
The New Gold Mountain

Dwelling is not primarily inhabiting but taking care of and creating that space within which something comes into its own and flourishes. . . . Dwelling is primarily saving, in the older sense of setting something free to become itself, what it essentially is.

MARTIN HEIDEGGER

THE CHANS MOVED TO SILICON VALLEY in the early 1980s when Dan, an engineer at Ford Aerospace in Detroit, received a job transfer to Palo Alto.¹ Dan and his wife Elaine had both emigrated from Taiwan in the 1960s and did their graduate work in the United States. Like most professional couples, they wanted the best home in the best neighborhood they could afford for their budding family. For them this was Mission San Jose, a neighborhood in the Fremont foothills with a mix of stately and modest single-family homes interspersed among vast stretches of rural farmland.

In their early days, the Chans were the only Asian American family they knew in Mission San Jose. While they never intended to be suburban pioneers, they also did not consider moving to denser urban neighborhoods in San Jose or San Francisco. They liked Mission San Jose's semirural appeal, accessibility to Dan's work, relatively affordable new homes, and up-and-coming schools. There they purchased a spacious three year-old home for \$200,000—less than they would have paid for a row house in San Francisco or a smaller older home in Palo Alto. On a good day, Dan was able to get to his office in about 30 minutes. More important for them, Mission San Jose's schools, where their son would enroll in three years, were well regarded and getting better.

Soon after the Chans got settled, Mission San Jose and the larger region changed in ways that they had not anticipated. One by one their neighbors sold their homes to professional Chinese American and Indian American families. Residential development and home prices boomed. Dan and Elaine's success in their professions and the housing market allowed them to

trade their first home for a much larger newer house in a more esteemed section of the neighborhood. By the late 2000s, their home value had increased nearly fivefold. And by the time their son graduated from Mission San Jose High School, it was a majority Asian American school in a majority Asian American neighborhood and was considered to be among the most competitive schools in the state.

These changes convinced Dan and Elaine that Silicon Valley was *the* place for educated middle-class Taiwanese American families like themselves. While back in the 1980s they questioned whether they had made the right move, 20 years later they could not imagine living anywhere else. “I don’t know where we’d go,” Dan told me. The Chans loved their home overlooking the San Francisco Bay—“great feng shui,” Dan noted. Though over the years the neighborhood had lost some of its rural charm, it was still nothing like the crowded cities where they had grown up in Taiwan. Besides, Fremont’s popularity among other Asian Americans was what allowed their most cherished amenities to flourish. Dan and Elaine now had a Chinese-language newspaper delivered to their front door, watched all the same television stations they had in Taiwan, ate out regularly in nearby Chinese restaurants, and shopped primarily at Asian supermarkets right down the street. Dan even retained his love of badminton, playing three times a week at the Fremont Community Center. The Chans had come to feel close to their culture and homeland in the valley. “We have all the conveniences we want and don’t have to speak English,” Dan explained, noting that Fremont’s new-found amenities saved them from the regular trips they used to make to Oakland’s Chinatown—a drive they had not made in over a decade.

The Chans’ love for their Silicon Valley lifestyle was not rooted in nostalgia for their lives in Taiwan but rather in their belief that the region offered the best of both Asian and American cultures. Dan observed, with some pride, that Fremont was “not like Monterey Park,” the suburb of Los Angeles that Timothy Fong dubbed “America’s first suburban Chinatown.”² Dan complained that “People tried to make [Monterey Park] exactly like Taiwan.” Instead, he appreciated the small-town feel of Fremont’s neighborhoods and the highly educated population they drew from all over the world. The Chans enjoyed the high-quality lifestyle that their privileged class status afforded them and, equally so, the diversity of faces and places that had become the norm in their well-to-do community.

Dan was not alone. Over the last half of the 20th century, Asian Americans emerged among Silicon Valley’s largest and fastest-growing groups, largely

consisting of well-educated, high-income, professional immigrants from Taiwan, China, and India. These newcomers were part of a population boom that changed many of the region's cauliflower fields, orange groves, and predominately White middle-class communities into Silicon Valley suburbs with Asian American majorities. Like the Chans, these newcomers not only settled on the land; they embedded themselves in it. They raised their families, built new businesses, got hired and fired, met lifelong friends, made their fortunes, and saw some of it decline during the dot-com bust and the Great Recession.

What drew the Chans and so many other middle-class Asian Americans to Silicon Valley and to suburbs such as Fremont in the latter half of the 20th century? And how did these suburban migrants establish a sense of place and community on unfamiliar turf? This chapter traces four decades of unprecedented growth, development, and demographic change in the valley, underscoring how these forces helped to shape Asian Americans' evolving suburban dreams.

Indeed, Asian Americans' pursuit of the suburban dream, replete with its material pleasures and personal freedoms, and their perception of Silicon Valley as a productive place in which to pursue it have been just as central to shaping the demographics of the region as larger structural forces. The valley's booming technology industry has often been described as a "New Gold Rush."³ For many Asian Americans, the region's plentiful economic opportunities loosened the epicenter of their vision of the abundant riches of California's "Gold Mountain" from its roots in San Francisco. This shift refashioned the traditional narrative of immigrant success from one centered on small business entrepreneurship and tight kinship networks in relatively homogenous urban ethnic neighborhoods to one that relied on highly skilled workers and strong business ties within diverse suburban communities.

This version of the American Dream drew upon a prototype adopted by many middle-class Whites after World War II but was distinct.⁴ It enmeshed the material accoutrements of modern suburban life with the premium that many Asian Americans placed on maintaining their ethnic communities, global ties, and everyday cultural practices. As Dan reflected, it was one that mixed the comforts and conveniences of suburban American life with the robust traditions of social and community life in Asia. As Dan also noted, this dream was not merely a suburban version of Chinatown; it was that of a more cosmopolitan community filled with cultured, educated, and professional people from all corners of the globe.

Asian Americans' paths to and within Silicon Valley were not paved—they were forged on often inhospitable grounds. Against tough odds, generation upon generation struggled to realize their own aspirations and those of the pioneers who had built the routes that they then followed. Each put another crack in suburbia's wall of intolerance, making it a more welcoming place for others like them. Their efforts reaffirmed their legitimacy and rights as suburbanites. Yet the terms of their inclusion have long remained open to question. Despite their increasingly robust populations in many valley communities, Asian Americans' ability to significantly reshape the landscape in accordance with their dreams has been limited.

Asian Americans' struggles to build their lives and livelihoods in Silicon Valley complicate the singular lens through which the region is often read. Despite nearly a half century of unrivaled immigration and demographic change, the valley is still largely referenced as a breeding ground for invention and entrepreneurship—home to America's creative class and the birthplace of the digital revolution.⁵ Some scholars have given attention to Asian Americans' contributions to the valley's economy and culture of innovation, but they are all too often left out of the story.⁶ Moreover, in a place so often measured by the number of startups and venture capitalists, attention to the diverse social and cultural life that Asian Americans have brought to Silicon Valley and the sometimes sobering realities behind their portrait of success have frequently gone unnoticed.

ON THE SUBURBAN SIDELINES (1945–1964)

Asian Americans have deep roots in Silicon Valley, laying claim to the land as early as the mid-1850s. But their claims were consistently challenged by White Californians who disputed Asian Americans' legal rights as citizens, property holders, and, later, suburbanites. Though sometimes skirting the law and social custom to take up residence in the valley's countryside and later its growing suburbs, the challenges of living on the social margins kept Asian Americans from enjoying the full benefits of their residence, largely reserved for Whites.

