Ethnic Diversity

This concept refers to the degree to which different ethnic groups are represented within any area. To measure the relative diversity of different neighborhoods or tracts, we used a statistical measure called the entropy index (also called the Shannon index) that is widely used for this purpose. We chose Whites, Blacks, Asians, and Hispanics (Latinos) as the most important groups whose relative numbers in each census tract we compared. The index ranges from zero to one. If all residents of a tract are members of only one of these four groups, there would be no diversity in that tract. If all four groups are equally represented, that exceptionally high diversity would be measured as one.

As can be seen on the map legend, in Southern California tracts vary a great deal in the degree to which all four groups are represented. (Scroll down to see map.) This demonstrates that neighborhoods do differ greatly in the degree to which their residents are ethnically mixed. Highly diverse tracts are widespread and have moderately priced housing. In much of Los Angeles and Orange counties are highly diverse older suburbs (those built before the 1960s) in which Whites were the original inhabitants. As many Whites moved to newer homes and Blacks, Latinos, and Asians joined the middle class, the Whites who remained were joined by members of the other groups. Such highly diverse neighborhoods characterize places like Long Beach, Gardena, Garden Grove, and parts of the San Fernando Valley between Interstate 405 and Canoga Park. In the Palmdale and Lancaster areas of Los Angeles County and in Riverside and San Bernardino counties are many newer suburbs that are highly diverse because their greater commuting distance to jobs in Los Angeles and Orange Counties led developers to price new housing low enough to attract people in all four of the major ethnic groups.

Neighborhoods with very low ethnic diversity usually represent two contrasting types. In the first type the residents are mostly Whites living in very expensive homes, as in Pacific Palisades, Newport Beach, and Laguna Beach. The second type has relatively low-priced housing and contains mostly Mexicans and other Hispanics. This is illustrated in Santa Ana and the large, strongly Mexican area between East Los Angeles and Watts. As these areas have become more strongly Latino, some members of other groups move away to neighborhoods where their group is better represented. In some cases, these low diversity areas are known for having violent crime and poor schools, and those factors have led to the departure of members of all groups who could afford better housing elsewhere.

See map below.
The diversity index is a statistical measure of the evenness in the proportion of the four major ethnic populations (non-Hispanic White, Black, Asian, and Latino). The index ranges from 0 (lowest diversity, meaning only one group is present) to 1 (meaning an equal number of all four groups is present).