a lot of years and a lot of people that are coming here are immigrants, so I think that that kind of makes sense because some of the people are just kind of feeling out the area. They are just kind of getting adjusted. And part of coming in as an immigrant is getting adjusted. African Americans have been here for many years, so they have more of an understanding of the community. So that’s why they would be in more leadership roles.

*Gascón:* Do you think that they are able to represent the interest of some of the other groups?

*Sanchez:* Yeah, I think so. I think there is always representation from Hispanics as well, so I think that it’s workable. They are living in the same type of situations. They understand the community because they have lived in it for many years, so yeah. I would say yeah. They know the needs because they’ve lived here for so many years, they know the needs of the community.

*Roussell:* So there’s no friction between them, they really just represent the needs of everybody in the community?

*Sanchez:* I guess the biggest thing right now is understanding an immigrant’s needs. You don’t get many services as an immigrant because you’re not legally here. So that is a problem because a lot of the services that are being offered are not offered to illegal immigrants. As we all know there is a lot of immigration happening and often times it’s not legal. They aren’t getting the services and it’s difficult in some situations to express the need and not be able to fill it. You can express the fact that these people still need services and they still need jobs but where’s the show for it? But how to you do that?

### *Structural barriers to participation*

The constitution of local institutions as black disenfranchises Latinos in other ways as well. The official CPAB of the 77<sup>th</sup> Street Area is also predominantly African American. One barrier to greater Latino participation results from the nature of the institution (LAPD), but also because many Latinos are, or are related to, immigrants who may lack necessary documents for legal standing. Despite LA’s Special Order 40, which forbids police from checking immigration status unless it is related to a felony or gang arrest, interfacing with LAPD for undocumented residents carries clear risk.<sup>12</sup> This is problematic for increasing Latino membership in community organizations and volunteering that requires background checks, fingerprinting, or even face time with LAPD. Furthermore, unlike the aging African American population, the Latino population comprises many young and middle aged parents, whose time is taken by working and childrearing. Dr. Stacy explains the barriers to Latino participation in her organization, which is sponsored by the LAPD:

*Stacy:* Well, one thing is that we’ve got some forces working against us. Many of the Latinos that would work for us, they can’t pass the background check...because we go through and fingerprint

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<sup>12</sup> And, in fact, Special Order 40 is sometimes ignored. In an illegal vending sweep that was discussed at length by police and residents, the arrestees were screened for immigration status and ICE was called for many of them.

and they do a whole background check and if you've got anything in your history that won't allow you to [volunteer]...

...

*Stacy*: So then the older ones have that language issue. Then let's say middle-aged, 30-somethings, 40-somethings are working, they have no time. So it's been very difficult to find anybody—we have one guy, he's 40, that wanted to volunteer, but his gang member background wouldn't let him [pass the background check]. So this is something, this is a challenge that we are going to talk about, that maybe we should look at maybe lowering the bar a little bit? You know, and come out with something. If it [problems relating to criminality of LAPD volunteers] hasn't happened in 20 years, why not?

...

*Stacy*: You know, sometimes—this is ridiculous, so we are going to pursue that, because we cannot get the Latinos volunteers in. Then they are afraid. Some of them aren't legal—

*Roussell*: Right, and that would present a problem [with the background check]—

*Stacy*: [*misunderstanding the thrust of the comment*] No, not any more, no problem whatsoever. Because they've gotten the message that we're not the feds...that makes a difference...because when they think we are, that is the cause of a lot of other problems.<sup>13</sup> Right, so we've got this conflict and contradictions all the time, so you walk the street—a thin fine line all the time and you have to be aware and cognizant of it at all times.

The political dominance of African Americans also translates outside of the official realm to the street through social networks. Here, Hendricks explains how local black political elites divide the community into black and Latino sections through their familial ties with the local street gang:

*Hendricks*: [Name] Park, it's one of our biggest gang problems. That park is a gang haven. It's a problem. We get a lot of petitions from the community about the gang activity in the park. How they feel they're in fear, they feel like they can't take their kids outside, they feel like the police are doing nothing, they're alone. They're being left to their own devices and they can't protect themselves. They feel like we're failing them miserably. That part of the community is almost entirely Hispanic.

*Roussell*: The ones doing the complaining are—

*Hendricks*: They're Hispanic primarily. And the people driving them crazy are the blacks.

*Gascón*: Oh, the [gang name]. Right. Okay.

*Hendricks*: The [gang name] and the people that are friendly to the [gang name].

*Gascón*: Okay.

*Hendricks*: Because let's be frank. You have a neighborhood council and you have— It's primarily African American. You have a neighborhood council and you have a community that historically has been black and the demographics are changing. And the neighborhood council is primarily black and they're friendly to the damn [gang name].

This favoritism shown by local black political figures to local black gang members also helps reinforce black political dominance in the area.

### *Solutions and cooperation*

Almost as a postscript, it is worth looking at an example of close cooperation between African-American US citizens and their immigrant and non-immigrant Latino neighbors. As perhaps might be expected, informal means have sprung up to address many of the local problems that all neighborhoods face, but which are exacerbated by poverty and language

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<sup>13</sup> It's worth noting here the disconnect between Dr. Stacy, a highly educated, African American US citizen, and the immigrant Latinos that she is discussing. The Latinos with whom she comes in contact may not feel threatened by contact with the LAPD, but this is not our general understanding from others in the Latino community.

barriers. Dr. Stacy discusses the way that some Latino immigrants afraid of the police deal with problems in her neighborhood through social networks:

*Stacy:* The black or African Americans of the community prey upon the [undocumented] immigrants because they are not going to report it.... They run here, they'll come tell me and a lot of times I can convince them to report it. I will—

*Roussell:* Wait a minute. They—?

*Stacy:* [firmly] They will tell me or others in the area that—no, we've got it set up, tell this [resident] and that [resident] about it. That girl's come all the way home to tell Mike down the street because she trusts him. So just this morning, I was watering my lawn and someone comes by and says "This little black kid came in on a bicycle and tried to jack the van at the corner!" Why you hollering? You know, because they tend to be smaller intentions and try to jack him for something, I don't know, just really quick, he comes tell me. I said, "Did you call the police?" "No...!"

*Roussell:* So this network is interracial?

*Stacy:* Right, and so we have been able to get through to a lot of the kids to call the po-po, call this, call this person, if you see the graffiti, call 311 and, yeah, they are beginning to get it now. In addition to their kids.

*Roussell:* Gotcha. So this is a new thing. It is just starting to take place?

*Stacy:* Right, this is *our* approach.

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Our participant observations and interviews have allowed us to understand the inevitable cultural conflict that comes with rapid immigration as the background to everyday life in South LA. The finding of a sense of conflict, however, does not lead inexorably toward genocide—many residents might resent the implication that their (as they see it) legitimate complaints about their neighbors could be included as part of a causal path leading to murder. Further, many Latino and African American residents feel as though the discourse of "black-brown violence" is actually displacing the very real concerns that they have about jobs, education, and community investment which they see as the cause of violence generally.