Prior to the 1970s, Silicon Valley was an agricultural region better known as the "Valley of the Heart's Delight." Sometimes called the "Prune Capital of the World," the region was a global headquarters for agricultural production in the early 20th century. Vast fields of apricots, cherries, almonds,

peaches, pears, oranges, lemons, apples, cauliflower, grapes, and avocados covered the landscape as far as the eye could see, interrupted only by rolling foothills and San Francisco Bay. By the 1920s, Santa Clara County was the nation's leading exporter of dried and canned fruit.⁷ In the 1930s the economy turned more to poultry, flowers, and nurseries, but the valley maintained its qualities as a rural region well into the 1970s.⁸ Asian Americans were central to the region's agricultural industries. From the late 1800s, Chinese Americans, mostly from the seafaring province of Guangdong, toiled alongside many Japanese Americans to clear the chaparral for farmland and work in the canneries, packing sheds, and salt mines. Many were employed as laborers to build the San Jose–San Francisco Railway that connected to the transcontinental railroad and transported the valley's products across the country and around the world.

Prior to 1965, national quotas on Asian immigration, including the various exclusion laws passed between the 1880s and 1920s, prevented the establishment of any large Asian American settlements in Santa Clara Valley or elsewhere. The few Asians who were able to gain admission under the harsh immigration laws that favored European immigrants were largely men who could serve as low-skilled laborers and did not compete with White workers.⁹ As late as 1960, Asian Americans, largely of Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino decent, constituted a mere 0.5% of the U.S. population and little more than 2% of that of Santa Clara County.¹⁰

Still, Asian Americans congregated in a few communities around the region. Most lived in San Jose's Chinatown and Japantown, which were the subject of repeated violence, arson, and displacement. Between the 1850s and 1930s, San Jose's Chinatown had to be rebuilt five times in different parts of the city.¹¹ Asian Americans also settled in a few communities beyond the San Jose border such as Alviso, which was home to various waves of new immigrants. These outlying communities, however, often lacked even the most basic municipal infrastructure systems such as streetlights and paved roads, which Alviso did not receive until the mid-1950s.¹² As the primary target of racial zoning and restrictive land tenure laws in the pre–World War II period, Asian Americans were generally limited to purchasing or renting homes within these areas. Those who did not comply with the formal and informal rules of segregation faced stiff legal penalties and sometimes lethal social consequences.¹³ Given their legal status and the active threats to their bodies and pocketbooks, only a few settled among the various agricultural communities outside of San Jose.

One agricultural region that attracted a few early Asian American settlers was Washington Township. The township consisted of eight unincorporated communities in Alameda County just north of Santa Clara County—five of which would later come to form the City of Fremont. In the first half of the 1900s, Asian Americans in Washington Township largely worked as tenant farmers, seasonal laborers, and merchants, but few lived in the township permanently. Deed restrictions typically dictated that properties could not be sold to anyone who was not of the “Caucasian race.” Further, alien land laws prevented nearly all Asian immigrants, who had been deemed ineligible for citizenship by federal naturalization policy, from owning land or holding long-term land leases in California until 1952.

Even still, by midcentury the township had a few prominent Japanese American landowning families. In California, such ownership was often made possible by a loophole in land tenure laws that allowed land to be held in the names of Nisei, or second-generation Japanese Americans who were eligible for American citizenship, rather than their Issei, or first-generation parents. In 1942 Japanese Americans families were forcibly detained in relocation centers, and many lost their land claims and returned to their former homes as tenant farmers and migrants laborers.¹⁴ According to the *History of the Washington Township*, written by the local country club, which was clearly anxious about their presence, Japanese Americans in the township were never “numerous enough to warrant trouble.”¹⁵ A small number of families of Chinese, Filipino, Indian, and Hawaiian ancestry, most of whom came among different waves of agricultural workers, could also be found scattered throughout the township (Figure 3). As the central focus of White nativist fervor in prewar California, Asian Americans were, however, excluded from almost every facet of mainstream social and political life.¹⁶

The post–World War II period radically reshaped the character of Silicon Valley. As the primary gateway to the Pacific Rim, the nine counties that comprise the Bay Area boomed, swelling in population by about 500,000 people during the conflict.¹⁷ Like many western Sunbelt regions, Santa Clara Valley was a popular site for postwar growth.¹⁸ Core Bay Area cities such as San Francisco, Oakland, Alameda, and Berkeley, which before the war contained up to four-fifths of the region’s population, lost their favored status to expanding suburbs.¹⁹ Leaving behind increasingly overcrowded, dilapidated inner-city housing, many young middle-class families moved into suburban homes and neighborhoods being built on the South Bay’s former agricultural



FIGURE 3. This class picture from the Irvington Grammar School's eighth-grade class of 1939 shows Asian Americans' long roots in Fremont. Six students and one adult pictured here have Japanese last names, and the student in the upper right corner is listed as "unknown." Image published in Hammond (2003).

empire. In San Jose, the population increased more than sixfold in only three decades—from fewer than 70,000 in 1940 to nearly 450,000 in 1970—as the city annexed surrounding farms to make room for new neighborhoods of single-family homes. While the Bay Area doubled in size between 1930 and 1960 to over 2.6 million residents, the percentage of residents living in core Bay Area cities shrunk to less than half.²⁰

Postwar suburbanization, however, did little to relieve Silicon Valley's entrenched patterns of racial segregation. If anything, it deepened them. While Federal Housing Administration and Veterans Administration loans drove an unprecedented suburban building boom that accommodated returning White veterans and provided new homeownership options for many White working- and middle-class families, such loans were systematically denied to neighborhoods of color, particularly those in the inner city with older housing stock such as San Francisco's Chinatown. For many White Americans, suburbanization represented a class shift up that, according to anthropologist Rachel Heiman, "sealed their whiteness" and their identity with the middle-class American Dream. In the postwar period, this

dream came to include good schools, nice homes, quiet neighborhoods, and the absence of lower-class and non-White residents.²¹

New transportation technologies and federally underwritten infrastructure investments encouraged South Bay suburbanization, while federal policy favoring slum clearance and the dispersion of “blighted” poor and minority communities razed inner-city housing in neighborhoods whose residents had few options in suburbia. In the 1940s San Francisco’s Japantown was part of the urban renewal plans for the Western Addition, which became one of the largest slum-clearance projects in the nation. By the end of the 1960s, over 8,000 residents and 6,000 housing units in Japantown had been displaced. Replaced by large-scale commercial buildings and upscale residential condominiums, few residents or affordable housing units returned to the neighborhood.²²

Discriminatory lending and real estate practices such as racial steering, blockbusting, and redlining as well as individual and collective acts of discrimination and violence often denied Asian Americans and other racial minorities access to suburban housing and a growing number of suburban jobs. Racially restrictive covenants, which were applied with increasing frequency in the immediate postwar period, were ruled unconstitutional in 1948 in *Shelley v. Kraemer*, yet many remained on home deeds. Moreover, homeowners who were intent on avoiding integration continued practices promoting de facto segregation well into the 1970s.²³ While exclusionary measures were in place before the war, postwar suburbanization crystallized America’s racial order across metropolitan spaces as never before.²⁴

Fremont followed a pattern of postwar racial and class segregation similar to that of many other South Bay suburbs. These battles often began at the time of municipal incorporation. As Robert Self has shown, incorporation proved to be among the most effective means of exclusion that many South Bay municipalities had at their disposal. As both industry and their working-class employees expanded out of cities such as Oakland and San Francisco, suburban municipalities incorporated to control growth and adopt standards for development that secured their borders against poor and minority encroachment.²⁵

Leaders of the incorporation movement in Washington Township clearly understood issues of race and class integration to be at stake. By the mid-1950s several cities north and south of the township had incorporated, and residents were feeling the pressures of growth, including potential annexation from fast-growing neighboring municipalities. Supporters of incorporation trumpeted the value of local control over the character of growth, taxes,

and their “way of life.”²⁶ A 1952 editorial titled “Halt Toadstool Growth” exemplified the tone of the debates: “This Township wants its master plan [from the County Planning Commission] and wants it in a hurry—before shacks over-run our industrial land, before factories are jammed against our homes.”²⁷ The Citizens’ Committee, which favored incorporation, suggested that it would allow the township to solve “the troublesome ‘fringe’ problem which vexes so many communities.”²⁸ The “urban-rural fringe problem,” as California agricultural economist Stephen Smith explained during the period, was clearly about the desire of suburbanites to protect their property values against decline, including that brought about by race and class integration. Yet the problem was often posed as issues related to public health, welfare, amenity values, and, in Washington Township, maintaining their “way of life.”²⁹ While praising growth liberalism that would allow the township to capitalize off of impending development, many officials and residents emphasized strong local control over the character of that growth, in part to restrict the influx of lower-class minority residents and other “undesirables.”

