Poverty

The poverty of households is measured in terms of their household income and the number of people living in that household. If the income of a household of a certain size is below the poverty threshold as determined by the federal government for a household of that size, then the household and all its members are considered to be living in poverty. Because the federal government provides for no geographical variation in its poverty calculations, poverty rates in areas with a very high cost of housing are, in our opinion, underestimated. Thus, realistic poverty rates in Southern California should be higher than are shown in the data we map. At the same time, the questionnaires on which the data for our map are based were collected during the severe recession of approximately 2008-2012, a period in which many people’s income dropped. For these reasons, it’s important to use the map as only an indicator of the relative poverty in different places.

The design of this map emphasizes visually areas of greater poverty by its use of darker shades of green for such tracts. (Scroll down to see map.) This map looks very different from the maps of household income for Whites, Blacks, Asians, and Hispanics. On those four maps the increasingly dark shades for higher incomes accentuate high-income neighborhoods. In this sense, the poverty map is designed to balance visually the four household-income maps. However, in the less densely populated and more rural areas the census tracts are usually large in area, which calls attention to them despite the typically greater populations in the smaller census tracts in older, more central parts of larger cities. This is why the high poverty in the older parts of Palmdale and San Bernardino and in and near Victorville, Moreno Valley, and Perris is very evident on the map.

A few high-poverty tracts stand out for special reasons. In the large census tract in Wilmington most residents live in a low-income housing complex but in the same tract are an oil refinery, a park, and a community college. Another such tract with over a third of its residents in poverty is north of Downtown LA and south of Interstate 5, where most of the tract is occupied by Dodger Stadium and Elysian Park. Other high-poverty tracts are easily visible in Riverside and in Orange County south of Santa Ana. These are the campuses of the University of California at Riverside and Irvine, where most residents are students living in dormitories.

See map below.