While gang disagreements can end in bloodshed, non-gang Latinos and African Americans routinely express their interpersonal and political disagreements through socially acceptable mechanisms. As Antoine Johnson put it, "it's amazing the microscope they put on it." Racism is anywhere one chooses to look in a society characterized by racialized inequality, interracial genocide is not: "We're all neighbors, man."

## CHAPTER 5

### **Policing Conflict: Police Interviews and Observations Regarding Interracial Violence in South Los Angeles**

**Luis Daniel Gascón and Aaron Roussell**

“In L.A., race kills,” reads the title of an op-ed piece written by Sheriff Lee Baca (2008). In this article, the sheriff colorfully argues that, “race is at the heart of the problem” of interracial violence. Most people locate gangs divided along color lines as the primary cause for violent conflict in the city, but Baca says that they refuse to accept that this violence is necessarily race-based. Race is the propellant in this ongoing feud between black and Latino gangs, he claims. Media accounts like this one are a regular occurrence in Los Angeles. But while some may agree that “race kills,” officers of the LAPD disagree.

Not much is known about the state of race relations in South L.A. Though the black-brown dynamic became salient during the 1992 riots, very few researchers have explored the issue. The influx of recent immigrants into a traditionally black community is sure to stir the pot, but due to the dearth of research the degree to which this has caused friction is unknown, yet in recent years, demographic shifts have blamed for increasing tensions between the two groups. Our interviewees—including homicide detectives, administrators, and patrol officers—suggest the black community feels threatened by the encroaching Latinos and the Latino community feels resentment for being the target of victimization. The Latino community, these officers say, remains tightly knit and seldom interacts with the black population in the area.

In this chapter, we relied primarily upon interview and observational data to understand what constitutes racial tension and violence for Latinos and blacks in South Los Angeles from the perspective of the LAPD. Although most interviews considered here were conducted with 77<sup>th</sup> officers and administrators, several interviews were conducted with key figures within from Southeast and Southwest Divisions as well.

While officers declare that gangs are the primary cause of violence, gangs of different races—Latino and black in our case—don’t frequently engage one another, detectives argue. When they sell drugs, they surely sell on the same street corners, but almost never to the same customers. Two racially divided gangs may hold territories that border one another, sometimes divided by a single street, but most often, the two mainly ignore each other. But this begs the question: How, on the one hand, can you have a law enforcement official declare that gang violence and race violence are one and the same in LA, but on the other, have on-the-ground officers disagree? This chapter documents why there appears to be such variation in official accounts of racial violence and explores the realities of interracial conflict in South Los Angeles.

#### **Demographic Change and Culture Conflict**

Throughout our investigation, officers recounted for us various theories of conflict among the black and Latino communities generally and gang tensions between the two racial groups. Officers, detectives, and administrators noted that much of the racial conflict so prominently displayed in the media resulted from sweeping changes to the racial composition of South Central and that culture conflict has resulted.

As discussed in Chapter 4, South Central is not the oldest site of conflict in the city, but it is certainly one of the most storied. Many streets, neighborhoods, community centers, and libraries bear the names of the 1960s-era civil rights leaders, community activists, cultural icons—all of which are instrumental in the formation of the black identity of LA, residents say. On the other hand, some officers argue that South Central neighborhoods are sensitized to cultural turnover because the area has been home to so many different ethnic groups over the past century. Others locate the cause of tension in the heterogeneity inherent in ethnic succession, as different cultures overlap. Although these would appear as different mechanisms, officers often weave them together into a story of ongoing racial change situated within the two specific cultures. We explore this story below and the logics of interracial tension that unfold from them.

Two LAPD administrators, during a casual conversation at a community event in South LA, suggested to us that racial conflict between blacks and Latinos surfaced due to the “racial changes” that took place “almost overnight.” Over the past 15 years, LAPD Administrator Dan Buchanan said, blocks and neighborhoods that were completely black transitioned to being primarily Latino. Administrator Don Mori agreed that the racial balance of the communities has finally shifted in favor of Latinos, which the black community experiences as a threat. Homicide detective Terry Farmer agrees, speaking specifically of the Watts community:

*Farmer:* I would say that the demographics in Watts have been changing pretty consistently and causally over the last 10 to 15 years where there is a greater influx of Hispanics in the area. As the Hispanic families move into the neighborhood, the children start identifying themselves with some of the street gangs. The biggest change in Watts has been probably, I don’t know the exact numbers, but probably in the last 10 years.

*Gascón:* Would you say racial or ethnic identity is a major issue in the Watts neighborhood?

*Farmer:* Yeah, I think based on the history of Watts, a lot of black people identify with Watts as being a black neighborhood so with the change in demographic I think black people that are still in the area strongly identify themselves as being a black person from Watts.

Detective Eric Reinhardt takes a longer term view when it comes to understanding exactly what implications these changes have had for South LA:

*Reinhardt:* I’ll state the obvious: Los Angeles is a growing, changing community. It changes all of the time. It changed in the last hundred years and it’ll continue to change in the coming whatever, hundred years. Clearly, we have more and more Hispanics within every community in Los Angeles.

*Gascón:* How is that affecting the way the community is evolving?

*Reinhardt:* I don’t know. It’s case by case. It’s difficult to give you some complete overview, but it’s very clear that it is changing right before your eyes. There’s been times when you felt like there’s been tension out there as a result of some of the rapid changes. I’ll give you an example, Binford High School right here, the closest high school was known as the big Blood high school way back when. And to this day it’s probably at least two-thirds Hispanic. So, things have changed rapidly and that affects the perception of like the local gang members that attend that school. But on the other hand, I’m not sure that the community even knows where its stands completely because everything changed so quickly, the population changed quickly and people are getting to know each other. Things are blending now. How it’s going to end up, I don’t know.

*Miller:* Clearly, this area has changed in the demographics of different groups of races. Last month was the all-time low for homicides in a month since 1970, so it’s hard to say. All of us live in this world and whatever area we grow up changes and its how we accept or don’t accept those changes.

Homicide Detectives Eric Reinhardt and James Miller identify the rapidity of the demographic changes as a cause of interracial tension, rather than specific cultures. Miller acknowledges, however, this may not translate into violence, insofar as homicides rates continue on a downward trajectory.

One exponent of rapid (and ongoing) overlapping ethnic succession is an inevitability of cultural overlap. Detective Dave Villa argue that South Central is more susceptible to the transformation that demographic changes bring because historically the area has had a revolving ethnic population. It is well known that prior to the 1960s, the areas was mainly occupied by white working-class residents who fled the city when during the latter period when scores of black arrived from the South. When asked how the two racial groups get along, Detective Villa responded:

*Villa:* See, even here, it all goes together. Like East LA, that's going to be predominantly Hispanic. South Central, that's all different neighborhoods. Yes, you do have black neighborhoods and Hispanic neighborhoods, but in one of those neighborhoods you're going to have a mixture. Like in a black neighborhood you're going to have a couple, like two houses, that are Hispanic. And in a Hispanic neighborhood you're going to have one house that's black. And then they all mix together.