In 1956, five of the eight unincorporated towns coalesced to form the City of Fremont—the third-largest city by land area in California at the time. While the new city was geographically large, its population was small and largely White. It had only about 22,000 residents and, according to the 1960 census, less than a 2% non-White population. With incorporation, the city took control of its land use and the power to shape new development. Officials inscribed their vision of the city as a middle-class suburb by zoning many of its neighborhoods for large lots of about two to four and a half families per acre. Seeking to boost its tax base, the city also zoned about 5,400 acres of land in its southern border for light industry. For its active planning efforts, Fremont received national recognition with an award from the American Institute of Planners in 1962.

Jack Stevenson, the first mayor, argued that Fremont was to be an antidote to the problems of city life. “Fremont stirs the imagination of those who fled the city to seek a better life beyond. It must excite those who look upon the tangled problems of the nation’s older cities and wish they could start again,” he proclaimed.³⁰ With the Second Great Migration of African Americans from the rural South to western cities such as San Francisco well under way, the “tangled problems” that many White suburbanites fled included the increasing interracial mix of urban neighborhoods.

Though a few Asian Americans were able to bypass Fremont’s exclusive planning regime and various other discriminatory housing practices during the

city's early years, their experiences were far different than the experiences of their White neighbors. Paula Jones and Sam Phillips, both middle-class Whites raised in Fremont in the 1960s, described the city as an idyllic place to grow up. Paula likened her experience to "growing up in a Garden of Eden." She recalled that most of her childhood in Mission San Jose was spent playing outside and climbing fruit trees. "It was a bucolic environment for a child," she explained. Likewise Sam, who grew up just down the road in Irvington, recalled that it had the feeling of a small agricultural community where a curious kid on a bike could roam free, as he did. But Asian Americans lived in the shadows of Silicon Valley. Their experiences were marked by daily social and psychological indignities and a clear sense that they were "alien neighbors" in their own communities.³¹ Despite their hardships, pioneers such as the Nikitas, Hondas, and Fudennas paved important pathways for the next waves of Asian American suburbanites who would forever change the face of the valley.

CIVIL RIGHTS SUBURBANIZATION (1965–1980)

As in much of the rest of the country, Silicon Valley suburbia was the site of sometimes violent resistance to integration during the civil rights era.³² To a far lesser degree than African Americans, but no less important, Asian Americans faced fierce opposition when purchasing homes and otherwise settling in suburbia. But the same period marked Asian Americans' first widespread success in pushing out of the urban center. As they broke through many historic dividing lines, communities such as Fremont became the front lines of debate over Asian Americans' new claims to their rights as suburbanites.

Like other minorities, Asian Americans' suburban struggle was born out of harsh inner-city conditions. In the 1960s when many South Bay suburbs were busy planning for new growth, San Francisco and Oakland were in the midst of an urban crisis. Dollars directed to housing and industrial development on the urban fringe took jobs, residents, and taxes away from central cities. Between the 1950s and 1970s, federal and local policies gutted many inner-city neighborhoods to make way for shopping malls, office towers, highways, and other downtown urban renewal schemes.³³ In Los Angeles and San Francisco, processes of Latino and "Asian removal" were as much at issue as "Negro removal" in many redevelopment projects.³⁴ Much of the housing replacement promised under the 1954 Housing Act never materialized, while racially segregated high-rise public housing projects became more prominent



FIGURE 4. The General Motors Company relocated from Oakland to Fremont, bringing with it many working- and middle-class families. This picture shows the plant after its opening in 1963 surrounded by miles of agricultural land. Image courtesy of Arnold del Carlo, photographer, Sourisseau Academy for State and Local History, San Jose State University.

fixtures within increasingly poor, racially segregated neighborhoods. New transportation technologies and federal support for highway construction that eased the downtown commute for suburbanites displaced residents and disrupted life in many urban communities. The Nimitz Freeway that brought rapid development to Fremont cut directly through West Oakland, leaving the once thriving African American mecca in ruins while also displacing many residents of nearby Chinatown.³⁵

Economic restructuring and deindustrialization further hastened the outward migration of middle-class residents and jobs and exacerbated the conditions of the growing “urban underclass.”³⁶ Industries once located in Oakland and San Francisco moved to the suburbs or headed overseas. General Motors (GM), for instance, moved its main West Coast production facility from Oakland to Fremont in the early 1960s (Figure 4).

By 1964, the plant employed more than 4,100 people and was the city’s largest employer, laying the foundation for Fremont’s early reputation as a

blue-collar industrial suburb.³⁷ The racially integrated United Automobile Workers (UAW) union promised new employment opportunities for minorities in the city, but GM's initial policy of prioritizing local residents for new positions limited the effectiveness of the UAW's policies.³⁸

The decline of central-city neighborhoods, their stark contrast to the suburbs, and various race riots in Oakland, Los Angeles, and elsewhere were important impetuses for civil rights reforms, including the Civil Rights Housing Act of 1964 and the Fair Housing Act of 1968, which prohibited discrimination by race in the administration of both public and private housing.³⁹ Anticipating these changes, California passed its own fair housing act in 1963 with similar provisions.⁴⁰ Further, in an important precedent-setting decision, in 1975 the New Jersey Supreme Court ruled in *Southern Burlington County NAACP v. Mount Laurel Township* (commonly known as *Mount Laurel I*) that exclusionary zoning was unconstitutional.

Judiciary rulings and legislation, however, were slow to impact conditions on the ground. In the absence of racially restrictive covenants, common interest developments put in place homeowners' associations and covenants, codes, and restrictions, requiring the maintenance of certain standards of home and neighborhood development and design. In high-end developments such as the many being built in Fremont during the period, such practices translated race-based forms of exclusion into more sophisticated class-based mechanisms.⁴¹ In some of Fremont's earliest subdivisions such as Mission Ranch and Glenmoor Gardens, these tools helped maintain their exclusivity as largely upper-middle-class White neighborhoods well into the 1990s.

Suburban communities also banded together to enforce de facto segregation, forming neighborhood block groups and associations that provided vehicles for organized resistance. Real estate agents steered minorities away from certain neighborhoods, homeowners refused to sell their properties to non-Whites, and violence continued as an active threat to minorities seeking to move into many suburbs. In 1968 Tom Parks, who is African American, was looking to move out of his apartment in Oakland. He and his wife began by looking at over 100 apartments in Hayward and were consistently told that they were unavailable or required extraordinary security deposits. They were also steered away from purchasing a house in Fremont, where only 398 African Americans lived in 1970. When they bought in Newark instead, Tom recalled paying about \$4,000 more than his neighbors and being harassed by five local police officers who launched a community-wide petition to prevent their purchase.⁴² "There is nothing much that has been done in the

way of the force of law that has terribly altered the practices that are in place. They have just shifted in how they implement those practices,” Tom explained to me more than four decades later. As Arnold Hirsh argued, violence and intimidation, especially toward African Americans, might have actually increased as the legal restrictions waned.⁴³ Certainly, the language of exclusion shifted during the period from a focus on race to property values. As historian David Freund has pointed out, doing so provided cover to White suburbanites to deny personal malice toward racial minorities and support exclusive practices in the name of “rational” market logic.⁴⁴

Just as the rationales of suburban racial exclusion were changing, so too were perceptions about Asian Americans as suburban neighbors. In the 1930s and 1940s, the strategic alliance of the United States with China led many White Americans to consider the acceptance of Chinese Americans into their neighborhoods as part of their patriotic duty. In the face of rising demands for civil rights, stereotypes about Asian Americans as compliant and industrial laborers who were unlikely to challenge the social order added to their exceptionalism from the otherwise clear rules of postwar segregation, which affected African Americans most particularly.⁴⁵ Tom recalled, for instance, that in 1949 when his family moved to San Mateo, a suburban community less than 20 miles south of San Francisco, his parents purchased their home through a “straw buyer,” a Chinese American friend who bought the home on the family’s behalf because the owners refused to sell to African Americans.

