

LOS ANGELES, ALMOST 200, RANKS NO. 2 AMONG CITIES

The New York Times

September 8, 1980, Monday, Late City Final Edition

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Section: Section A; Page 1, Column 1; Foreign Desk

Length: 1508 words

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Dateline: LOS ANGELES, Sept. 7

Body

At the age of 199, it appears, Los Angeles has become No. 2. This sprawling city began a yearlong bicentennial celebration this weekend that will culminate with the commemoration of the 200th anniversary of its founding by 44 immigrants from Mexico on Sept. 4, 1781.

As the civic celebration was beginning, preliminary estimates from the 1980 Census were released indicating that Los Angeles was now the nation's second most populous city, eclipsing Chicago, which had held that distinction since 1890 when it passed Philadelphia to become the "Second City."

Role of Mexican Immigrants

While few people dwelled on the matter, there was a pattern in the turn of events: Los Angeles, a city founded by Mexicans, appeared to have become the country's second largest city largely because of a renewed wave of immigration from Mexico.

And as it began its bicentennial year, Los Angeles appeared to be on its way to becoming the nation's first city where a majority of the population is made up of immigrants from Latin America and Asia or descendants of earlier immigrants from those regions of the world and Africa.

AN-A

This city is still the Los Angeles of freeways, movie stars, earthquakes, palm trees and smog, of experimental ways of life and unorthodox religious cults and a seemingly omnipresent, benign sun.

Autos and Real Estate

It remains perhaps the quintessential American urban expression of the automobile, a city that seems to have been experiencing a real estate boom continuously since the first land developers and hucksters came from "back East" a century ago and began to turn a sun-blessed semidesert into one of the world's largest metropolitan regions by importing water from mountain ranges 300 miles away.

It is the economic center of a region containing more than 10 million people that in the last decade has become the nation's major financial bridge to Asia, a visibly thriving city whose downtown is currently experiencing a rejuvenation involving more than \$1 billion worth of new construction.

It is a cultural center that not only produces most of the world's movies and prime-time television programming but, increasingly, exports original plays to Broadway, has a world-class symphony orchestra whose musical director,

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Zubin Mehta, was recruited by the New York Philharmonic, and is the setting for a planned major museum of contemporary art that promises to be one of the most ambitious museum projects in any American city in decades.

Annual Gathering of Migrants

Every summer, a 45-year-old southern California ritual recurs, when some of the tens of thousands of migrants who moved west from Oklahoma, Texas, Iowa, Nebraska and elsewhere in the 1930's gather at picnics to talk about old times.

But each year, there are fewer people at those picnics, because some of the migrants have died and others have decided to move out of California to escape the smog and congestion.

To fill their places, there is a new wave of migrants. Los Angeles is still attracting people from other states, especially New York. But more and more, local officials say, the newcomers are from other countries.

"It's becoming a Hispanic city," said Charles Drescher, director of the city's Community Analysis and Planning Division, which has estimated that the 1980 Census will show that non-Hispanic whites now make up 44 percent of the population, as against 59 percent in 1970 and 72 percent in 1960.

But he said that the changes went beyond the tide of immigrants from Mexico and other Latin-American countries who have been propelled northward by economic deprivation and have changed the look and texture of life here.

He predicted that the census would also document a sizable influx of immigrants from Taiwan, Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia and other thirdworld countries in the 1970's. According to the local population researchers, it is this Latin and Asian immigration, occurring in a decade when more than one million non-Hispanic whites have left the city, that has allowed Los Angeles to challenge Chicago for the position of the country's second largest city, after New York.

Although both cities are contesting the figures as too low, the preliminary Census Bureau data indicate that Los Angeles now has about 152,000 more residents than Chicago. The figures show Los Angeles with a population of 2,878,039, about 62,000 more than in 1970, and Chicago with a population of 2,725,295, about 644,000 fewer than in 1970.

Breakdown of Population

The city's most recent estimates indicate that whites make up 44 percent of the population; blacks, 21.5 percent; Hispanic residents 28 percent and Asians and Pacific islanders about 7 percent.

The median age of the Hispanic residents is about 19, and the rate at which they are increasing, through childbirth and immigration, has prompted some researchers to predict that Latins could account for more than half of the city's population by the end of this decade. By the year 2000, they say, the Hispanic influx could make Los Angeles the nation's largest city. Hispanic pupils already make up almost 40 percent of the student enrollment here.

The Spanish-speaking immigrants are becoming increasingly important economically here, supporting not only retailing establishments but providing the labor for a large garment industry, much of it operating in sweatshop conditions. The large Latin population is also economically vital to the city's school system, whose white population has plummeted in recent years.