*Gascón:* And why here and not in East LA?

*Villa:* I think because East LA, that's for generations predominantly Hispanic. And down here you have your old influxes. You have the white Americans that were here from before World War II and after World War II you have some of them returning, but the majority leaving. And then from there you have the blacks that took over the whites and then now Hispanics are coming in. But that creates a mixture—one going and one coming in.

...

*Gascón:* Does that [residential] turnover cause any tension, you think?

*Villa:* I think I touched on that earlier with my stint in Newton. Cultural differences like, back to that neighborhood—

*Gascón:* Well, that doesn't mean there's going to be a race war. Like, is there tension because black people feel Mexicans are taking over?

*Villa:* I've heard some comments like that from black families. Like, "these Hispanics are taking over, they even got Mexican cooties." Like, they've said, "Well, my family has been here for over 25 years and now the Hispanics are moving in." I've heard all that.

This "mixture" Detective Villa describes is what many officers agree causes tension. Ethnic homogeneity, as described in the theories of social disorganization, is a critical element in understanding crime in the inner city. Chicago school theorists Park and Burgess expressed this idea in 1925: "Where individuals of the same race or of the same vocation live together in segregated groups, neighborhood sentiment tends to fuse together with racial antagonisms and class interests" (Park & Burgess, 1967, p.10)

Such rapid demographic changes, officers contend, are the reason why blacks and Latinos have been placed at odds in this part of the city. The fear of displacement for a community that has laid material and symbolic claim to a particular space is one potential source of tension, but the simple fact of ethnic churning and a area history of conflict provide alternative explanations. But these are general backdrops. Interviewees below struggle to define the causal mechanisms of black-Latino tension. Villa locates it within classic neighbor-to-neighbor tensions:

*Gascón:* What sparks intergroup tension?

*Villa:* You know, if it doesn't have gang ties, going back to my patrol days...I'm trying to think about my radio calls. It was real simple things, but non-violent. Neighbor disputes: blacks and Hispanics because of loud music, things like that.

Detective John Cordoba presents it as a lack of cultural understanding, and “loud parties” as the exponent of Latino culture:

*Gascón:* Is race a major issue in this community?

*Corboda:* Well, maybe not race, but culture. Hispanics are very family-oriented and have loud parties that can last into the morning hours. Most of the trouble I’ve encountered between the races is a lack of understanding across cultures.

In addition to these cultural differences, generational differences also pose a problem. Along with immigration comes home-country attitudes and traditions. By the time many Latino immigrants reach the US, they often belong to older generational cohorts and hold on to many of those beliefs, which can stifle and discourage interethnic communication and understanding. These attitudes sometimes comprise holdovers from the racialized discourse in Latin America (Lancaster, 1992):

*Alvarez:* The ones – the old timers, the grandmas, the fathers who grew up in their home countries, they come over here because of what they hear through family members and friends. They kind of don’t want to associate with black people. Like I said, the younger kids growing up—like second generation, third generation—because they grow up, you know, they live with black people so there’s no difference. They grow up you see them playing together, see them friends. And it’s the old timers, the old generation that come with that—

*Gascón:* That have some kind of hostility towards other groups?

*Alvarez:* Right.

*Gascón:* And does that affect their relationship within the community?

*Alvarez:* Um, no. No, not as much. They kind of leave them alone. They don’t associate with them. They don’t want to deal with them. They just leave them alone. The only times I’ve encountered issues with race is when something happens. Like I said, loud music, parties, parking, or “they looked at me bad.” Other than that, you very rarely get a hate crime.

These loose theories of conflict explain the vast majority of interracial conflict as it exists in South Central, according to officers. Most of it is non-violent and often has to do with conflicts as they arise in day-to-day living, which officers interpret as cultural clashes.

### **Police Perceptions of Racial Disharmony: Unpacking Gangs and Race**

Consider again Sheriff Baca’s statement (2008) about “race wars” in LA: “In LA, race kills.” Echoing LAPD Chief Bratton’s public rebuttal of this statement, LAPD officers disagree with the existence of a “race war” altogether. Detectives argues that the differences in law enforcement perspective are drawn from crime statistics, which vary, considerably in some cases, from the city to the county-level, and the populations for which agency is responsible.

LAPD and the county sheriff’s office oversee with different populations and geographic regions. While LAPD’s jurisdiction lies within the city limits, the Sheriff oversees the county area, which surrounds and traverses the city’s borders. The Sheriff is also responsible for the county jail, the closest conduit for California’s racially segregated prison system (Goodman, 2008). Because of the continuous exchange of inmates from jails to prisons and back around again attitudes among this population also becomes racialized. This, said our interviewees, helps explain why certain law enforcement officials are more sensitive to the presence of racialized violence, no matter how rare its occurrence. Still, as Detective Farmer points out, this does not inherently invalidate either Bratton’s or Baca’s opinion. Rather, the differentiation is simply a matter of divergent data sources:

*Farmer:* I think the chief of LAPD was at odds with the county Sheriff. Chief Bratton versus the point of view of Sheriff Baca was that the sheriff believed there was much more racial tension. Brown versus black, black versus brown, they wanted the Chief's opinion. I know that the chief is basing his opinion on numbers, you know the specific stats for our crimes in our areas and, you know, when I think of the homicides we've handled this year, I can't think of a single one that crosses racial lines, it's all been same race suspect and victim. There might be one, so I know that would be what the chief of police is basing his opinion on. I'm sure that the sheriff is doing the same thing, that he is basing his opinion on stats in the areas that he has law enforcement jurisdiction, and I'm sure also that the sheriff includes issues in the jails, which I got to the jails all the time to talk to people, I go to prison to do interviews, there is definitely a hard line that is drawn between black and brown once you get into the jails and prison systems. So, like I said, they have what would seem like conflicting opinions, but I truly believe that they are both basing their opinion in fact as it relates to the communities where they enforce law in.

Consistent with her own reflections, Farmer bases her own opinion on her homicide beat:

*Farmer:* Based on my knowledge of the area, no. I would say it's a story that the media wants to create more than being a reality.

Following the detectives who work on the ground in South Central, we suggest that a "race war" is not precipitating elevated levels of racialized violence. Yet, whether due to simple propinquity or for other reasons, some does exist. What, then, does interracial violence look like in the South Central?

In Detective Farmer's experience, robbery is the most likely violent crime to cross racial lines. This is borne out in recent Latino CPAB meetings, where officers expressed concern regarding increased robberies along a busy corridor in the division. Officers suspect that the Swans, a local Blood set—and traditionally black gang—is responsible for the crimes. The perpetrators, officers have determined, are primarily black and the victims are predominantly Latino, middle-aged, and often female, bus riders. The crimes occur in the late afternoon when most people are returning from work and take place at or near the local bus stop. Suspects will strike the victims and make off with their phones, jewelry, and purses.