By the 1970s, changing attitudes regarding Asian American exceptionalism vis-à-vis other racial minorities had begun to ease their passage into new suburbs. This was most robust in inner suburbs such as Daly City, which abuts San Francisco’s southern border. There, the Asian American population went from only around 4,000 in 1970 to more than 22,000 by 1980—from less than 7% to nearly 29% of the city’s population. But even with such dramatic changes taking shape in some suburban communities, historian Charlotte Brooks notes that Asian Americans’ acceptance was conditional—oftentimes prefaced on the expectation that Asian Americans would quietly stay in their place and adopt the norms of their White middle-class neighbors.⁴⁶

Further, many Asian Americans continued to meet resistance as they settled into new suburban communities. Indra Singh, an Indian American senior, recalled that when he and his wife moved to Fremont in 1972, children threw eggs at their home and toilet-papered their yard. A friend of his

who was also Indian American had rocks thrown at their house and, as a result, moved out of Fremont.

By the late 1970s and early 1980s, however, many more Asian Americans were beginning to make their way from other inner-ring suburbs such as Daly City or neighborhoods in San Francisco such as the Richmond District, where they had gained a foothold in the postwar period. The main factors pulling Asian Americans to the South Bay were the increasing availability of jobs and access to quality, affordable homes. Joe and Judy Wu are both American-born Chinese mathematicians who in 1973 were living and working in Oakland. In 1974 Judy got a job in South San Jose, and the couple made their way down the Nimitz Freeway, completed less than two decades earlier to connect Oakland to San Jose. Midway along their route, they discovered Fremont. There they found that they were able to purchase a two-bedroom home and pay less on their mortgage than they were spending to rent in Oakland. Joe could keep his job, commuting by car or Bay Area Rapid Transit, which opened a new station in Fremont in 1972, connecting the city to San Francisco and Oakland.

Andrew Li, an immigrant from Taiwan, was selling real estate and developing new homes in the 1980s in the Northgate neighborhood, where Judy and Joe settled two years after moving to Fremont. Andrew reported that while the low cost of new homes and job accessibility were the main draws for Asian Americans moving to the city during the period, one could not discount the important role that pioneers such as the Wus also played:

Chinese, Filipinos—they may have a townhome or house in Daly City. They got invited by their friends and they bought a home in Fremont. They would invite them over for Saturday afternoon barbecues. It would be 80 degrees. They enjoyed it tremendously. They would go back to Daly City where it would be 45 degrees on Saturday night. . . . Sunday morning, they would drive to Fremont again, looking for a house. . . . The house prices were comparable, and the weather was much better.

As Andrew noted, social networks drew many Asian Americans southward and to particular Silicon Valley communities. The easiest places to settle were often those with or in close proximity to extant minority populations. In Fremont, the long history of Chinese American, Japanese American, and Filipino American farmworkers increased its popularity among Asian American newcomers. Many came by word of mouth, following family members and friends to neighborhoods such as Northgate. David Li, whose

Chinese American roots in the Bay Area date back to the 1850s, recalled that one of the things that convinced his parents to move from Berkeley to Fremont in the mid-1960s was that his mother's cousin had recently relocated there.

Social relations were not the only factor that drove David's parents to Fremont. Like many other Asian Americans, they were attracted to the range of possibilities that suburbia seemed to promise its residents. They wanted better schools and larger homes in safe, less crowded neighborhoods and also wanted to escape the same "urban ills" as their White neighbors. This no doubt included the growing concentration of poor communities of color. David stressed his parents' desire for a quiet, semirural lifestyle. Shortly after he was born, his working-class parents purchased a four-bedroom home in Irvington that supported their growing family and a different sort of lifestyle than they had enjoyed in Berkeley. David explained:

I think it was just different. Fremont was just starting out. It was already a city, but it was a spread out community. "Spread out" meaning in between the neighborhoods that had sprung up at the time, we had farms and cow pastures. It was a different kind of living. It was country living. We just wanted to get away from the inner city, so to speak, and get back to the country. . . . I think [my parents] wanted a fresh start. . . . They decided there may be a better future for us there. It was a growing community with a lot of possibility.

In Fremont, David moved into a new home on a new street, with a new high school nearby. In all its novelty, suburbia invoked an endless sense of possibility, especially for those who had long been denied its benefits.

Though many Asian Americans held high hopes for their new suburban lives, they all too often found themselves surrounded by a sea of circumspect White faces. In 1970 Fremont's population was 97% White, including about 10% of the population that categorized themselves as being of "Spanish origin." In Fremont, this likely included a large percentage of Portuguese farmers, who had worked the land for generations. Asian Americans were less than 2% of the population. By 1980 Asian Americans had made significant inroads, growing to about 9,600 people, or roughly 7% of the population. Still, Asian Americans were a distinct minority, and they felt it. Having entered elementary school in Fremont in the early 1970s, David recalled being 1 of only 2 Chinese American boys at his school. Though his family was "acculturated"—eating meat loaf and pizza for dinner most nights, "not rice bowls"—he grew up with the nagging feeling that he was different. While he

did not recall any direct acts of racial discrimination, he felt his difference in simple, everyday activities such as looking at his class pictures year after year in which everyone but him was blond or brunette.

Whether driven by feelings of isolation or hostility, many early Asian American suburban pioneers looked for communities to which they could belong outside of their local neighborhoods. To establish a stronger sense of community and retain their cultural ties, several early ethnic and cultural associations developed in Fremont. The South Bay Chinese Club (SBCC) was founded in Fremont in 1965 to preserve Chinese culture and customs while also fostering and encouraging better understanding among Chinese Americans of their civic responsibilities and the “American way of life.”⁴⁷ The SBCC was and continues to be largely a social club for American-born Chinese. The Organization of Chinese Americans (OCA) started its first California chapter in Fremont in 1974, drawing its members from across the South Bay and the East Bay. Inspired by groups such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the Japanese American Civics League, the OCA had a far more political agenda than the SBCC. The OCA was concerned with both the civil rights and political representation of Chinese Americans. Judy Wu was among the California chapter’s founding members. Having grown up on the East Coast, where her parents were active in the organization, Judy was concerned with the lack of Asian American political representation in Fremont, a cause that she and her husband fought hard for. With their support, Yoshio Fujiwara became the first Asian American elected to the city council in 1978.

Religious institutions also became an important part of the emerging cultural and community fabric. In 1978, Gurdwara Sahib was founded in Fremont to serve the religious needs of the region’s growing Sikh American population. By the mid-1980s, Fremont’s diverse faith institutions had come to include Wat Buddhansorm, a Thai Buddhist temple; Vedic Dharma Samaj, a Hindu temple; and a host of small mosques and Asian ethnic Christian churches scattered throughout the city.

Despite Asian Americans’ efforts to develop a sense of community rooted in their common suburban experiences, many continued to rely on established urban centers for their daily necessities and social support. Fremont’s Chinese American residents still regularly traveled 30 miles or more to Oakland’s and San Francisco’s Chinatowns on the weekends to do their grocery shopping, eat out, or get a haircut. Indian Americans would head to University Avenue in Berkeley, where clusters of retailers and restaurants

could be found near the University of California campus. These neighborhoods were not just service centers; they also served as important social and cultural hubs that provided moments of relief and a meeting point for those who had left their communities behind when they moved to the South Bay suburbs. This generation of Asian American pioneers consisted of largely young families headed by U.S.-born householders who had struggled to afford entry into the suburbs and build the community and cultural infrastructure they needed to thrive. They were quickly joined by a generation of recently arrived Asian immigrants who were doing the same.