The Latin residents have not yet translated their numbers into political strength, but many people say they soon will. "It's only a matter of time - it's already begun," Grace Montanez Davis, a Chicano, who is an aide to Mayor Tom Bradley, a black, said recently in an interview.

Rivalry With New York

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Although this is a city with a long history of self-promotion and civic boosterism, the news that it appears to have passed Chicago in population is not likely to bring much local applause. Many people here already believe that they live in the Second City and have considered New York as their natural rival.

According to some observers, many Angelenos, as the people here call themselves, have a kind of collective municipal inferiority complex. They say this is especially true regarding New York City's image of supposedly superior cultural riches and greater economic importance, in contrast with Los Angeles's reputation as a kind of vast, shallow tinsel town - "19 suburbs in search of a city," as several generations of Eastern writers have depicted it.

The differences in reputations seems especially to trouble many of the New Yorkers who have moved here. A study by the Security Pacific Bank last year indicated that about 16 percent of this region's new residents in 1979 came from New York State.

For many displaced New Yorkers, a move here results in a kind of love-hate relationship involving the two cities, and they seem to be forever debating the cities' relative merits. Many of them have been known to return to New York for quick visits to confirm their decision to move here, or to import items, ranging from Nedick's orange soda to New York pastrami, for comfort.

Neil Simon's Solution

Neil Simon, the playwright, moved here five years ago after tiring of New York's problems but now divides his time between this city and Manhattan. Recently he decided to try out his next play outside Los Angeles because of his dissatisfaction with reviews in The Los Angeles Times.

Sandy Fox, a Brooklyn-born lawyer, holds a party each year at which 100 or so former New Yorkers nostalgically play stickball and other games from their childhood.

Reflecting on the dispute over the cities' respective cultural values, Gordon Davidson, a former New Yorker who runs this city's respected Mark Taper Forum, an innovative theater organization here, said:

"I'm bored with it. It's a silly argument. There's the problem of geographic sprawl, but there is a lot of activity that's bubbling here in many areas in the performing as well as the visual arts. The cultural situation in Los Angeles is different than it is in the East. The East looked to, and benefited from, the cultural heritage of Europe, but it's also been weighed down with it. Here we can benefit from the things that occur on the Pacific rim and take advantage of our Mexican and Hispanic influence."

The bicentennial observance will include more than 150 community projects, ranging from art shows to the commissioning of a ballet and plays that stress the city's history. Angelenos are trying to use the event to enhance the city's image. Admittedly inspired by the imagebuilding power of the "I Love New York" slogan, the bicentennial planners devised their own slogan: "L.A.'s the Place."

Margo Albert, the wife of Eddie Albert, the actor, is co-chairman of the celebration. "This will be a fine opportunity to show that Los Angeles is a great city instead of 'tinsel town,' and all that flaky stuff," she said.

Graphic

Illustrations: Photo (Page B8)

Classification

LOS ANGELES,ALMOST 200,RANKS NO.2 AMONG CITIES

Language: ENGLISH

Subject: IMMIGRATION (90%); HISPANIC AMERICANS (90%); CITY LIFE (89%); CLASSICAL MUSIC (89%); CITIES (78%); ANNIVERSARIES (78%); LAND USE & DEVELOPMENT (78%); CENSUS (76%); CELEBRITIES (71%); IMPORT TRADE (71%); CULTS & SECTS (70%); RELIGION (65%); CUSTOMS & CULTURAL HERITAGE (65%); ORCHESTRAS (64%); MUSIC GROUPS & ARTISTS (64%); MOUNTAINS (50%)

Company: SECOND CITY COMMUNICATIONS (57%); SECOND CITY COMMUNICATIONS (57%); BUREAU OF THE CENSUS (60%)

Organization: BUREAU OF THE CENSUS (60%); BUREAU OF THE CENSUS (60%)

Industry: REAL ESTATE (90%); MUSEUMS & GALLERIES (89%); ACTORS & ACTRESSES (71%); CELEBRITIES (71%); MEDIA CONTENT (66%); LAND SUBDIVISION (65%); CONSTRUCTION (65%); ORCHESTRAS (64%); MUSIC GROUPS & ARTISTS (64%); TELEVISION PROGRAMMING (60%); PRIMETIME TELEVISION (50%)

Geographic: LOS ANGELES, CA, USA (94%); IOWA, USA (79%); NEBRASKA, USA (79%); TEXAS, USA (79%); CALIFORNIA, USA (79%); MEXICO (94%); ASIA (92%); LATIN AMERICA (79%)

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