

# THE CHANGING FORM AND STRUCTURE OF THE SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA METROPOLIS

(PART II)\*

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In Part I of this study two avenues of inquiry were followed. The development of the Southern California Metropolis and its relation to an evolving regional economy was considered, and spatial trends contributing to the present form and structure of Greater Los Angeles, a concept operationalized here as a territory lying within sixty miles of downtown Los Angeles. The focus is set on spatial trends presently shaping this far-flung urban region, and on some of the broader implications of this example of urban development.

## FORCES OF CHANGE

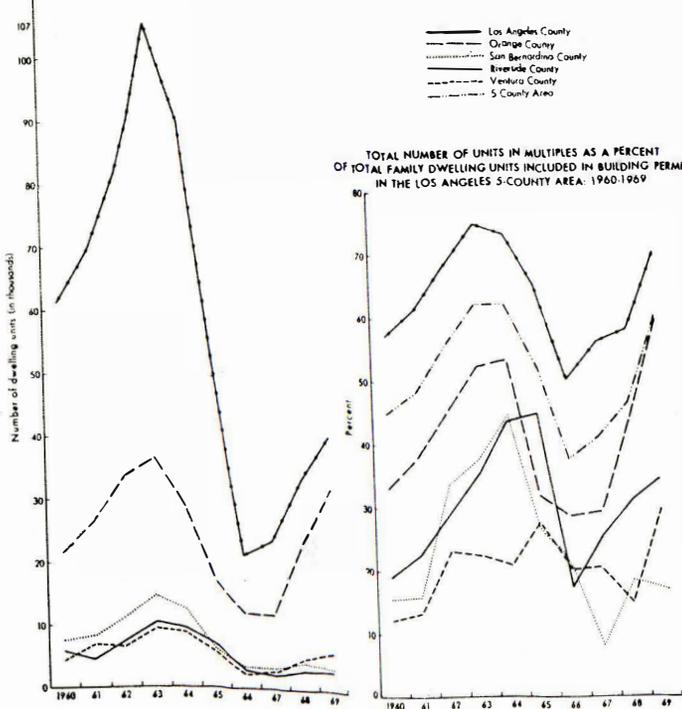
Within the 60-Mile Circle, forces of change are afoot. Population and land occupancy densities are increasing radically throughout an inner-ring surrounding downtown Los Angeles. Densities are also rising around commercial nodes throughout the agglomeration, along major intraurban transportation routes, and at access points to physical or cultural amenities. Moreover, new nodes are forming. The classic relation between accessibility and rising land prices at such points and increased occupancy densities explain much of this phenomena but more pertinent information comes from several trends established in the 1960's.

The outstanding trait of residential construction in Greater Los Angeles over the 1960's was the increase in apartment houses. For a number of years more multiple units than single family units had been built in Los Angeles County, but in 1962 this became true for the five-county area as a whole (Fig. 1). In that year fifty-six percent of all dwelling units authorized for construction were apartments. By 1964 this percentage rose to over sixty-two. During the housing slump of the late sixties, multiple units as a percentage of all dwelling units authorized dipped below fifty percent, but by 1969 multiples accounted for over sixty percent of all units authorized. The impact of apartment building throughout the decade was by far the greatest in Los Angeles County where the percent of total dwelling units authorized accounted for by multiples did not fall below fifty percent.

Figure 8 (see part I) shows that an inner-ring surrounding downtown Los Angeles experienced substantial population growth over the last decade, and that a small area adjacent to the Los Angeles CBD lost population. The first of these findings is further elucidated by Figure 2 which shows that with few exceptions the inner-ring was an area of large-scale multiple-unit construction during the 1960's. Residential densities are particularly high in the inner-ring along transportation corridors like Wilshire Boulevard, and localized high-density concentrations are present in older cities such as Beverly Hills, Pasadena, Burbank, Long Beach, and Santa Monica, where over ninety percent of residential building is for apartments. It should be added that the whole inner-ring has experienced substantial increases in population density as well over the decade (ranging from 500 to over 1,000 per square mile), and that most of its statistical units have experienced a decrease in single family housing. Population decline around

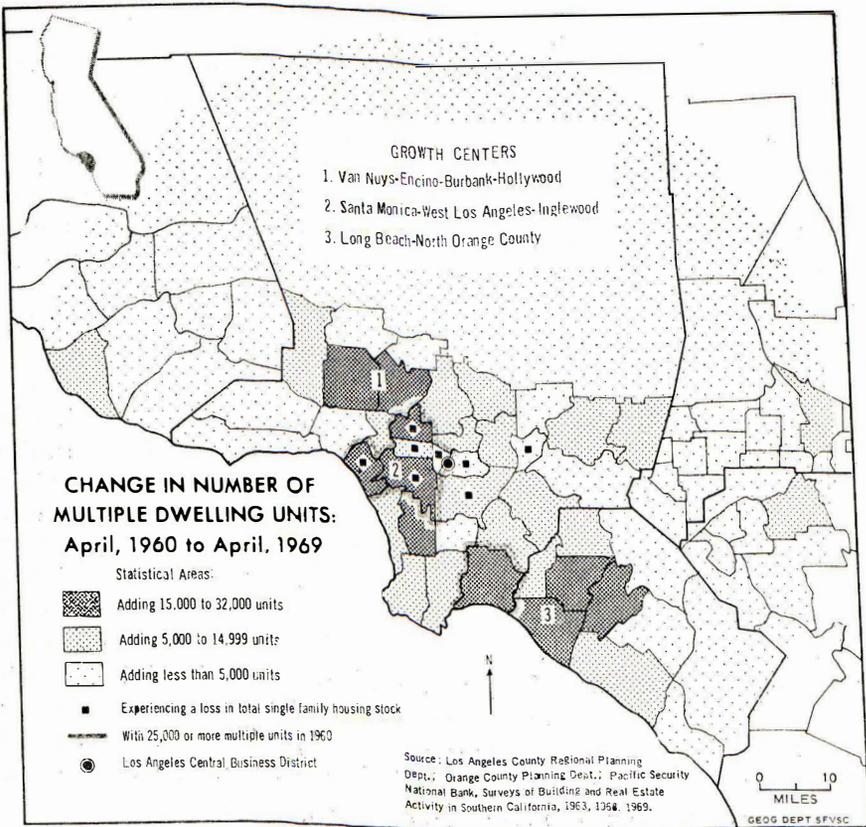
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**NUMBER OF FAMILY DWELLING UNITS INCLUDED IN BUILDING PERMITS ISSUED IN THE LOS ANGELES 5-COUNTY AREA: 1960-1969**



Source: THE SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA REPORT (Los Angeles Economic Research Department, Security Pacific National Bank, March, 1970), pp. 131-132.