While the victims belong to a single racial group, their race is not the *primary* motivation for the crime, Detective Farmer and other officers argue, although victims may perceive otherwise. Instead, the victims that will not pose a threat and are least likely to resist are chosen for ease of perpetration. In this sense, middle-aged Latina bus riders are attractive targets. As Farmer explains in detail below, these victims are chosen for physical stature, likeliness to report, and potential for monetary gain:

*Farmer:* Based on my experience in this area specifically, the majority of cross-racial crimes have been on the level of street robberies. The [black] gangs will target people getting off the bus, waiting for the bus, getting off the train, you know? And they are going to target someone they perceive to be a soft target, or a weak person. They want to target someone they know has something they want. You know, money. So, a lot of the victims in those cases are Hispanic, you know? Older Hispanics, females, because the suspect is looking for a soft target, someone they know they can get something from. I don't know if that is definitely specifically based on race, or if it's the fact that now the Hispanic population is a majority numerically and they are on the streets on those public transportation kind of scenarios, and may be less likely to report to the police based on their immigrant status, they tend to victimize that type of person.

But just as accounts differ between law enforcement officials, accounts of interracial violence also vary among LAPD detectives. Detective Cordoba explains a slightly different facet

of these crimes. These bus stop robberies, Cordoba says, are crimes perpetrated by black gang members not only because the targets are easy and the getaways quick, but because black gangs are not beholden to the unspoken rule that the working class are off limits. It is customary among Latino gang members to leave working class residents to their own devices, Cordoba argues. They are not to be robbed. In this sense, Latino and black gangs are not only divided racially, but culturally as well, similar to officers' arguments of non-gang residents. "Respect," he says, is a significant part of Latino gang culture and effectively absent from the culture of the local black gangs:

*Corboda:* Again, culture. Hispanics respect working adults. Hispanic gangsters don't rob them, the *paletero* [ice cream man], and the *tamalé* lady, whatever. Not many black gangsters do [either], but a number of them are known to prey on everyone where even vendors become targets. They don't respect the working class.

While officers generally agree that instances of interracial violence are rare, there is some disagreement over the mechanisms of the interracial crime that does exist. However, these explanations together help explain not only the racial identity of the victims, but also of the perpetrators.

### *The Place of Race (and Culture) in Gang Life and Violence*

To say that racial hatred is not often a causal factor of violence is not to say that race is merely circumstantial. Those of different racial backgrounds may not share the cultural schemas which shape their social worlds. Cultural schemas are the way we make sense of the world; they are "fundamental tools of thought" (Sewell, 1992, p. 8). These meaning-making devices are patterned culturally and their employment is a performance or a recreation of established sociocultural behavioral norms. As interpretive tools they are versatile and can be applied across a wide range of social settings and situations. For gang members, then, cultural schemas pattern thought and shape behavior in certain contexts. These schemas are activated in patterns gang recruitment, rules of behavior, or even when officers ask gang members to speak "man to man."

Detective Villa argues that the extent to which gangs are raced depends on their formation, which emerges out of necessity due to one's "comfortability and familiarity." Basically, he argues, gang members stick to what they know—in this case culture and race. These are, no doubt, also exacerbated by the generational cultural misunderstandings discussed above:

*Villa:* Again, you have to go back further to the roots of how gangs started and why people join gangs. It's the whole formation of people stay together out of comfortability and familiarity.

*Gascón:* I just interviewed a guy in Watts and he worked with some youth organization. He was saying that he knows kids who grew up together—black and Hispanic—they were best friends in grammar school and middle school, but right as soon as they got into high school they went into black and Hispanic gangs, respectively. Why does that happen?

*Villa:* Because it just does. I mean, because the gangs are already established according to race. And then you have to look at that gang's origination. And gangs, when they originated, people just got together out of one common threat. And that is what? Race.

Gang differences arise from divergent cultural schemas. These result in different black and Latino gang cultures, as our interviewees recount. Officers often compared Latino street gangs to organized crime syndicates, positioning prison gangs at the top of the hierarchy and

street gangs as the minions on the outside. The reputation Latino gangs have for a family orientation makes comparisons to the Italian Mafia easy for gang detectives. Like the code of silence among members the Italian Mafia, Latino gangs are said to operate along similar lines. Members refuse to cooperate with police during investigations involving fellow gang members, even if it means they have to spend time behind bars:

*Villa:* Hispanic gangs are all about respect and machismo and all that. Black gangs are generally organized and you do have hierarchies in there, but everyone individually is all “What’s in it for me?” That’s the attitude that black gangs have. Hispanic gangs, it’s all about their gang, it’s all about the neighborhood. It’s all about “Okay how is this how it’s going to look on the rest of us here?” and that’s how it’s played. And that’s how police officers, gang officers, use that to their benefit. You know, each way works, because we know, one individual here, you know, this guy [black gang member] will rat out on his buddy to save himself.

“Pride” is a key factor in Latino gang culture, Cordoba says, which distinguishes black and Latino gangs, in his mind. Curiously, what the detectives see as racial differences can be more accurately described as differing cultural schemas. In addition to cultural differences between the black and Latino gangs themselves, Detective Alvarez argues that these differences necessitate divergent approaches throughout investigations. Because Latino gang members respond to pride as a result of machismo as a cultural schema, when asked to be honest, or speak plainly, “man to man,” Alvarez says Latino gang members will often “cop to” whatever crime they may have committed. But African American gang members, on the other hand, have to be pressed much harder and approached from a different angle because respect and machismo are not resources with which these gang members identify. Detective Cordoba identifies a historical component to the racial and cultural differences in black and Latino gangs:

*Corboda:* It’s been this way since the 1940s. Usually in Mexican barrios there is a sense of pride. Certain things must be respected. There are unwritten laws that should be followed, like snitching. If you “sweat” a Hispanic gang member or threaten them with a criminal charge, they’ll take responsibility rather than snitch on their fellow gang members. It’s only on very rare occasions that they snitch. Black gang members usually only care about themselves. They always want to make a deal. They’ll point the finger. If a black gang member snitches he may get “tuned up” [disciplined by physical assault] or killed, but in Hispanic gangs, they go after the entire family, which is why snitching is so uncommon.

These differences can be used as tools—here, Detective Alvarez uses them to define gang members’ reactions to a “use-of-force beating”:

*Alvarez:* Um, it looks – it seems more like Hispanics have more, what’s the word I am looking for? Like, they have more pride. They get caught, like, they’re not going to cry about it. You know what I mean? They got caught, they got caught. They won’t, for the most part, give up information. Whereas blacks, you know—I don’t know if it’s their nature or whatever. Even if you try to talk to them in a real professional way, you know, they’re still “You messed with me. I want a supervisor.” They start whining too much. You know, “Momma. Where’s momma? I want to talk to momma.” You know? That type of thing. Whereas with Hispanic gang members, it seems like “Okay, you caught me, you know. I deserved the use-of-force beating that I got.” You know? Blacks are more – more childish, if that’s a good word. They just whine too much, cry too much.

According to the detectives, Latino gangs are highly structured, operating upon a foundation of family and respect and honor, whereas black gangs are much more

entrepreneurial and willing to give up their fellow gang members if it means they can avoid jail time.