NEW IMMIGRANT GATEWAY (1970–1990)

By the 1970s the technology industry in Silicon Valley was blossoming, and so too was Asian immigration. New laws made way for fresh waves of émigrés, while a growing number of high-tech companies ensured plentiful opportunities for their employment. As the valley's population grew, so too did its reputation as a place that was "good for immigrants." As they had done for generations, Asian immigrants imagined the Bay Area as a land of bountiful wealth and opportunity. But now their visions centered on the possibilities arising in South Bay, not in San Francisco. The New Gold Mountain was, in fact, not gold at all—it was silicon.

By the 1970s, Santa Clara Valley was fully engaged in its transformation from an economy based on agriculture to defense and aerospace contracting. Facilitated by alliances that began during the early Cold War period, Stanford University engineering professor and future provost Frederick E. Terman, the so-called "father of Silicon Valley," pioneered efforts to pair talented university researchers and engineers with the needs of emerging industries to create a "community of technical scholars."⁴⁸ Thriving off its unique culture of competition and collaboration, the region became a hub of innovation that gave birth to some of the most important technological milestones of the late 20th century. From microelectronics and the semiconductor to the personal computer, the region broke ground in technology that became the hallmark of a new information age.⁴⁹

Early Silicon Valley companies clustered in exclusive suburbs and employed an almost all-White labor force, especially among white-collar engineers and managers.⁵⁰ The valley was a dream landscape for many early high-tech employees who were enticed not only by its well-paying jobs but

also by the promise of orderly and manicured suburban neighborhoods and high-end office parks designed around the same principals.⁵¹ In 1970, for instance, the elite suburb of Palo Alto just beyond the Stanford University campus was 93% White. The community also housed the Stanford Research Park, a 700-acre site that was home to many of Silicon Valley's most prominent companies, including Bell Labs, Varian Associates, Hewlett-Packard, General Electric, and Lockheed.

Silicon Valley's rise to global prominence also came at a time of massive immigration from many parts of the world, particularly Asia. Immigrants were pushed by ongoing political and social turmoil and harsh economic conditions abroad and were pulled by the valley's mild climate, extant Asian American populations, and wealth of new job opportunities. Following the passage of the historic 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act, émigrés began arriving in record numbers. Commonly known as Hart-Celler, the act opened the floodgates of Asian immigration by lifting restrictive quotas from non-European countries and instituting new policies aimed at family reunification and attracting skilled labor.⁵² The population of Latino and Asian immigrants in the United States expanded rapidly—far faster, in fact, than Congress had anticipated. “The bill will not flood our cities with immigrants,” Senator Edward Kennedy assured his colleagues. “It will not upset the ethnic mix of our society.”⁵³ Facing pressure from civil rights advocates but expecting little change, Congress passed a bill that has had one of the most significant effects on the numbers and diversity of immigrants ever since.

More educated and skilled than previous generations, post-Hart-Celler immigrants were far more likely to bypass central-city destinations to settle directly into suburbs, such as those in Santa Clara County.⁵⁴ Between 1970 and 1980 the population of Asian Americans in the county grew threefold, from around 30,000 to more than 100,000, making up just under 8% of the population. In the subsequent decade the population more than doubled to over 260,000, comprising nearly 18% of the county's population. Fremont saw similarly dramatic trends, with Asian Americans growing from fewer than 2,000 residents in 1970 to more than 33,000 in 1990, comprising about one-fifth of the city's population. During the same period, the city's immigrant population went from less than 5% to about 20% of the population (Table 1).

Santa Clara County's first major wave of Asian immigrants were a diverse lot but highly stratified by occupation, education, and skill level. The valley's

| | | 1960 | 1970 | 1980 | 1990 | 2000 | 2010 |
|----------------|-------------------------|------|------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Fremont | White* | 98% | 97% | 85% | 70% | 48% | 33% |
| | Asian | 2% | 2% | 7% | 19% | 37% | 51% |
| | Hispanic | 12% | 10% | 14% | 13% | 14% | 15% |
| | Black | 0% | 0% | 3% | 4% | 3% | 3% |
| | Other | 0% | 1% | 5% | 6% | 12% | 13% |
| | Foreign-born | 5% | 5% | 10% | 20% | 37% | 43% |
| | Median household income | — | — | \$25,342 | \$51,231 | \$76,579 | \$87,385 |
| Metro | White | 90% | 86% | 76% | 69% | 58% | 52% |
| | Asian | 3% | 5% | 9% | 15% | 20% | 24% |
| | Hispanic | — | 8% | 12% | 15% | 19% | 24% |
| | Black | 7% | 8% | 9% | 9% | 8% | 3% |
| | Other | 0% | 1% | 6% | 7% | 15% | 17% |
| | Foreign-born | 10% | 10% | 15% | 20% | 27% | 32% |
| | Median household income | — | — | \$20,607 | \$41,595 | \$62,024 | \$73,027 |

*ALL racial categories include Hispanic populations to facilitate comparison of data across time. The U.S. census did not account for non-Hispanic groups by race until 1990. Source: All data for 1960–2000 is based on U.S. decennial census and, for 2010, the American Community Survey five-year data.

TABLE 1. Over the last half century, Fremont grew from a predominantly White middle-class suburb to a hub for highly educated high-income immigrants from around the world. The table compares Fremont’s racial composition, foreign-born population, and median household income to the San Francisco-Oakland-San Jose Metropolitan Statistical Area between 1960 and 2010.

“barbell economy” tended to concentrate jobs at the top and at the bottom—clearly dividing the workforce between manual and mental laborers.⁵⁵ Chinese from Hong Kong and Taiwan as well as Indians, to a lesser extent, were those most likely to be employed in the higher-end positions, entering into the ranks as scientists and engineers. Many arrived under professional visas known as the third and sixth preference, which prioritized admissions for those with “exceptional abilities” and in occupations with short labor supply in the United States. They came seeking better jobs and educational opportunities than they had in their home countries and oftentimes greater political stability and freedoms. Filipinos fled far more dire circumstances, including the deteriorating economic and political conditions in the Philippines under the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos (1965–1986). Still, those who emigrated tended to be

among the professional class and entered semiskilled professions that supported the valley's economy, such as nursing and medical technology.⁵⁶ They were later joined by a rush of political refugees from Indochina, particularly Vietnam, who arrived in several successive waves after the fall of Saigon in 1975 and throughout the 1990s.⁵⁷ Often lacking formal education, many Indochinese refugees took jobs in manufacturing or other service-sector occupations such as construction, landscaping, and dishwashing. While plentiful and requiring little English-language skills, these jobs were often temporary, offered few legal protections, and had hazardous working conditions and little opportunity for upward mobility.⁵⁸

While many recent arrivals initially settled into various communities in and around San Jose, their geographies quickly became as divided as their occupations. Southeast Asian immigrants, including Vietnamese and Filipinos, tended to cluster in "South County," an area of Santa Clara County that stretched all the way south to Gilroy and whose core was in San Jose. Despite San Jose's attempt to attract high-tech companies, its inexpensive housing, land, infrastructure, labor, and taxes compared to other Silicon Valley cities was attractive to many computer component manufacturing firms and their blue-collar workers.⁵⁹ These included not only many Southeast Asian Americans but also Latinos and, to a lesser extent, African Americans.⁶⁰ By 1990, Vietnamese Americans and Filipino Americans made up nearly half of the 152,000 Asian Americans in the city of San Jose.⁶¹

With growing presences in high-tech professions, Chinese and Indian Americans, however, bucked these trends. Instead, their primary geographies tended toward the more exclusive "North County" suburbs. Like Fremont, these communities had built their prestige on restrictive zoning that historically prevented race and class intermixing. By the mid-1970s when Asian immigration had reached new heights, however, many of the North County suburbs closest to Stanford University had already closed their borders to residential growth. By adopting strict no- and slow-growth policies, these close-in communities effectively raised the cost of land and pushed new development farther out. By 1975, 84,000 people commuted daily to the core Silicon Valley suburbs of Sunnyvale, Palo Alto, Mountain View, and Santa Clara.⁶² While shunning residential expansion and density, many of these same communities welcomed new high-tech firms. Municipal bonds supported infrastructural investments needed for white-collar office parks, while tough environmental regulations ensured that manufacturing firms would not set up shop.⁶³

Fremont was one of the few North County suburbs to welcome new residential development. In fact, the city courted it. Progrowth elected officials wanted Fremont to join the ranks of its prosperous neighbors and encouraged property owners to make residential and industrial land available to help it do so. “The welcome mat is out,” announced Mayor Gus Morrison in 1989. “If someone wants to build a quality project here, I mean a quality project, they’ll never have a reason to be disappointed with Fremont.”⁶⁴ Stressing the need for “quality” development that matched their middle-class aspirations, the city fast-tracked business permits, rezoned much of its industrial land to industrial research, made significant infrastructure investments, and provided generous tax incentives to high-tech companies.⁶⁵ In an effort to attract new Silicon Valley wealth, Fremont radically shifted its development policies—going from one of the state’s most highly recognized planned-growth communities to one of its most progrowth communities in only three decades.