**Figure 1**



**Figure 2**

central Los Angeles is attributable to expansion of the commercial-industrial core into residential areas, freeway construction, and urban renewal, all of which contributed to a local reduction in housing stock.

Apartment construction influences the landscape in ways not revealed by their increasing numerical importance. For example, many apartments contribute to what can be thought of as "second stage" low density spread. Such is especially the case where apartments are located cheek-by-jowl with single family housing in rapidly developing areas like the San Fernando Valley or Orange County. There apartments often follow space consuming styles, generally being not over three stories tall, hollow in the center to accommodate swimming pools and patio facilities, and having separate parking and storage areas. Such space consuming practices are declining, but a substantial stock of such apartments exist at present.

Although the role of both high- and low-rise apartment living is becoming more important, it should not obscure the continuing dominance of single family housing in the 60-Mile Circle. In the 1960's far more single than multiple units were constructed outside of Los Angeles County (Figure 1), and even there, where apartment construction has predominated for over a decade, single family homes continue as the principal housing type. On April 1, 1970, fifty nine percent of all housing in Los Angeles County was estimated to be single family units, while thirty years ago, the 1940 Census showed that the County's housing inventory consisted of sixty three percent single family units. Thus although apartments accounted for a substantial fraction of the approximately 1,600,000 units added to the housing inventory since 1940, single family homes remain the dominant type.<sup>1</sup>

Even in the single family housing context, however, factors are contributing to increased densities. For example, subdivisions are not as large as they were a few years ago. In 1950, an average housing tract in the five-county area had seventy-two lots, by 1955 the average had dropped to fifty nine. As open land became scarce and more expensive, the average had dropped to forty in 1964. At the same time the number of units per lot has increased. Other factors contributing to higher densities stem from the implementation of modern housing concepts such as cluster housing condominiums, town houses, and large integrated land developments (sometimes called "New Towns" for advertising purposes).

A summary of the reasons for the trend toward higher residential densities would include: (1) higher land values throughout the area; (2) ample money for mortgages for high density residential enterprises; (3) age distribution—more young marrieds, more elderly couples; (4) higher incomes that have encouraged separate households by single persons; (5) increasing cost of single family homes plus the difficulty of acquiring lending money for their purchase; and (6) the presence of a growing population seeking the advantages of private residence without assuming the obligations of home ownership.

### *Changing Pressures in Single Family Housing*

Ownership of single-family homes in the suburbs has traditionally been a middle-class province. However, during the late 50's and early 60's each successive wave of suburbanization included members of lower income groups. What this process meant for the physical problems of the metropolis in the long run is debatable, but its short-run impact was clear, an increasing number of lower income families were able to satisfy their drive for private space. Regarding the participation in single family home ownership by families from a wide income range, it is useful to consider that a substantial

part of the homes in Greater Los Angeles were constructed in a period when both Federal and California State government philosophies encouraged home ownership.

The opportunity for lower income groups to participate in the single-family housing market has deteriorated.<sup>3</sup> In the mid-1960's interest rates increased sharply, and simultaneously the supply of available mortgage funds became inadequate. The number of real estate loans recorded in the 5-County Area reached an all time high of 515,000 in 1964, but by 1967 the number of loans had dropped to 275,000. Between 1964 and 1969, while the number of loans plummeted, average loan size increased from \$20,800 to \$27,404. By comparison, average loan size in 1960 was \$13,453. When combined with raising interest rates and a thirty-three percent increase in single family home prices between 1960 and 1969, these facts signal that the income range from which families can acquire single family homes has been reduced, with the result that more families will be deflected into apartments and aging housing in the inner-ring.

### *High-rise Construction*

Increased densities around commercial cores, along transportation corridors, near special attractions like the ocean front or mountains introduce another trend, namely, high-rise construction (high-rise buildings are defined here as having a minimum of five stories above the ground and a permit valuation of \$500,000 or more.)<sup>4</sup> During the 60's, 585 high-rise structures were authorized in the five county area, 512 of which were in Los Angeles County. Of those in that county, 107 were apartments, 290 commercial structures (including government, educational, and hospital buildings). The largest concentration of high-rise structures is in the downtown Los Angeles-Wilshire Corridor area, where the skyline has been transformed in five locations: the Santa Monica Ocean Front; Beverly Hills, Westwood-UCLA; Wilshire Boulevard for a distance of over two miles westward from the CBD; downtown Los Angeles; and the University of Southern California-Exposition Park area.

The high-rise situation is in vivid contrast to the recent past, when for years downtown Los Angeles had only two high-rise buildings (City Hall and the Old Federal-Building). Less than a block apart, these two structures were the only exceptions to an ordinance passed in the 1920's limiting buildings to thirteen floors or 150 feet in height. In 1957 the ordinance was repealed, and advances in technology and changes in building and zoning codes, combined with the "Bunker Hill" redevelopment project, stimulated the long overdue surge of high-rise construction. The space provided by high-rise structures is occupied by region-serving and other businesses, public functions and by families or persons in higher income brackets seeking a prestige residence close to commercial and cultural facilities and their employment.

### *Increasing Decentralization of Retail and Service Trades<sup>5</sup>*

The pattern of Major Retail Centers considered above fails to convey the full nature of retail dispersion in the 60-Mile Circle. While the number of such centers was increasing by seventy-eight between 1958 and 1967, and while the overall sales in these centers was increasing spectacularly, the percentage of total retail sales accounted for by Major Retail Centers was dropping. One explanation is the proliferation, especially in major growth areas and beyond, of a recently emergent form of planned retail center. The pivotal store and major traffic generator in these new centers, however, is not a general merchandise or department store, but a large super-market. Moreover, convenience shopping, and specialized goods stores cluster around the super-markets in a manner similar to that associated with department stores in traditional centers. Already widespread, the number of "department store-less" centers is increasing, especially on

the periphery where they respond to thresholds lower than those necessary for full-scale shopping centers as those included under Major Retail Centers, and within the built-up area in response to higher population densities associated with apartment house concentrations and where advantageous market opportunities exist between major shopping centers.

