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Urbanization of the North Hollywood District

“If the San Fernando Valley is a suburb, I don’t know what you’d call Santa Clarita or Simi Valley and the Thousand Oaks area,” says lifelong North Hollywood resident Zachary

Rynew. It’s hard to picture that back in the 1970s, North Hollywood, a neighborhood in the east San Fernando Valley, was a predominantly Caucasian, with middle class residents. The transition of North Hollywood from a traditional suburb to an increasingly cosmopolitan region is reflected by



Image 1 North Hollywood in 1894 used to be a farming village named Lankershim

housing development, immigration, and commercialization over the past quarter century. The urbanization of the district, characterized by the lack of affordable housing, is fueling waves of middle-class exodus. Meanwhile, North Hollywood has become a favorite settlement for new immigrants and native-born minorities. These newcomers are continuously changing the housing and economy landscape. The commercialization of the area—through the establishment of new shopping mall and plazas—is bringing secession sentiments (the secession movement of creating a separate city from Los Angeles) and political tensions.

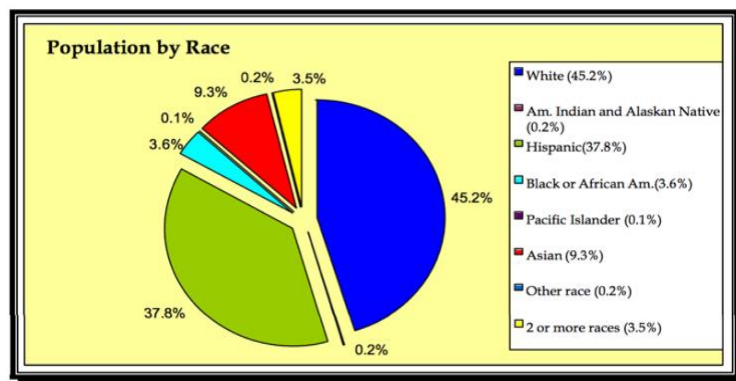
North Hollywood (hereon refers to as NoHo) is experiencing waves of changes towards urbanization. The affordability of the housing is one of the most impactful changes in the neighborhood as a result of urbanization, and the change is upsetting NoHo residents. Urbanization, according the definition from the United Nations, is agglomerations of 50,000 or

more inhabitants, generally having population densities of 1000 persons per square mile or more (United Nations, 2007). The NoHo district today is nothing like its past. Like many Southern California Suburbs, North Hollywood's roots reached back to its agricultural past. In the late 19th century, Issac Lankershim raised sheep and cultivated wheat fields on his large holdings across much of the Valley (Sonksen, 2015). The North Hollywood native and poet Amelie Frank remembers a simpler time: "We were, truly, the last innocent generation," she recalls, "and part of a greater city on the cusp of becoming a hub of world attention for all the good and all the worst reasons possible; It was a happy place for an exceptionally happy childhood" (Sonksen, 2015). However, many NoHo residents feel like the district is carried by waves of development and they have no control over what is happening to them.

Around twenty years ago, while the real estate prices on the Los Angeles Westside were out of the range of all, the NoHo area had houses in the relatively modest \$200,000 and \$300,000 range, contributing to the district's above-average levels of home-ownership (Kotkin & Ozuna, 2002). However, City Hall of NoHo focused heavily on building luxury condos and entertainment venues downtown, and dense multistory apartments on streets with bus or rail stops. Rental housing construction doubled from 1970 to 2000, from 130,000 to 240,000 apartment units (Chiland, 2018). The city needs almost 600,000 affordable units when developers are primarily focused on building high-end residence (Chiland, 2018). U.S. Census figures show that in 1970, sixty percent of NoHo families could afford an average housing cost, when three of four NoHo families own their homes (Kotkin & Ozuna, 2002). The region was the epitome of the great middle-class ideal of owning a house in a sunny, safe, and comfortable community. But now, one of the most prominent changes has been those associated with demographics. The housing policies are hastening middle-class flight. The supply of affordable

housing does not match the population growth. Many residents, especially the middle-class and some businesses, are moving out because of the increasingly unaffordable living expense of NoHo. For example, Sunkist Growers, an agricultural company, moved out after four decades in the North Hollywood, heading to Santa Clarita, where housing is cheaper (Branson-potts, 2014). Now, the price of a home has soared beyond the reach of most families. At the current rate, within 60 years, NoHo will have no discernible middle class (Kotkin & Ozuna, 2002).