The city’s efforts paid off. New Silicon Valley residents and companies saw clear advantages to locating in Fremont. It was strategically located directly across San Francisco Bay from Palo Alto and just north of San Jose. Further, its large quantity of undeveloped land allowed new homes and industrial land to be sold at about half the price as in core Silicon Valley towns.⁶⁶ High-tech businesses boomed in Fremont from the 1980s to the late 1990s. In the early 1980s the city became home to Apple®, which produced its first Macintosh computer there.⁶⁷ It also attracted other large high-tech firms such as NEXT and Everex computer manufacturing. By 1989 Fremont was the fastest-growing city in the region for new high-tech firms, with roughly 6,200 acres of its industrial land occupied, primarily by manufacturers of computer-related electronics.⁶⁸ Officials projected Fremont as “Silicon Valley North”—a moniker that reflected both its changing character and their hopes for the city’s economic future.

Fremont’s residential population was also booming. Between 1970 and 1990 while the populations of many core Silicon Valley communities hardly budged, Fremont’s nearly doubled from just over 100,000 people to nearly 175,000. During one of Santa Clara County’s most significant periods of growth, Fremont outpaced the county’s population growth rate 3.6% to 2.0%. “We’re a sleeping giant,” declared Gus Morrison. “Fremont isn’t that blue-collar town of old. That label just doesn’t fit anymore.”⁶⁹

With its ample stock of new and affordable homes, good schools, and an increasingly sophisticated array of community and cultural amenities,

Fremont was especially popular among newly arrived Asian immigrants. As evidence of the city's popularity among Indian Americans, Indra Agarwal, an Indian immigrant who moved to Fremont in 1972, recalled becoming the 16th subscriber to *India West*, an Indo-American newspaper that started in Fremont in the early 1970s and now circulates throughout California. By the 1980s, the city had developed a reputation in many Asian immigrant circles as a good place to live. Like prior generations, these groups arrived by word of mouth to stay with friends, family members, or university classmates from overseas and eventually settled in the city.⁷⁰

These newcomers started businesses together, networked among each other, moved into common neighborhoods, and began to build their own versions of the American Dream. When I asked Ishan Shah, a second-generation Indian American, why his family had relocated from Chicago to Fremont in the early 1990s, he spoke of both the importance of immigrant networks and what Fremont meant to families such as his. "We had heard that's where all the immigrants went," he explained. "It was a community of people driven by the same principles. [My parents] really connected with that. They felt that this was going to be a good place with people like us." While Ishan's father was trained as a computer engineer, he moved to Fremont to pursue his lifelong dream of starting his own business. In 2009, Ishan announced his bid for Fremont City Council. At the age of 17, he became the youngest declared candidate to ever run for public office in the United States. According to Ishan, it could only have happened in Fremont. For both he and his father, the city represented a land of opportunity and was key to their American Dream.⁷¹

S. Mitra Kalita argues that for many post-1965 Indian immigrants, the American Dream and the suburban dream have been deeply intertwined. "For many, homeownership in a place with a good school district and soccer leagues, strip malls and picket fences, signified the completion of the American Dream," she wrote.⁷² According to Kalita, what most post-1965 Indian immigrants wanted from suburbia was similar to that of most other Americans.⁷³ But there were also important differences. The first waves of post-1965 Asian immigrants were looking for suburbs with, as Ishan said, "people like us." It was a generation who in large part had come to the United States for higher education. They were high-achieving, upwardly mobile, and more culturally "assimilated" than previous generations. They had saved up and sacrificed to purchase new homes in quiet suburban neighborhoods with good schools that were easily accessible to their jobs. But they also sought out

places in proximity to their cultural touchstones: Asian grocery stores, restaurants, community institutions, places of worship, and other professional Asian Americans.

These amenities and their shared value among others of similar racial, ethnic, and class backgrounds gave Asian American suburbanites a sense of home, place, and security. These amenities were not just part of Asian American suburbanites' dreams; they served as critical supports in their pursuit of them. Asian Americans have long used their ethnic communities and resources not just as a refuge but also as a platform for social mobility.⁷⁴ The community and cultural infrastructure being built in places such as Fremont was, as much as the suburbs themselves, their launching pads.

Taking stock of just how much Fremont changed over two decades of rapid immigration was not so easy for those who lived through it. But for those just coming to the area, the contrast between it and other American suburbs was clear. When Irene Yang arrived in Fremont in the mid-1980s from New Jersey after emigrating from Taiwan, she could not believe what she found:

I almost felt like I'd moved to another country. This [was] not the America that I was used to. When I [went] to the playgrounds, the people [spoke] in their different languages. The Indian moms would be together speaking in Punjabi or whatever, and the Chinese moms—the Taiwanese moms—would be speaking Taiwanese dialect to each other (the ones from back then, very few from mainland China). And then, very few already, very few Caucasian moms.

For many Asian immigrants, even those such as Irene who had lived in the United States for many years, moving to Fremont changed the way they perceived of the suburbs and their relationship to it. Entering a city that was fully entrenched in its transformation from a White working- and middle-class community to a global hub for skilled migrants from all over the world, Irene was faced with a kind of diversity that she had never seen before. Amid such diversity, she saw both new opportunities for connecting with those similar to herself but also new challenges of negotiating the separate spheres that were beginning to take shape among Asian Americans and between Asian Americans and Whites. Such experiences marked the new social realities faced by Asian American suburbanites of this generation as distinct from all those who had come before them.

COSMOPOLITAN SUBURBIA (1990–2010)

By 1990, Silicon Valley was entering its boom years. A decade later the ride was over, and the region was dealing with the aftermath of the dot-com bust and ongoing effects of the Great Recession. But throughout this period of rapid economic expansion and contraction, the region was constantly being reshaped by its role as a popular immigrant gateway, especially for highly educated, geographically mobile immigrants from mainland China and India. Compared to previous generations who often left their homelands behind, these migrants remained closely tied to their friends, families, and even workplaces abroad. In only two decades, they turned many valley suburbs into cosmopolitan places that were more dynamic, globally connected, and ethnically diverse than ever before.

The year 1990 marked a critical turning point in the history of immigration policy for highly skilled immigrants. That year, Congress signed a new immigration and naturalization act focused on attracting skilled laborers. The act tripled annual immigrant quotas for professional employment-based visas from 54,000 to 140,000 and initiated the H-1B, a visa that permitted foreign nationals with “special skills” that were in demand among American companies to work in the United States for six years with the option of pursuing a green card.⁷⁵ The initial cap on new visas was set at 65,000 but continued to rise throughout the decade, reaching 195,000 by 2001.⁷⁶ Policy changes coincided with improved foreign relations with both India and China and booming economies in both countries that produced large numbers of highly trained engineers, researchers, and other information technology professionals.