Another index of retail and service dispersion is the increase in number of branch banks between 1960 and mid-1969.<sup>6</sup> To meet the needs of the suburban structure of the market, the total number of branches of all banks in Southern California increased from 853 to 1,601, an increase of nearly ninety percent. Moreover, in 1960, the average bank served over 10,000 customers, but by 1969 the ratio dropped to slightly more than 7,000 per banking office.

### *Cultural Patterns*

Prior to the great post-war migrations, Los Angeles exhibited economic and social segregation, a condition exemplified areally, and in the extreme, by contrasts between communities like Beverly Hills and San Marino, on the one hand, and low income districts like Watts and Boyle Heights on the other.<sup>7</sup> With the arrival of large numbers of immigrants during and after the War, this pattern was intensified. Migrants settled where they found others with similar material means and attitudes, and even though there has been considerable mobility (every year between 1960 and 1965 approximately thirty percent of the families in Los Angeles and Orange Counties moved)<sup>8</sup> economic and social stratification form dominant areal patterns. Present housing regulations and building practices continue to separate social and economic groups into single-class districts.

One aspect of such economic and social separation is reflected by the proliferation of independent cities, each incorporated to protect, in some way, some aspect of homogeneity.<sup>9</sup> Although rapid growth has fused the numerous communities into one agglomeration in which all components interact in one vast market for jobs, goods, and housing, each of 122 incorporated cities in the 60-Mile Circle remains isolated in some respect by the medium of local government. Something of this political fragmentation is reflected by the fact that there are seventy-seven incorporated cities in Los Angeles County alone. This "home rule" syndrome has effectively blocked serious attempts at region-wide governance or planning, created municipal financial chaos, and contributed to slum formation and racial and economic segregation.

Greater Los Angeles today exhibits a varied cultural geography differentiated along income and ethnic lines (Fig. 3). Economically and socially distinct areas, whether generated politically or not, are of several kinds.<sup>10</sup> Most numerous are the strongholds of various grades of middle-class, exemplified by the San Fernando Valley and Orange County. Present also enclaves occupied by high-income groups like Beverly Hills and Bel Air. Another form is the "special purpose" city designed to keep people out and to provide private industries with intra-metropolitan locations on preferential bases, usually related to tax relief. The industrial cities of Vernon and Commerce exemplify this type.

Other enclaves are formed by expanding ethnic minorities, and most important here are the segregated territories occupied by Negroes and Mexican Americans (Fig. 4). Prior to 1955 Negro and Mexican-American migration to Greater Los Angeles was less than five percent of total immigration.<sup>11</sup> Between 1955 and 1960 the proportion increased substantially, and it is estimated that at present there are over one million persons with Spanish surnames and at least 800,000 Negroes within the 60-Mile Circle.