The detectives suggest that black and Latino gangs also diverge in terms of allegiance to their neighborhood. This allegiance is an indication of Latino gang members' entrenchment in the gang culture. Gang involvement is a multigenerational affair—something of which up-and-coming youth should be proud, although this may be less common than officers believe (Vigil, 2009). Officers rarely discuss gang activity as a family business within the black community. Research shows that, for some black gang members, the likelihood of passing one's affiliation from father to son is lower than in some Latino communities, as a result of the high rate of incarceration among black male adults between 18 and 40 (Pew, 2009). For this demographic, male role models outside the home tend to have more bearing on the development of young men reared by single mothers. Detective Villa explains how the "family orientation" of Latino gangs makes escaping gang life difficult:

*Villa:* When you're dealing with a Hispanic gang member you have to approach them differently because you know it can be all about the respect. They're not going to give anybody up for you. No matter if you're pinching them, or holding something over them, "I'll take it, 'cause I ain't rattin' out anybody here." Now, the black gangs are a little different, remember? Because, it's all about the individual. "Okay, what's in it for me?" "Well, here's what's in it for you. I need to know *this*, maybe we can do something about *this*, no big deal." But that's for them.

*Gascón:* So, where does the mythology come from?

*Villa:* Once again, it gets broken down into race. Hispanics. And I've seen this personally, you're never out. When you're in, you're in. That's it. Black gangs, because I was a black gang expert in the Wilshire district, so I know a lot about black gangs, there's ways out. There's ways out of black gangs, you know. You can pay your way out. You can crime your way out, just like how you get into that gang. You might, you know, get jumped in, you might get crimed...jumped in, crimed in, or you can j—I call it grandfathered in, because you're related to so-and-so, and so-and-so will bring you in that way. Hispanic gangs, always jumped in, and I've never seen anybody leave. Even when you have their utmost respect because of stuff you did when you were younger. And you just can say, "I'm still in, but I'm not active." But you'll never get out. Black gang members, I've seen them, they're, "you know when I was little when I was younger I was...I'm not down with that." No, I mean, none of this is all easy, but it's simpler to get out of a black gang.

For Villa, the answer is simple, black gangs do not operate as Latino gangs do. Villa's interpretation of the mafia-like structure among Latino gangs makes it such that escaping "the life" is equivalent to a death sentence. But the more fluid structure of black gangs allows for gang members to come and go as long as they do what is asked of them first—abiding by the rituals of initiation and dissolution of gang ties.

According to Detective Alvarez, black and Latino gangs often neglect one another's presence, often necessarily. While gangsters belonging to black and Latino gangs may live in the same neighborhoods and on the same blocks, they avoid one another, unless there are specific business dealings, because the costs of interracial feuds are far too high for individual gang members. Violent conflict between the two groups is a rarity, Alvarez asserts:

*Alvarez:* The last one that I can remember—I think Detective Cordoba was explaining to you—was our Hispanic gangs, Alameda 12 and the Atlantic Crips<sup>14</sup>. And before that they would do

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<sup>14</sup> The dispute—Alameda 12 is said to have been robbed by the Atlantic Crips of a large quantity of drugs over a decade ago—has taken on something of an origin myth with respect to those who believe that a race war is underway in LA (e.g., Quinones, 2007). After piecing together gossip from ex-gang members,

business together or they would get along. And rarely do you get incidents like that, where the Hispanics and the blacks go at it...But in general it rarely happens. Like I said, it's been like what, four or five years? And no other gangs have gone at it. Like I said here, we get more Hispanics against Hispanic gangs. Blacks against blacks. We rarely—

*Gascón:* And it's just because they just don't associate with one another?

*Alvarez:* Right.

The narcotics trade, as detectives argue, is a volatile enterprise. Indeed, most officers would argue that the narcotics trade is much more potent than race when speaking of violence. However, because gangs may cross racial lines to do business, the potential for conflict certainly exists given that when personal feuds surface they can easily turn violent. But officers admit that even in these cases they have no clear indication that race is *the* inciting factor.

Detectives from two different divisions in the South Bureau agree that homicides are mostly gang-involved and are more readily stimulated by narcotics conflicts than racial hatred or acrimony. Though the detectives argue that interracial incidents are rare, they do, however, discuss those interracial/intergang feuds that have arisen in their tenure as officers, which involve gangs that share coterminous boundaries with gangs of a different race. This, though, raises the question, is the motivation territory or race? Either way, the potential for interracial/intergang feuds exist in the following examples:

*Reinhardt:* James has already touched on any cross-racial that we're having. At the north side of South Bureau it would be 57th Street Gang, the D-Rocks, what's the other one that was going on there for a minute? There was something with Roamers.

*Rossi:* Some of those 2<sup>nd</sup> Street? – I don't know.

*Reinhardt:* Maybe with the 2<sup>nd</sup>s. But that's not even widespread, probably 57th Street and the D-Rocks. So, cross-racial is very few. You know, in 77<sup>th</sup>, I have more of my experience there, very seldom do we even have cross-racial [incidents].

*Miller:* The only thing close would be the three gangs, Latinos Locos in the Harbor, 57th Street Gang and D-Rocks, and the Alameda with the Atlantic Crips...

In contrast to other officers' responses, when asked about the recent media attention South Central has received, Detective Villa mentions that interracial/intergang feuds are not so much driven by race, but racial mistakes can help the violence along. Villa argues that mistaken identity killings often occur when people display the telltale signs of "gangness" such as tattoos, baggy clothes, and affiliated colors. This "if it walks like a duck" philosophy is also the rationale officers use to describe their suspicion of suspects who may potentially be gang members. This element of randomness of gang violence as a result of mistaken identity, then, may contribute to the belief in extensive interethnic violence and hatred:

*Gascón:* We talked briefly both about what Baca said about the race war and all the claims that the media has been making about this huge spell of racialized violence. What would you say about that? Is it really happening?

*Villa:* It's hard, because I know in some cases each individual gang has newcomers coming in and they want to set a precedent with how they're going to do things with their gang. And they even want to look good to the younger ones. So, you can have a group of, I don't care what race they

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community residents, LAPD officers, and newspaper articles, however, the existence of this event remains in question. Yet it is telling that "race war" folk social science roots racial conflict in gang conflict, rather than the other way around.

are. Let's say you have Race A. You have the youngsters hanging out, just watching and they can see anybody from a rival gang and they just so happen to be [Race] B. They can recognize and look at him and go, "Oh, it looks like that guy is from this gang." So, without hitting them up, or they can hit them up and say, "Where are you from?" And they don't care what you answer. But in their mind, if you look like you are from that gang, pop! They're going to shoot you. Because they're trying to put in work to show everybody else that they're down for their gang. You know what I'm saying?

*Gascón:* Yes.