While national and international forces propelled Asian immigration, high-tech companies played a significant role in facilitating their migration to Silicon Valley. During the dot-com boom (1995–2000), over 168,000 new jobs were created in Santa Clara County—more than had been produced in the previous 15 years of a thriving electronics industry.⁷⁷ Arguing that there were insufficient American-born employees to fill these positions, Silicon Valley companies pressed Congress to raise the cap on H-1B visas and allocate a larger portion of those visas to high-tech employers. Their lobbying efforts proved effective.⁷⁸ In the first few decades of the program, Silicon Valley companies ranked among the nation’s top employers of visa holders, and computer-related occupations received the bulk of all H-1B visas.⁷⁹ In 1999, for example, 57% of all H-1B visas went to workers employed in information technology.⁸⁰

As more visas were granted, Silicon Valley began to use them to aggressively recruit skilled foreign-born workers. Some placed ads in overseas trade journals and newspapers announcing the availability of jobs and employer-sponsored visas.⁸¹ Indian and Chinese workers were the primary beneficiaries of these efforts. Between 1990 and 2010 Indian nationals, whose educational system shifted in the 1990s to train more highly educated engineers, dominated the ranks of recipients, receiving 46% of all visas.⁸² During the same period, émigrés from China came in a far second, receiving only about 6% of H-1B visas.⁸³

Asian immigrants profoundly transformed the face of high-tech work. Between 1990 and 2000, the percentage of foreign-born engineers in Santa Clara County rose from 33% to 53%. Among them, nearly 40% were of Asian descent.⁸⁴ Asian immigrants were not only hired by companies; they also launched new firms. Between 1995 and 2005, over half of all Silicon Valley companies had one or more immigrants as a key founder. Indian and Chinese immigrants founded nearly one-third of new high-tech firms during the period.⁸⁵ Thus, while many recognized that the integrated circuit (IC) fueled the valley's success, when locals referred to the region as "being built on ICs," they were oftentimes referencing the region's large number of Indian and Chinese immigrants, who were commonly described as the engines that drove the industry.⁸⁶

Immigration slowed during the dot-com bust in 2000 and the subsequent Great Recession. During these challenging times, many migrants were forced to return to their home countries, including many H-1B workers who were unable to remain in the United States without an employer sponsor. Immigration was further restricted by Congress's 2003 downgrade on new H-1B visas from a cap of 195,000 to the original 65,000.⁸⁷ With thriving technology sectors abroad—in places such as Bangalore, India; Chengdu and Dalian, China; and Hsinchu, Taiwan—many immigrants were also lured back to their home countries for better employment opportunities.⁸⁸ But even as Asian immigration rates slowed, the Asian American population in the valley rose. Between 2000 and 2010, the Asian American population in Santa Clara County increased by 32% to around 565,000.

Though they predominantly came from mainland China and India, the diversity among Asian immigrants in the region was striking, including many South Koreans, Filipinos, Pakistanis, Vietnamese, and Malaysians as well as Chinese and Indians from many different parts of the world. As Lisa Lowe argued, the abolishing of national origin quotas and exclusions that

began with the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 brought in many groups that widened the definition of “Asian American.”⁸⁹ By 2009, Fremont’s residents came from as many as 147 different countries and spoke over 150 different languages.⁹⁰ Irene Yang’s neighborhood is exemplary of such diversity, as it took shape in some of Fremont’s more well-to-do neighborhoods. Sitting in her custom-built house in the Mission San Jose hills, which she described as Frank Lloyd Wright–inspired with feng shui touches, Irene pointed out the diverse families who surrounded her. She counted one White family; two Indian families, one from India and the other from Pakistan; and six Chinese families, including those from Vietnam, Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and mainland China. Irene’s family also reflected this diversity. She was born in Taiwan but grew up in Japan and married a second-generation Chinese American. Held together by their class status, this potpourri became the norm in Silicon Valley neighborhoods by the first decade of the 21st century.

Diverse as they were, these newcomers shared one important similarity. They were far more likely than previous generations to regularly travel across the Pacific Rim for work and family. A 2002 study found that approximately half of all Silicon Valley foreign-born professionals traveled to their native countries for business yearly, and 5% made the trip five times or more per year.⁹¹ Among these, Taiwanese were the most likely nationality to return home on a regular or even permanent basis, followed by Indians and Chinese mainlanders.⁹² For many of these families, life was lived on both sides of the Pacific. Aiwah Ong describes late 20th-century globalization as producing generations of elite “hypermobile cosmopolitans” whose sense of citizenship has been grounded in their economic ties as much as, or even more so, than ethnic or national allegiances.⁹³ Among this generation of Silicon Valley newcomers, many found themselves at home both in the American suburbs and abroad. Their bicultural identities and transnational landscapes reflected their transpacific lifestyles.⁹⁴ As Wei Li put it, these global sojourners were as comfortable crossing oceans and countries as Main Street, USA.⁹⁵

The mobility of many Silicon Valley newcomers changed their pattern of sociability and community. It was increasingly common, Andrew Li noted, to find Taiwanese Americans who ran companies in which the manufacturing was done in China, their business headquarters were in Taiwan, and the family home was in Silicon Valley. Asian Americans’ frequent border crossings fostered important social networks, business ties, and familial connections that expanded their sense of place and home.⁹⁶ At the same time, they

also disrupted old social patterns. Comparing his friends' lives to previous generations of Taiwanese immigrants, Andrew explained that overseas travel had become such a regular part of their lifestyles that it was difficult to get people together, even for a weekend barbeque.

Among this class of global cosmopolitans, the North County suburbs served as important gateway communities, especially those that were already popular among the Asian American middle class such as Milpitas, Cupertino, and Fremont. Word of mouth and established connections reinforced these suburbs as popular immigrant destinations. This extended to Taiwan, India, and mainland China, where the zip codes of these suburbs were well known.⁹⁷ Ellie Cho, a second-generation Chinese American who was a young student at Mission San Jose High School in Fremont when we met, understood the importance of immigrant succession in affecting the decision of families such as hers to settle in Fremont. "Immigrants who are moving in America, they are thinking like, oh, where am I going to fit in?," she explained. "Where am I going to make a transition the easiest?" For her parents, she understood the answer to be clear: "In Fremont, [the] Bay Area, because there's so many Asians here already."

Not everyone came to Fremont with the intention of settling in an Asian American community, but many found the city's ethnic diversity and its now-established ethnic businesses and social institutions comfortable and convenient. This included Timothy Hu, an immigrant from Taiwan who had spent most of his life working in the American Midwest. He explained that during his three decades there, he always "felt like a minority." Upon retirement, he and his wife Doreen decided to move closer to their daughter and other family members who lived in the Bay Area. Having found a residential subdivision that was close to his daughter that Doreen liked and that had new homes (which both Timothy and Doreen wanted) and good feng shui, they settled in the Fremont hills. Quickly, their lifestyles began to change. As they were now located close to three major airports with direct flights to Asia, the Hus began making more frequent trips to mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, where they held important social and business connections. Within a 15-minute drive they could be at any one of four Asian shopping centers, where they frequently ate out at restaurants that Timothy claimed were far better than those in San Francisco's and Oakland's Chinatowns. Just down the road in Milpitas, his wife began frequenting a Chinese Buddhist temple that was located along the city's historic main street. Once a week, Timothy made a longer drive across the bay to Millbrae,

a suburb south of San Francisco, where he joined a Chinese opera club. While they had not planned on it, the Hus stayed in Fremont because they discovered that it was “good for Asians.” They had all the community and cultural amenities they desired. Just as important, living in a city where “everyone is a minority,” Timothy noted, he no longer felt like one himself.