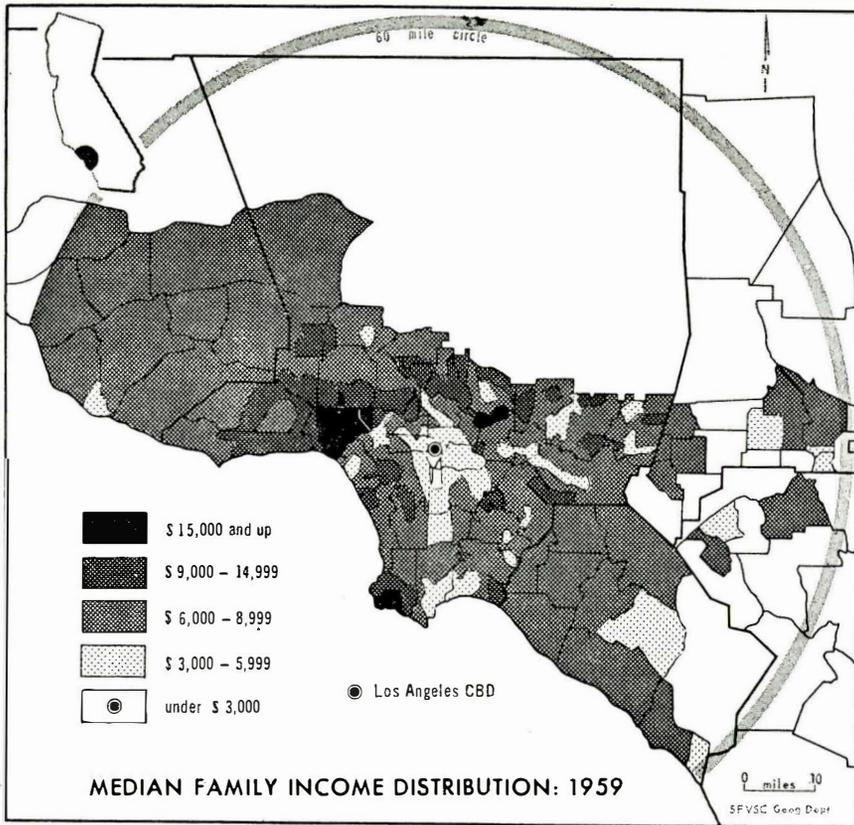


Figure 3

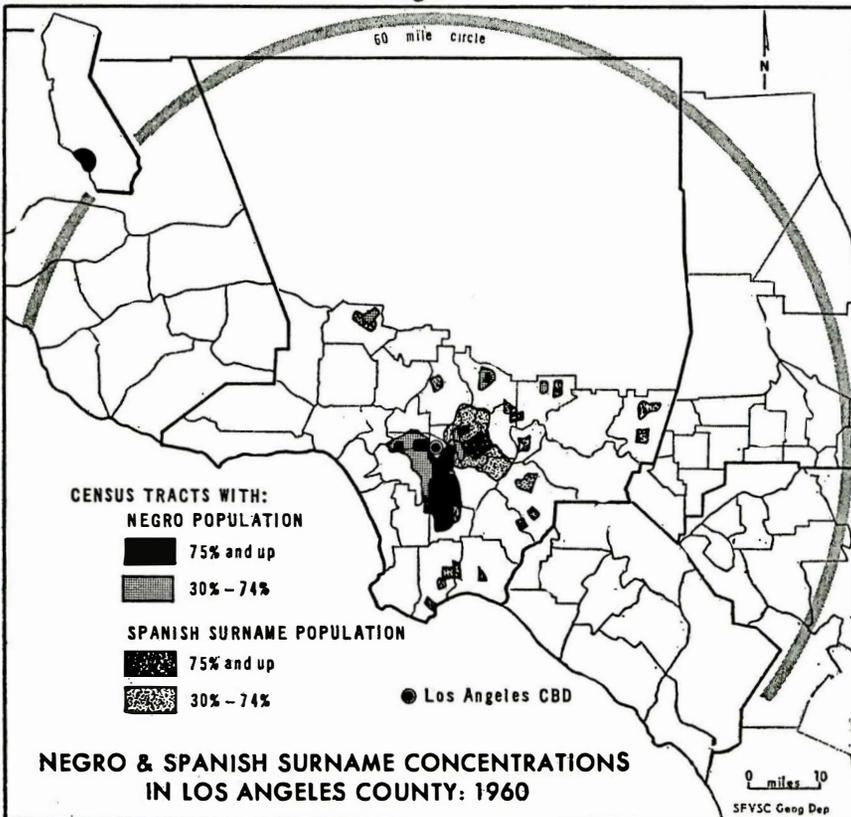


Figure 4

These groups are concentrated in clear-cut sections of Central Los Angeles. The Negroes southwest of the CBD, where Watts, Willowbrook, and Green Meadows serve as receiving stations. The largest concentration of Mexican-Americans is just east of downtown where Boyle Heights and East Los Angeles are receiving stations. Both minority core areas are expanding, and both contain areas of old and substandard housing as well as large sections where obsolescence is imminent.<sup>12</sup> The ethnic concentrations also exhibit a high incidence of low income, unemployment, low educational attainment, and deficient tax revenues. Amid the sea of material prosperity that is Greater Los Angeles, the Negro and Mexican-American communities are islands of neglect.

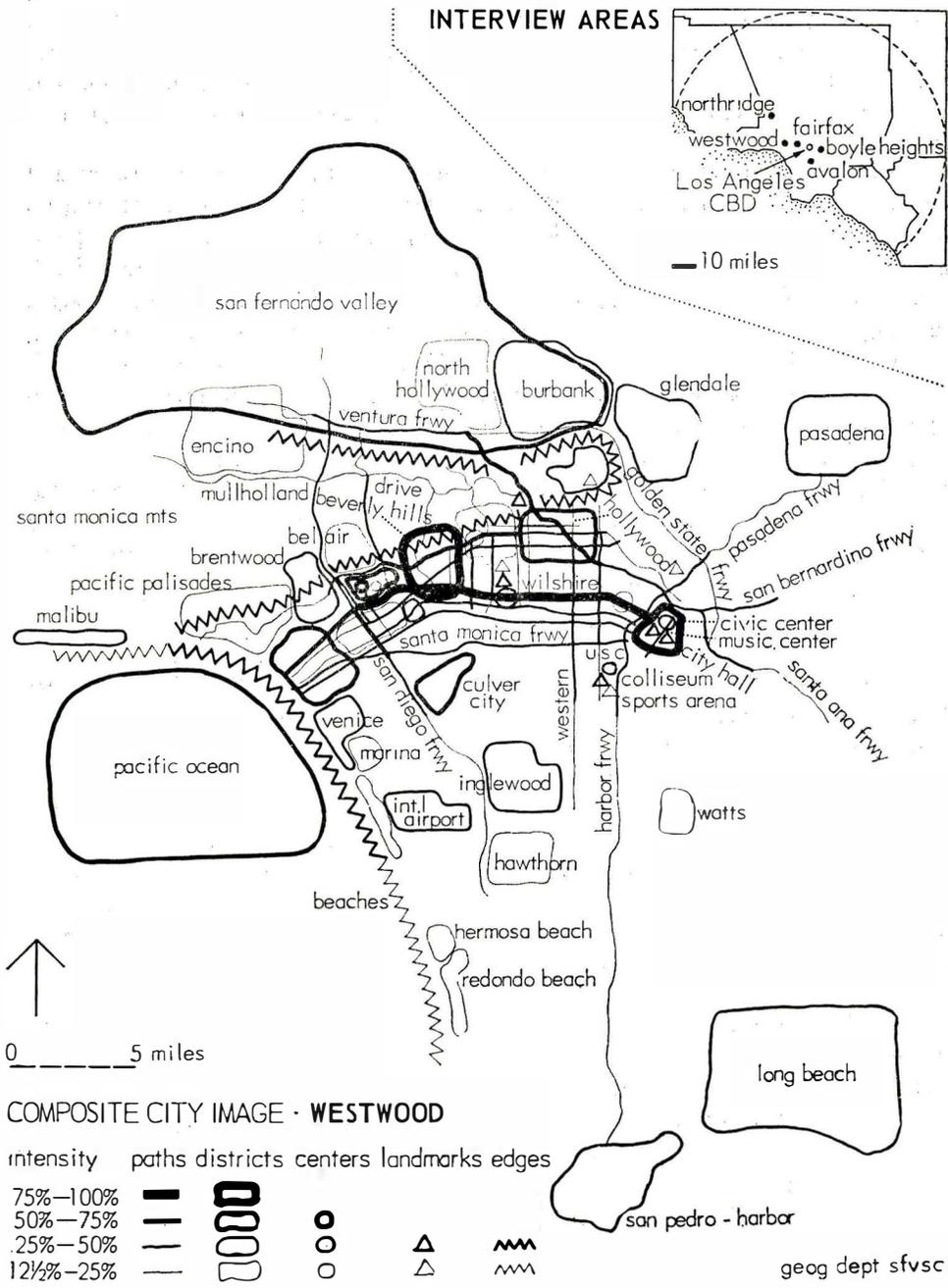
Greater Los Angeles thus embraces an areally complex pattern of sub-cultures, and something of the underlying nature of this diversity can be drawn from a Los Angeles City Planning Commission Project. Five different groups of respondents were requested to draw maps of the city,<sup>13</sup> the intent being to gain some idea of the respondent's "real concept of Los Angeles. Image intensity is indicated in Figs 5, 6 & 7 by line weights reflecting the percentage of total respondents in a particular interview area identifying a particular path, district center, landmark, or edge. Areas surveyed were Westwood, an upper-income district near Beverly Hills (Fig. 5); Northridge, a suburb community in the San Fernando Valley (Fig. 6); Fairfax, an inner-city district with a large Jewish population (Fig. 7); Avalon, a Negro community southeast of the downtown (Fig. 7); and Boyle Heights, a Mexican-American district east of the CBD (Fig. 7). These examples strongly suggest that residents of different areas relate differently to the agglomeration, and that the patchwork quilt of subcultures in the 60-Mile Circle represent "many publics" to be understood and served.