*Villa:* It's hard to make it more specific. You got members from a black gang, all the youngsters are getting together. They see a Hispanic kid walking and looks like a duck, walks like a duck. Cholo, right? Oh, he looks like he's from 57th Street Gang, he's in our neighborhood. What's going on with that? Two things pop up. They think, "Oh he's scouting our neighborhood. Or he's looking for somebody from our hood." Or three, "He's doing something. He shouldn't be here." So, they'll go over there and hit up and say, "Where are you from?" The guy will say, "Nowhere." As long as they think he's from 57th Street Gang, pop! They're going to get him.

*Gascón:* Do you think gang members of the different racial groups are oversensitive to the identification of gang members of a different group? Let's say I'm a gang member. Do you think I'm going to be more likely to identify a normal black person as a gang member because they're of a different race?

*Villa:* No, because—no. It's like I was saying, if it looks like a duck and walks like a duck. I could walk up that same neighborhood and you look at me or maybe with my hair, or whatever, but if I walk down, I'm down with my boots and my khakis, my Cortez's and my white T-shirt, shaved head. Now, I'm a gangster.

That gang members have to earn their stripes, in a manner of speaking, is a category of violence that officers claim is a regularity for gangs, despite the falling crime rate overall. Gang inductions, they say, can require that one "jumped in" or "crimed in," or gang members can be required to show their allegiance early on by "putting in work" [killing] for the gang, Detective Villa told us. While this may seem overdeterminate, these views are cornerstones of knowledge and worldviews of gang detectives.

### *The Conflation of Conflict: Gang versus Race Wars*

Without a doubt gang violence has and will always observe certain racial elements that at times may inspire violence and other times may be a superfluous factor in a given case—as was the case with most of the interracial murders we found in the LAPDs murder books (see Chapter 2). In light of this it is important to draw out distinctions between gang-inspired and race-inspired feuds because they are easy to confuse:

*Villa:* Well, one time in Wilshire we had a gang war. You see how we labeled it a gang war and not a race war? We had 57<sup>th</sup> Street versus Big Money Crips. Big Money Crips is black, a black gang. Now one street in the Southwest division, the west side belonged to Big Money and the east side belonged to 57th Street for narcotics rights. Anybody coming down south went to the west side for narcotics, so the black gang—Big Money Crips. Anybody coming north, 57th Street got that sale. That's how they coexisted. We think it spilled over from a combination of prison, from street, and personal stuff and they started warring with each other. And, hey, look. You have the same kids who went to grammar school together who grew up in their own gangs, respectively.

*Gascón:* Right.

*Villa:* And they coexisted. But up until this thing went down, they started a lot of shootings that ran back and forth all over the city between those two. And that's a gang war. I wouldn't necessarily label it a race war. It's a gang war.

Motivation is the distinguishing factor between what constitutes gang wars and race wars. Non-LAPD commentators and the media tend to characterize clashes between Latino and black

gang members as “racial incidents.” Yet this is loaded language, insofar as it tends to designate hate crimes. In court, interracial violence cases have to demonstrate specific and clearly identifiable hate-based motivations, which, as Detective Farmer explains, is when a crime is “perpetrated specifically based on race. I’m a black gang member and I am going to shoot that person because they’re Hispanic for no other reason.” Detective Reinhardt agrees, saying that racial motivations are established in homicides “where [the victims] were singled out and [the perpetrator] took action against them solely because of their race.” Officers pointedly construct race as the sole or primary motivator and not as an ancillary fact:

*Gascón:* How would you define a racially-motivated crime?

*Corboda:* When an individual is targeted because of their race or ethnicity. I don’t remember the last time I saw a racially-motivated crime. Here we rarely get hate-motivated crimes at all.

*Gascón:* Why don’t hate crimes happen here?

*Corboda:* Because there are set boundaries and people abide by those boundaries. When people don’t, action is taken. Racial tensions usually happen when people cross those boundaries, but no race war happens because the incidents are usually minor and are taken care of locally.

Detective Cordoba touches on an interesting point here: black and brown gang members getting along to keep the narcotics trade afloat. As the detective in the excerpt above suggests, race wars are not optimal on the street because they have the potential to cut into gangs’ profits. Yet it is easy to see how these relationships could sour. Gang conflicts can have a variety of motivations, most often involving narcotics, which is a potent instigator:

*Villa:* Um, like, the 77th division on the east you have Hispanics and Bloods. On the west side in the middle division you have all your Crip gangs. And then in the middle of Figueroa you have 57<sup>th</sup> Street Gang. Next block over you have, um, a Crip gang there. You have some [narcotics] trade there, so they all intermingle. There’s several reasons why, you know, a feud would occur. The strongest one would be the drug trade. Who’s controlling that neighborhood for the drug trade. Besides that, tension might come off from there based on, like, personal issues.

When asked a similar question, Detective Farmer responds in kind, arguing that much gang violence depends on the stability of the local drug trade:

*Farmer:* The tensions and the issues, like I said, that I come into contact with based on my assignment is all related to the street gangs. And the gangs earn their money by selling narcotics so the conflicts arise either between neighboring gangs and rivalries and very often within the gang itself based on who’s going to be in charge who’s going to control the narcotics, which is their business.

The nexus of drugs, gangs, and racial identification makes disambiguation during investigations a near impossibility. Throughout the course of such investigations officers have to deduce the nature of a given crime from the facts they are presented. And as illustrated in the above passages, interracial/intergang conflicts are seldom driven by racial motives, but instead result from the more ‘traditional’ gang conflict types (i.e. territory, personal “beefs,” and drugs).

### *The Prison-Street Connection*

Prisons, several of the detectives have argued, are a significant source of racially motivated incidents that occur on the street. Be it drugs, race riots on the inside, or

personal feuds that balloon on the street, prison organizations are the ones that dictate the terms for interracial feuds:

*Alvarez:* The only time [cross-race gangs] associate for violence is when they get—something happens; drug deal goes sideways. Or something happens in jail and they get what we call the “greenlight” from their upper command [prison gang hierarchy].

Detective Villa’s description in the last section of the delicate “balance” of intergang dealings broaches on a recurring idea we heard several times throughout this investigation: the “powder keg” theory. Our contacts tend to deny the sensational claims that in South LA there exists significant interracial conflict, but nearly all of them suggest that the potential exists. As officers see it, the volatility of gang violence and its eruption over seemingly trivial matters makes it so that Los Angeles is always on the brink of a full-scale interracial gang war, but because of a number of outside factors—namely, the prison influence—it has not and is not likely to happen without sanctioning from the “upper command.”

The influence of prison gangs on street dealings is a common theme across officers. And although race means more in prison than it does on the street, it cannot be discounted as a meaningless tidbit. Interracial/intergang violence, officers say, is not very common because the heads of the prison gangs must first approve of the violence. And what’s more, “The gangs don’t want a race war because it’s bad for business. Hispanics wouldn’t be able to sell dope to the blacks. People need to work together to do what they do,” Detective Cordoba told us. Thus, when edicts are not handed down, gangs of each race/ethnicity ignore one another’s presence and sell on the same corners, but engage each other only minimally.