The consequences of this multiracial, middle-class exodus could be devastating. As the middle class moves families and businesses to outlying areas, NoHo faces the prospect of becoming an ever more bifurcated society, with a small core of wealthy living amid a growing preponderance of poor residents.



Source: U.S. Census 2000

Table 2 North Hollywood demographics by race, Hispanic and Asian compose a large part of the population

The North Hollywood district is experiencing a series of population changes. The immigrant populations, along with their offspring, are critical to the resilience of the commercial

portions of the NoHo economy, while contributing to

urbanization. The NoHo has undergone a fundamental compositional and racial change in the population itself as a result of immigration. According to the U.S. census in 2000, there was a sharp decline in the percentage of whites living in the NoHo district in the last decade, while the number of Asians and Hispanic residents have doubled since 1980. According to the census,

whites only compose of 45.2% of the population, while Hispanic and Asians make up 37.8% and 9.3% of the population respectively (Los Angeles Department of City Planning, 2000).

Latino and Asian buying power, according to a recent study by the Selig Center for Economic Growth at the University of Georgia, is growing at roughly twice the rate compared to the rest of the population in California (Humphreys, 2018). As immigrants migrated out of worse inner-city neighborhoods on their way towards a middle-class lifestyle, apartment vacancy rates in the NoHo district have fallen from double digits for most communities in 1996 to under five percent by March 2000 (Humphreys, 2018). Also, according to Survey of Business Owners, within the NoHo region, revenues grew by nearly 30% at Asian-owned businesses, faster than other businesses (Nightingale, 2016).

Immigrants tend to be younger, have more children and are more likely to spend locally for goods and services. Demographics and entrepreneurial activity are all reasons behind immigrants' driving force in the real estate market. Also, Asian Americans comprise different cultures, with different languages. The cultural nuances create multiple, blooming businesses such as restaurants and supermarkets that better resonate with the diverse cultures of the Asian immigrant community. As NoHo urbanizes, these immigrants are fueling growth in the housing market and businesses. Much of the economic future in NoHo lies with the buying power of the immigrants.

North Hollywood has earned a reputation for being business-friendly and proactive. But secession arguments have brought political tensions to North Hollywood because of commercialization. The referendum brought by the secession sentiments was on creating a separate city encompassing most of the North Hollywood area from Los Angeles. Although the measure barely passed with 50.7 percent majority, the effort was seen as a failure (Hogen-esch &

Saiz, 2001). Historically, suburbs have promised political separation from industrial city. In the middle of the 20th century, suburban developers invented the images that embodied the American Dream, with the single-family home at its core. These communities were sold to the growing middle class as a way to escape the problems of the industrial city.



Image 3 North Hollywood's new mixed use complex, including apartments, hotels, restaurants and shopping malls.

However, current businesses in NoHo are not satisfying the image nor majority residence's need. Construction on a giant mixed-use project that transforms North Hollywood's Laurel Plaza shopping center into a miniature neighborhood has begun. The project will bring 642 apartments, 600,000 square feet of office,

244,000 square feet of retail, and two hotels (Chiland, 2017). Since the release of the plan, developers have flocked to the area to build housing targeted toward higher earning residents instead of the general public. However, not all NoHo residents were excited about the changes. 'We need to take back our neighborhoods because the city won't protect them for us,' Mr. Bernal, a 38-year-old school bus driver and union organizer said (Kahn, 2002). Also, a number of studies show that not only does NoHo pay more in taxes than it receives in services, but also that it could provide superior services for only about 25 percent less than residents now pay in local taxes (Kahn, 2002).

The secession represented a conflict between two opposed intentions for urban space. The suburban developers failed to satisfy the image of the American Dream, characterized by single-family home ownership. The battle over secession was to protect the communities from the threat of urbanization---one emphasized in growth and the other sought to protect the region's historically dominant suburban ideal. Secessionists argued that they fought to protect the region's suburban character because they wanted to preserve affordable single-family houses, good public schools, and safe neighborhoods. The secession movement towards a greater extent of urbanization and commercialization fueled political tension and division within North Hollywood.

Samuel L. Jackson cursed his luck getting stuck in the 818 area code in *Pulp Fiction*. In *Clueless*, Alicia Silverstone dreaded attending a party in the least cool part of town (Kahn, 2002). They were all referring to North Hollywood. North Hollywood, at that time, was still a true American suburb. Perhaps twenty years later, it would be hard to spot any individual houses on the streets of North Hollywood. The multicultural suburb is coming to an end both in reality and in the eyes of its residents. Over the past quarter century, North Hollywood has radically transformed from a typical American suburb; the process can be reflected upon in the housing market, immigration, and commercialization.

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