#### IMPLICATIONS<sup>14</sup>

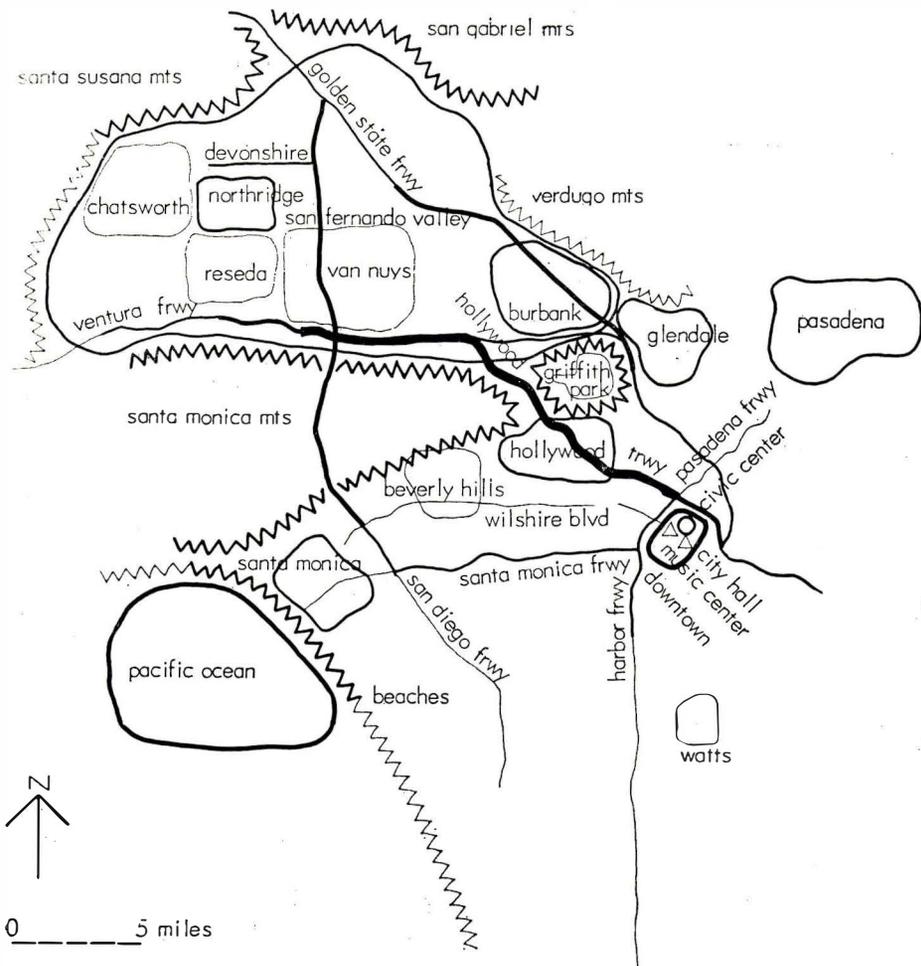
It is not the intent here to imply that the faster the economy of Greater Los Angeles grows and the bigger it becomes, the better off its inhabitants are. Growth and size bring problems, most of which are intensified by additional growth. For example, the area has enormous problems of environmental pollution, lack of land planning, and racial and other forms of social friction. It suffers from archaic municipal governance, and a multitude of difficulties connected with a huge and aging physical plant. But growth and size also bring opportunity, and it would seem that possibilities for problem-oriented resource allocation should be greater under conditions of urban growth and prosperity. If this is true, then solutions to overriding urban problems should be present at least in rudimentary form in Greater Los Angeles.

What can be learned from recent urbanization in the 60-Mile Circle? Only a few comments can be offered here, and therein no attempt will be made to consider the highly publicized problems of the physical environment and transportation. First, it is suggested that wherever contemporary urbanization is massive, the Metropolitan Region typical of the past half-century will not emerge. Rather, a pattern of related clusters of metropolitan regions, separated by expanses of low density residential spread and altogether lavishly consumptive of space will appear. The Southern California Metropolis houses around twelve million people today and its pattern is shown in Fig. 4. If County Planners are correct, in 1980 it will house approximately fifteen and one-half million persons and its pattern will look like Figure 8.

This pattern has been generated by an attitude that Catherine Wurster calls "Let the people have what they want: space and mobility". This attitude, despite its lack of support in intellectual, downtown business, and land planning circles, represents an inarticulate but powerful force, which at present, appears capable of winning-out as