Gang feuds are more often than not intraracial, detectives told us. Only when certain gangs, belonging to one race or another, are “greenlighted” [declaring open season] for attack are do interracial collisions take place:

*Alvarez:* If you’re talking about gangs, for the most part, you come down—it trickles down from prison to the streets.

...

*Gascón:* What makes South Central such that interracial conflict won’t happen here? Why is it that a race war doesn’t happen if all the conditions are present?

*Villa:* I think, personally, it’s that there’s a small area with blacks and Hispanics. They have to learn how to co-exist, or else, in war they’re not going to survive.

*Gascón:* You say survive though. Who are you talking about?

*Villa:* Both.

*Gascón:* Gang and non-gang members? Or blacks and Hispanics?

*Villa:* All of the above. They gotta learn how to co-exist because in this small area you have residents, you have commercial, you have everything. So you have to be able to—

*Gascón:* But why coexist, when after some tension you can take over?

*Villa:* Who’s willing to pay that price? Who’s willing to go into combat?

Despite the strong language about prison gangs’ control over street-level violence, officers, as exemplified above, sometimes espouse contradictory opinions about the relationship between prison and street gangs and their potential to stimulate violence. At once, gangs are always-already engaged in some sort of conflict, but they tend not to cross racial lines because such feuds are damning for narcotics profits. And, interracial feuds on the street must first be sanctioned from the inside, yet combat is not optimal because, “Who’s willing to pay that price?”

Though many of these officers claim that prison gangs control street gangs it, this theory is difficult to substantiate. This theory also infers that “race wars” on the street mirror gang tensions within the institution, which has yet to be shown in official data so far:

*Gascón:* Are there tensions between [racial] groups?

*Alvarez:* If you’re talking about patrol aspects, tensions come up with neighbor disputes, parking issues, loud music type of things. If you’re talking about gangs, for the most part, it comes down from prison to the streets. It’s been my experience where you rarely have incidents between Hispanics and black gangs. They usually avoid each other unless it comes from the top.

*Gascón:* Unless there’s a direct order to hit?

*Alvarez:* Exactly. What I mean by the top I mean prisons, their chain of command or whoever gives them the go-ahead or the green light or—

*Gascón:* So have there ever been incidents where there wasn’t a command to fight against someone of a different race? Or a gang member of a different race?

*Alvarez:* Have there been incidents? Yes. Last couple years, I believe was the last time we had one. And usually, like I said, it comes down from prison.

These incidents, as Detective Alvarez suggests, are a rarity, though they may be the most likely source of interracial feud, as officers see it. Why then, we asked, is race such a different issue in prison?

*Villa:* The whole fact of the comfortability level. It goes back to the whole mindset in everyone’s mind. It goes back to the tribe mentality, especially in prison. In prison you’ve got to rely on your instinct, your old tribal instinct and that’s how they get paired up.

Here, Villa is resorting a popular understanding of psychology to explain the notion that gangs inside California’s correctional facilities self-select into racial groups without acknowledging the institutions processes that have, by and large, necessitated these choices (Goodman, 2008). Even if incoming prisoners wish not to be placed with “their” racial or ethnic group, they are nonetheless informally encouraged to do so *for their own protection*. One could argue that this “tribal” mindset is which also encourages racialized violence on the street, yet officers do not use this language.

Finally, if the prison-street connection is true, classifying crimes as gang-related or race-related becomes an even messier affair. If a Latino prison gang greenlights a black street gang, would the individual incidents be classified as gang-motivated or race-motivated? Following through on an order from “above” would suggest a gang-motivation, but if, from inside the facility, the determination was made to kill black gang members for racial reasons, this would suggest a racial motivation. In all practicality, our experiences with the murder books suggest that investigations seldom go in this direction. Regardless, our interviews suggest that officers have yet to see these types of incidents on the street.

As we have seen in this section, interracial violence, which is executed mostly through gangs on the street, is not necessarily motivated by racial elements. Rather, as detectives have outlined, these intergang/interracial feuds occur as a result of the narcotics trade and territorial disputes that come about as a matter of proximity. Until this point, we have little reason to believe that interracial violence is the “war” it is claimed be.

## Summary and Discussion

Throughout this piece we have taken care to discuss many of the most salient statements and theories surrounding the issue of interracial violence in South LA. Although our data is gathered from only a small portion of South Bureau, the areas we selected are among the most violent and gang saturated in the city and we think our findings are generalizable on those grounds to much of the rest of the city facing a similar dynamic.

First, regarding the “race war,” the narratives presented here provide more detail to the findings of the murder books presented in Chapter 2. Detectives are skeptical, or as Detective Farmer put it, the claim may serve to sell newspapers. While interracial *conflict* is certainly a present condition in South LA, and though more palpable in some places than in others, this conflict seldom leads to violence.

As a point of rebuttal, former LAPD Chief Bratton claimed that gangs contribute most significantly to the presence of interracial conflict in Los Angeles. While gangs are clearly involved in violence, there are two caveats here: (1) While gangs may contribute a sizable portion of violence to law enforcement statistics, that violence is not specifically race-motivated. In fact, officers fault more traditional causes of gang conflict instead. And (2) most of the city’s interracial conflict, as officers maintain, is the result of non-gang collisions between blacks and Latinos. Rapid demographic and cultural changes to the complexion of South LA are much more frequently the source of interracial conflict.

Although clearly relevant, our data does not allow us to discuss the notion that gangs remain racially homogenous. This seems to be assumed in the official dialogue, yet officers note exceptions and some even point to a trend toward interracial/ethnic gangs. Still, while racial polarity among gangs may exist to a significant degree, officers insist that race proves less important than culture in determining the differences in gang activities, functions, and structures. Many officers confused race and culture in distinguishing between black and Latino gangs, but their arguments may hold, particularly in the future.

One primary reason for the appearance of so much interracial tension is the seeming ease with which intergang and interracial feuds can be confused. In the case of gang violence, for two gangs of different races to engage one another violently is not to necessarily speak of a “race war.” Context and motivation are important to highlight. Officers tell us that more often than not, gangs fight over the drug trade, territorial disputes, and “personal beefs.” Even the legendary clash between Alameda 12 and the Atlantic Crips was instigated by a local drug deal that went bad, officers said—tellingly, gang conflict in this story causes the race conflict, not the reverse. Even the famous gang clash in the Venice Beach area, known popularly as a “race war,” initially sprang from a personal dispute that then took on a racial character only after racial claims were made about the disputants (see Umimoto, 2006, for a full discussion). But above all, narcotics, rather than hatred, are the most likely cause of interracial/intergang violence.

Finally, of all the theories advanced about race and violence, detectives advanced the claim that racialized violence on the street is a product of prison gangs that control the activities of street gangs. Although this research was not initially geared toward an understanding prison and street gang linkages, this correlation continually emerged as an explanation for racialized violence among officers. Somewhat troublingly, many officers simultaneously argued that race was not an aggravating factor for gang violence on the street, but if race ever did become the motivator, prison gangs would be behind its materialization. Yet, quite apart from the other issues that were addressed in both Chapters 4 and 5 these claims remain the least supported, even

by our interviewees. Neither officers nor civilians could not articulate specific examples of these tensions or draw out the anatomy of this relationship, only providing bits and pieces of conjecture that strongly reflected the media narrative on the issue. While we shy away from addressing this particular claim without specifically researching the issue of the prison-street pipeline, we do suggest that this linkage has yet to be established in our data, and we encourage future research on this question.