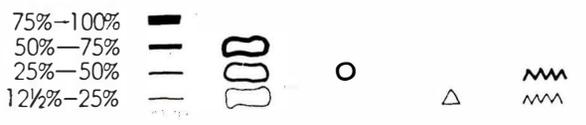


**Figure 5**



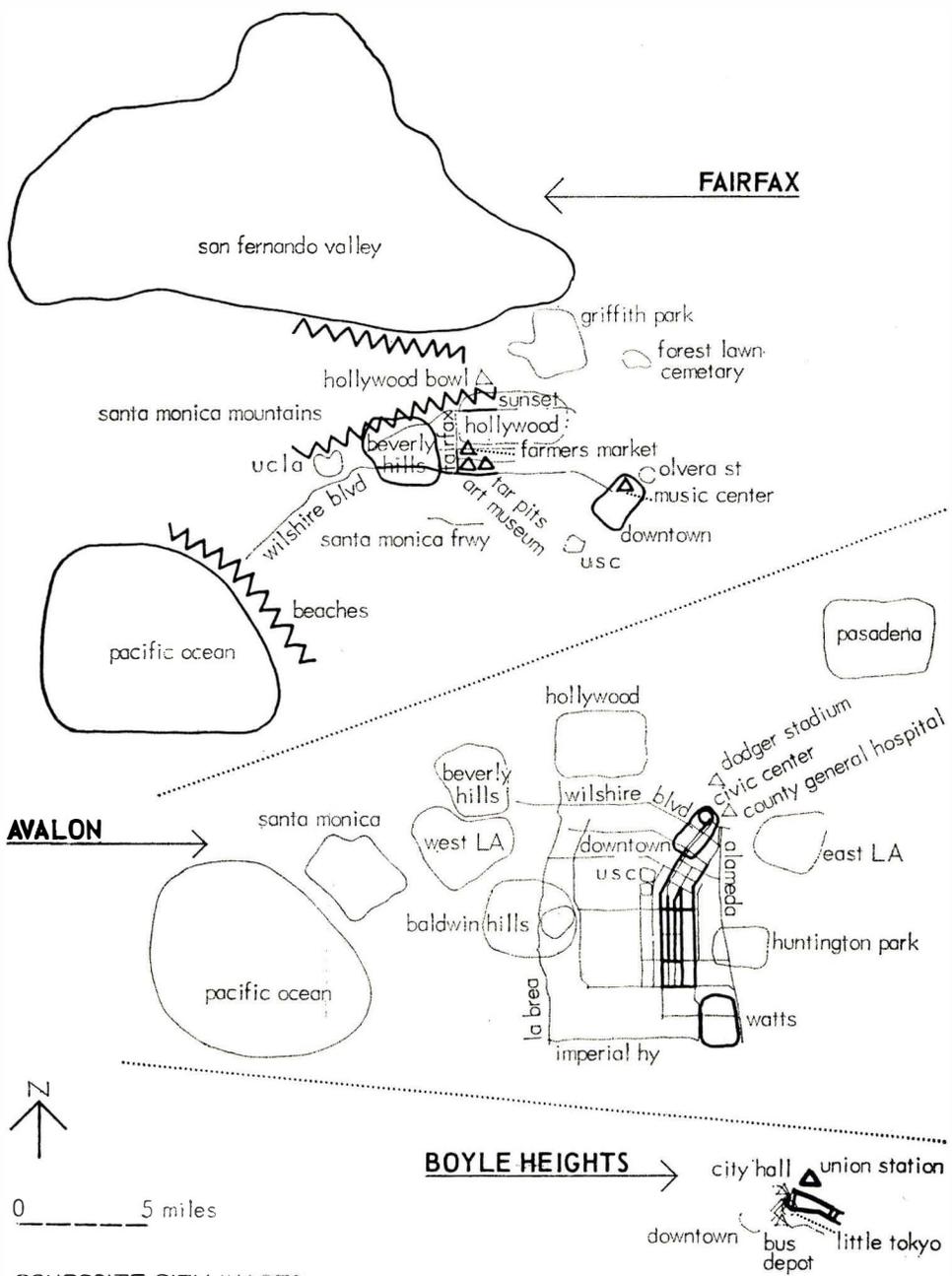
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intensity paths districts centers landmarks edges



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Figure 6



COMPOSITE CITY IMAGES

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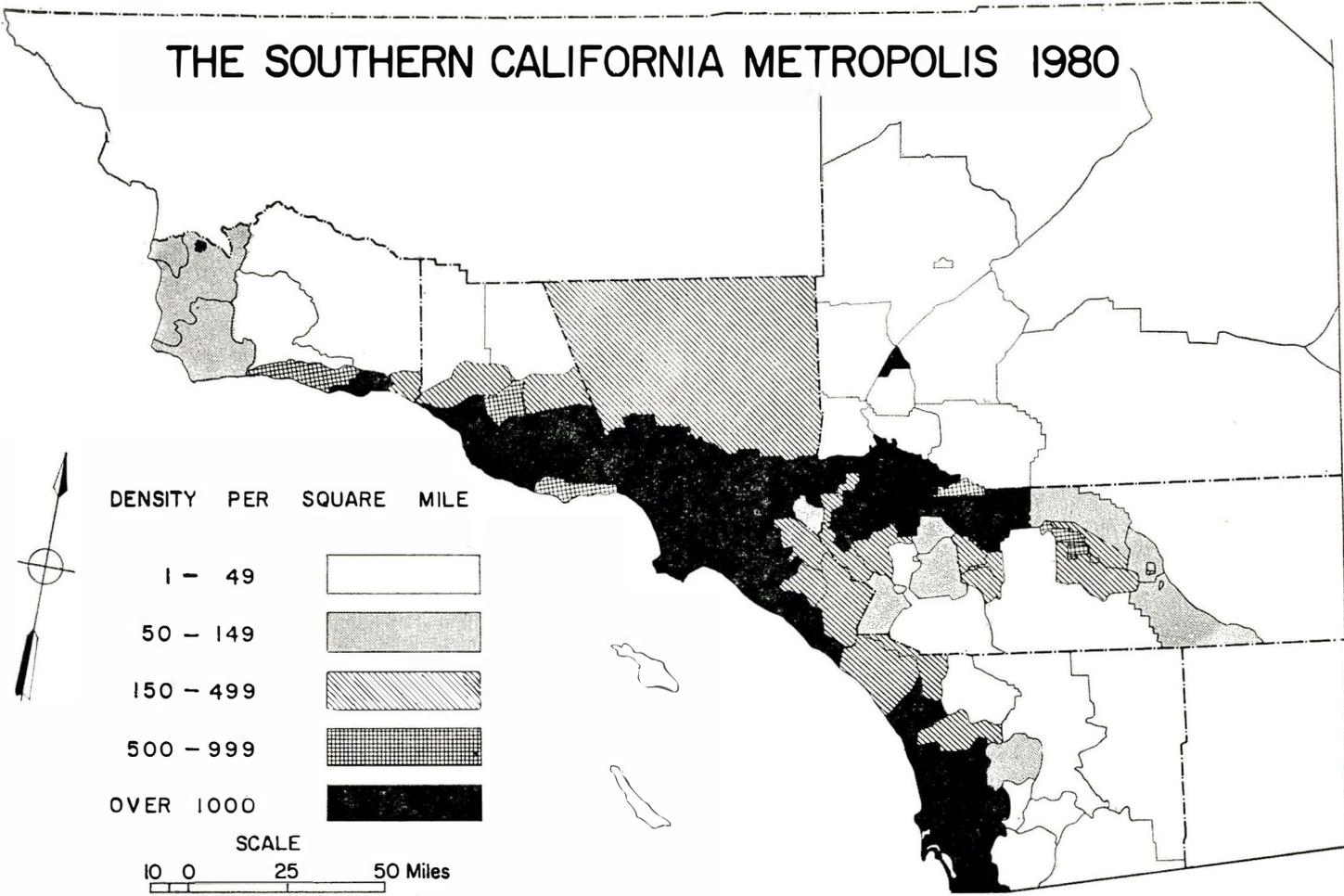
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Figure 7

# THE SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA METROPOLIS 1980

Figure 8



the single most powerful shaper of the form and structure of American cities. In this respect, the Greater Los Angeles experience offers little by way of established institutional guidance for shaping "The Regional City" along aesthetic and humane lines. Even at the most elemental level, land planning alternatives to the blatant diseconomies inherent in the present pattern of haphazard scatteration have yet to be formalized. Such is the case because the area's experiments in regional governance and planning have yet to produce institutions capable of influencing a Regional City.