Our basic question, in the end, is, What does interracial conflict look like in South Central LA? When asked pointedly about the existence of a race war in South LA, officers often recast the discussion in terms of non-gang, non-violent conflict. Officers and detectives describe conflict and tension between residents as a result of cultural misunderstandings, different music styles (and volumes!), weekend parties, and other cultural styles. These misunderstandings often feed into already embedded racial attitudes about the “other” in these conflicts. Many of the older generations of Latino immigrants feel an aversion toward blacks, an actuation of the pigmentocracy so prevalent in Latin America. This is the reality of interracial conflict in South LA: it doesn’t happen on street corners, fought with guns and bullets and gang signs, but in the everyday collisions between black and Latinos, using negative attitudes, mutual neglect, and social distance as instruments of conflict.

Officers identified two relational types that characterize the dynamic black-brown relationship. Most gang members, officers told us, practice an active avoidance or neglect when confronted with cross race gang members. The obvious language differences serve as impediments to cross-racial communication and the pre-existent negative attitudes both contribute to the rigidity of this stance. This relational strategy, though practiced by necessity by gang members, is also mobilized by older residents, particularly monolingual elderly Latinos. Officers suggest that many youth practice a different method, disengaging from their parents’ racial convictions, because of the attachments and bonds built in school and sporting activities.

This work is by no means an exhaustive look at interracial violence in South Los Angeles and through the elaboration of these findings several areas of future research become clear. The most significant limitation of our research is that, in terms of governmental units, it is exceedingly one-sided. Future work should take care to compare both city and county crime figure, and attempt to resolve the data conflicts that arise. These differences in crime statistics have significant political implications for how interracial crime is policed and perceived by the public. Further, there is a significant need in the literature on gang violence to parse out the logic and form of disputes that are conflated as racial, but may also (or only) have more drug or territory-based causes.

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## APPENDIX

### Area Contacts:

<i>Alias</i>	<i>Race/Nationality/Ethnicity*</i>	<i>Community</i>	<i>Organization**</i>	<i>Position</i>
Adriana Sanchez	Latina	Watts	Community Youth Services	Resident/Child Care Provider
Antoine Johnson	African American	Watts	Community Labor Organization	Director
April Umimoto	Japanese American	South Central	CPAB (English)	Business Owner
Aya Lafleur	African American	South Central	Gang and Youth Services	Program Manager
James Miller	White	South Central	LAPD	Homicide Detective
Bruce Palmer	African American	South Central	CPAB (English)/ Neighborhood Council	Resident/Officer
Catherina Nydia	Latina	South Central	CPAB (Spanish)	Resident
Conrado Alvarez	Mexican American	South Central	LAPD	Gang Detective
Cynthia Stacy	African American	South Central	CPAB (English)	Resident
Dakari Hendricks	African American	South Central	District Attorney's Office	Legal Official
Dan Buchanan	White	South Central	LAPD	Administrator
Dan Quito	Mexican-American	N/A	LA Times	Staff Writer
David Villa	Mexican-American	South Central	LAPD	Gang Detective
Diego Valencia	Latino	South Central	Verano High School	School Administrator
Don Mori	Japanese American	South Central	LAPD	Administrator
Drew Olivier	White	N/A	N/A	Conflict Resolution Facilitator
Eduardo Lorencio	Latino	South Central	Binford High School	School Dean
Eric Reinhardt	White	South Central	LAPD	Homicide Detective
Gerry Torrance	African American	South Central	CPAB (English) /Neighborhood Council	Resident/Officer
Gladys Plowman	African American	South Central	CPAB (English)	Resident
Guillermo Ángel	Mexican American	South Central	LAPD	Police Officer
Harold Hales	White	South Central	CPAB (English)	Business Owner
Hector Mendoza	Salvadoran	South Central	CPAB (English & Spanish)	Community Leader
Iván Tancredo	Latino	South Central	CPAB (English & Spanish)	Resident
Jaime Vargas	Mexican American	Watts	Community Direct Service Provider	Director
Jamal Kwame	African	South Central	Religious Congregation	Religious Leader
Jan Greeley	African American	South Central	LAPD	Civilian Liaison
James Miller	White	South Central	LAPD	Homicide Detective
Jelani Thornberry	African American	South Central	Gang Intervention	Resident/Gang Interventionist
John Cordoba	Mexican-American	South Central	LAPD	Gang Detective
Josie Williams	African American	South Central	CPAB (English)	Resident
Justina Padrón	Latina	South Central	CPAB (Spanish)	Resident
Leopoldo Sergio	Latino	South Central	CPAB (Spanish)	Resident
Liz Fairbanks	White	South Central	LAPD	Senior Lead Officer
Lupe Marita	Latina	South Central	CPAB (Spanish)	Resident
Lydia Palmer	African American	South Central	CPAB (English)/ Neighborhood Council	Resident/Officer
Marcus Drewery	African American	South Central	Gang Intervention	Gang Interventionist
Marisol Friar	Latina	South Central	Verano High School	School Coordinator (Volunteer)
Mike Elston	African American	South Central	Juvenile Justice Center	Director, Legal Official
Miranda Garman	Mexican-American	East LA	Police Support Group	Community Volunteer
Monica Bellows	White	South Central	Binford High School	Teacher
Niccolo Nazario	Latino	South Central	CPAB (Spanish)	Resident

Nikki Williams	African American	South Central	CPAB (English)/Religious Service Provider	Resident/Volunteer
Paul Rossi	White	South Central	LAPD	Homicide Detective
Richard Wingate	White	South Central	CPAB	Business Owner
Rick Rinaldi	African American	South Central	Community Direct Service Provider	Director
Roger Rainerio	Latino	South Central	LAPD	Senior Lead Officer
Stacy Ferris	White	South Central	LAPD	Senior Lead Officer
Stephanie Hawk	Multiracial	Watts	Job Placement Service	Business Service Representative
Sun Na	Korean	South Central	CPAB (English)	Business Owner
Terry Farmer	White	Watts	LAPD	Homicide Detective
Theresa Velasquez	Latina	Watts/ South Central	Fischer & Binford High School	Teacher
Vera Fisher	Multiracial (African American identified)	South Central	CPAB (English)	Community Leader
Vicki Morena	Latina/White	South Central	Binford High School	Teacher
Xavier Raúl	Latino	Watts/Harbor	Community Development	Community Organizer

\* For immigrants, we include specific countries of origin where they are known. Otherwise we use the generic "Latin@" where appropriate.

\*\* We have purposely made organization names and purposes vague to obscure identifying information. Where this is impossible (i.e., specific high schools), we have employed pseudonyms.