Second, regarding the people within the 60-Mile Circle it can be concluded that divisions between residents of the core and the suburbs are becoming increasingly sharp: divisions by age group, income level, and by race. These divisions have basically been created by housing patterns, and are intensified by the limitations of the current housing market which by and large serves only upper and upper-middle income white families in areas of recent growth. The problem is compounded by our inability to house the poor. If present trends continue, low income groups and ethnic minorities will occupy increasingly greater areas around downtown Los Angeles and around the cores of older cities like Pasadena where clumps of houses discarded by higher income groups are available. Again, little can be gained from the 60-Mile Circle's experience that would stand as an operational step toward a policy for expanding housing opportunities for the poor and the segregated.

Third, it can be argued that as the regional city expands its socially and economically stratified cellular structure, and as transportation becomes increasingly channelized, that the images of the agglomeration held by the inhabitants of each cell, as well as their awareness of problems and prospects of people living elsewhere in the Regional City, will become more restricted. The result could be further differentiation of the sub-cultural composition of the American City, and could produce still greater intergroup alienation as well as a decreasing responsiveness of the successful groups to the problems of the less fortunate, especially of those spatially removed.

Fourth, in the 60-Mile Circle single family houses are present in unprecedented numbers and over an unprecedented area. The bulk of these houses were produced on a tract basis, and vast areas are of similar age and materials and are likely to become obsolescent at about the same time (Fig. 9). In the Regional City, therefore, the problem of the "Old Neighborhoods" when it comes to pass will be manifested on a far greater scale than the older more compact cities.<sup>16</sup> Once again the area offers little by way of an operational approach to this overriding physical problem of American Cities; namely that of recycling the use of the countless square miles covered by deteriorated or obsolescent structures.

Fifth, few aspects of the city are more fixed in our minds than the idea of a central business district, but Greater Los Angeles has demonstrated spectacular and prosperous urban growth without developing a CBD along classical lines. The traditional center structure can give way to a system of different networks for different activities and prosper. The overall pattern is cellular, and the cells are laced together, at least in the short run, by freeways. This urban pattern is, at least physically, seemingly capable of endless expansion.

Sixth, and perhaps paradoxically, it appears that as a megalopolitan landscape evolves its intelligence functions centralize. Region coordinating activities are concentrating in downtown Los Angeles and are reflected in a new skyline. The Los Angeles CBD is booming, but not in the traditional sense. It has been called forth as a social and economic nerve center for a complex regional city.

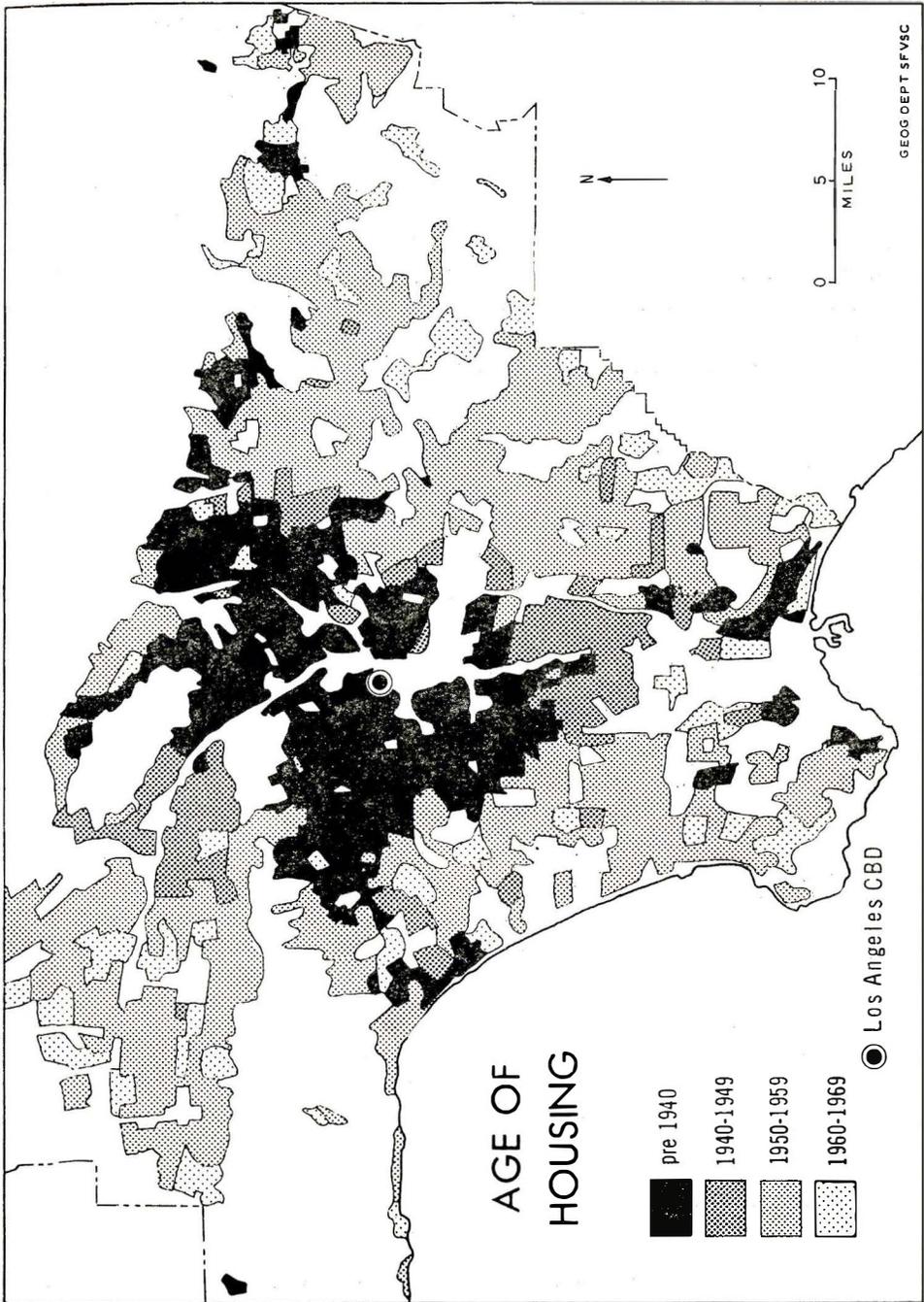


Figure 9

Age of Housing in Los Angeles County in 1969. Indicates dominant age of housing by census tract.

Seventh, new types of intra-urban nuclei are emerging. Disneyland and Marine-land accentuate man's ability to complement increasingly inaccessible natural amenities with completely man-made attractions. The Los Angeles International Airport is becoming one of the largest office and hotel centers on the West Coast, and in addition to the cluster of structures symbolizing its business meetings, the airport has become a significant shaper of the urban pattern, a function destined to become more important in the future.

Whether the cellular arrangement and vast distances inherent in the form and structure of urban life in the 60-Mile Circle are conducive to the good life is debatable, but it is clear that the pattern's origin lies in the very nature of modern urban-industrial technology, which, in turn has been molded into a life-style by the preferences of an affluent population in an open society. So even if it is only in certain respects that Los Angeles provides a scaled-down, speeded-up version of modern processes of urbanization, its experience as a forerunner may be of value. Perhaps most distressing, however, is that in the 60-Mile Circle we are still attempting to confront the emerging Regional City with obsolete institutions that were designed to handle pre-World War II urban processes, and as a result Greater Los Angeles can offer little by way of successful institutional guidance for improving the quality of human life in other emerging Regional Cities.

## REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup>Regional Planning Commission, County of Los Angeles, *Quarterly Bulletin* (supplement), No. 104, April, 1969, and No. 108, April, 1970.

<sup>2</sup>Information on the number of recorded subdivisions, number of housing tracts, and number of lots, was supplied by: Los Angeles City Engineer's Office; Title Insurance and Trust Company of Los Angeles; Orange County Title Company; and Security Title Insurance Company of Los Angeles.

<sup>3</sup>Data on real estate loans are from Economic Research Department, Security Pacific National Bank (Publisher) *The Southern California Report: A Study of Growth and Economic Stature* (Los Angeles: 1970), pp.42-45.

<sup>4</sup>Economic Research Department, Security Pacific National Bank, *Monthly Summary of Business Conditions in Southern California*, Vol. 48, No. 4 (1969) and Vol. 49, No. 5 (1970); and Economic Research Department, Security First National Bank (publisher), *Survey of Building and Real Estate Activity in the Fourteen Southern Counties of California*, 1968, pp. 35-38.

<sup>5</sup>See R. E. Preston and D. W. Griffin, "The Pattern of Major Retail Centers in the Los Angeles Area," *The California Geographer*, Vol. 9 (1968), pp. 1-26, and U.S. Bureau of Census, Census of Business, 1967, *Retail Trade: Major Retail Centers, California*, BC67-MRC-5 (U.S. G. P. O., Washington, D. C., 1970).

<sup>6</sup>*The Southern California Report* (1970), *op. cit.*, p. 28.

<sup>7</sup>E. Shevky and M. Williams, *The Social Areas of Los Angeles* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1948).

<sup>8</sup>Regional Planning Commission, County of Los Angeles (publisher), *Quarterly Bulletin*, Population and Dwelling Units, No. 93, July 1, 1966.

<sup>9</sup>Southern California Research Council (publisher), *Arresting Slums*, Report No. 16 (Los Angeles, 1968); W.W. Crouch and B. Dinerman, *Southern California Metropolis* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1964).

<sup>10</sup>Southern California Research Council, *Arresting Slums*, *op. cit.*; W. Marx, "As if Los Angeles Didn't Have Enough Trouble," *The Reporter*, Vol. 27 (1962), pp. 32-39; H. Nelson, "The Vernon Area, California - A Study of the Political Factor in Urban Geography," *Annals*, Association of American Geographers, Vol. 42 (1952), pp. 177-191; and J.G. Fielding, "Dairying in Cities Designed to Keep People Out," *The Professional Geographer*, Vol. 14 (1962), pp. 12-17.

<sup>11</sup>Southern California Research Council (publisher) *Migration and the Southern California Economy*, Report No. 12 (Los Angeles, 1964), and, same author, *Arresting Slums*, *op. cit.*

<sup>12</sup>Valuable background materials for these issues are provided in: Institute of Industrial Relations at UCLA, *Hard-Core Unemployment and Poverty in Los Angeles* (Washington, D.C., U.S. Department of Commerce, 1965); L. Grebler, *Profile of the Los Angeles Metropolis*, Part 1, Metropolitan Contrasts, (Los Angeles, Graduate School of Business Administration, UCLA, 1963); National Commission on Urban Problems, *Hearings Before the National Commission on Urban Problems*, Volume 2, Los Angeles and San Francisco (Washington, D.C., U.S. G. P. O., 1968), pp. 1-199; B. Duncan, G. Sabagh, and M.D. Van Arsdol, Jr., "Patterns of City Growth," *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 67 (1962), pp. 418-429; D. L. Foley, R. L. Drake, D. W. Lyon, and B. A. Ynzenga, *Characteristics of Metropolitan Growth in California* (Berkeley: Center for Planning and Development Research, 1965), pp. 105-232 in Vol. 1; and the supporting statistical materials in Vol. 2; *Californians of Spanish Surname* (San Francisco: State of California Department of Industrial Relations, 1964); *Negro Californians* (San Francisco, State of California Department of Industrial Relations, 1963); and *Negroes and Mexican Americans in South and East Los Angeles* (San Francisco, State of California Department of Industrial Relations, 1966).

<sup>13</sup>The materials shown in Figures 5, 6 and 7 were provided by the information officer of the Los Angeles City Planning Department; they are part of study that will be published later this year under the title, *The Visual Environment of Los Angeles*. A bit is told about this project in Los Angeles City Planning Department (publisher), *Tomorrow . . . Today*, (June, 1967).

<sup>14</sup>Particularly important in the preparation of this section were C. Bauer Wurster, "Form and Structure of the Future Urban Complex" in L. Wingo Jr. (ed.) *Cities and Space* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1963), pp. 73-101; W.L.C. Wheaton, "Form and Structure of the Metropolitan Area," in W. R. Ewald, Jr. (ed.) *Environment for Man: The Next Fifty Years* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1967), pp. 157-196.

<sup>15</sup>The staggering dimensions of the problem of "Old Neighborhoods" facing Los Angeles are treated in detail in B.J. Frieden, *The Future of Old Neighborhoods* (Cambridge: The M.I.T. Press, 1964).