With plenty of room for new residential, commercial, and office development, Asian American newcomers shaped the character of Fremont far more than in most Silicon Valley suburbs. For its growth between 1990 and 2000, Robert Lang and Jennifer LeFurgy ranked Fremont fourth among the nation’s “boomburbs,” cities with populations over 100,000 that were growing rapidly.⁹⁸ In the same study, Fremont ranked as the nation’s number one “cosmoburb” growing suburbs with particularly high numbers of foreign-born, highly educated residents, especially non-Hispanic Whites and Asian Americans.⁹⁹

By 2010, Fremont was the largest Asian American–majority city in Silicon Valley and, in fact, the largest majority Asian American municipality in the continental United States.¹⁰⁰ Known to many as “Little Taipei” and “Little India,” Fremont had become a popular meeting ground for successful young Asian Americans. Along with many other Silicon Valley suburbs, Fremont ranked among the wealthiest municipalities in the country, and among the city’s residents, Asian Americans were some of the most prosperous. In 2014, the American Community Survey estimated the median income of Asian Americans in Fremont to be nearly \$125,000, compared to around \$100,000 for the city as a whole.¹⁰¹ Asian American newcomers congregated in some of Fremont’s most prestigious neighborhoods, including Avalon, the 275-home gated community in which Timothy and Doreen lived and where homes regularly sold for upwards of \$2 million (Figure 5).¹⁰²

Fremont had become popular not only among Asian Americans working in high tech but also for high-tech businesses, especially those run by Asian Americans. Between 1990 and 2000, around 1,200 high-tech firms set up shop in Fremont.¹⁰³ According to former mayor Bob Wasserman, before the tech crash in 2000, the city had more high-tech headquarters than San Francisco.¹⁰⁴ That same year, it was also reportedly the most popular city in the United States for Taiwanese high-tech companies, with over 100 firms with connections to Taiwan.¹⁰⁵ Like many before them, companies that were relocating or expanding their operations from overseas found advantage in Fremont’s inexpensive industrial and warehouse space and strategic location within Silicon Valley. Increasingly, they were also attracted to the city’s easy

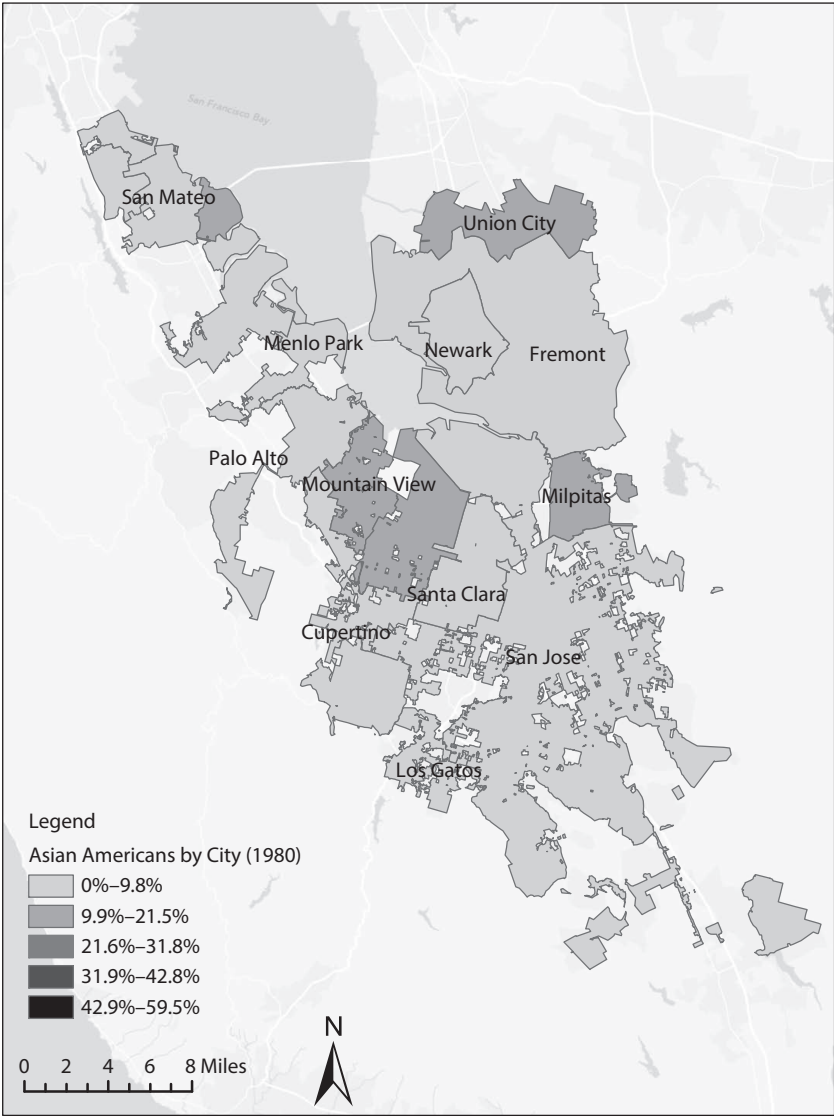


FIGURE 5. Inside the Avalon, one of Fremont's gated communities, signs of Asian Americans' presence are readily apparent in many homes. Photo by author.

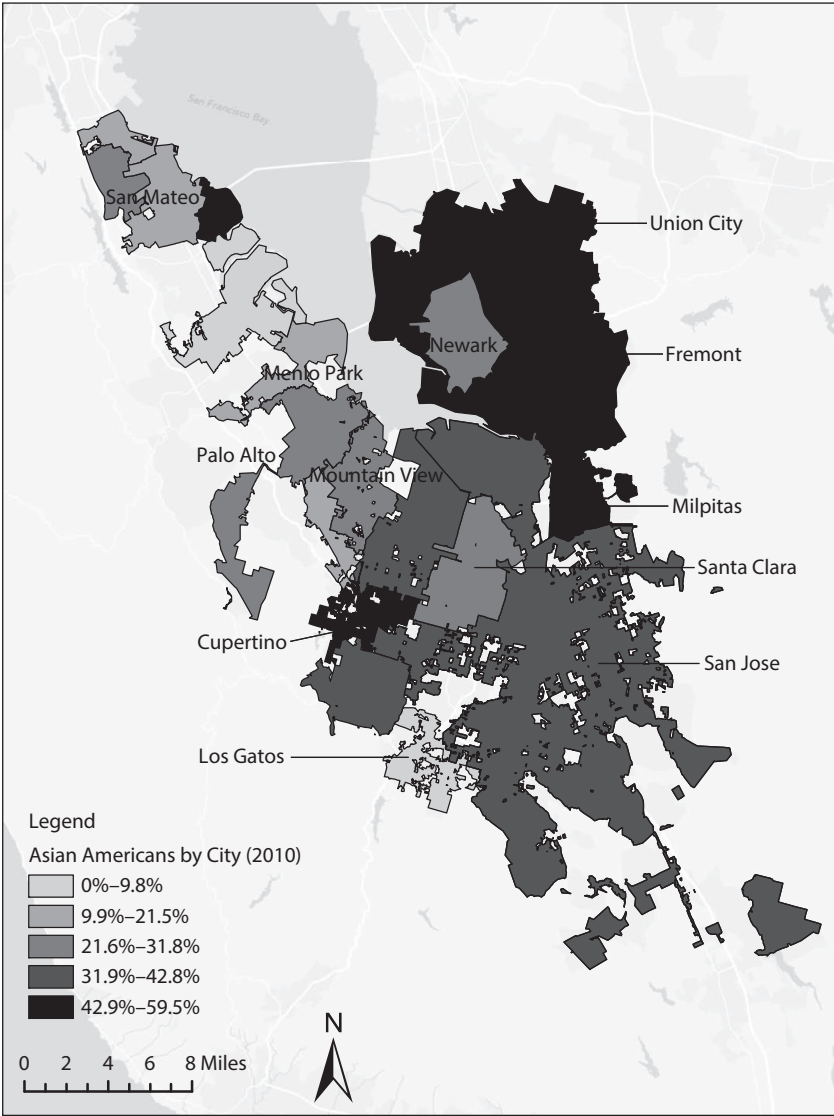
access to emerging Pacific Rim high-tech hubs and its growing population of highly skilled immigrants. To locate where the technology startups are the thickest, wrote Mark Hendricks, a writer for a blog run by American Express®, “Go west, young entrepreneur. When you reach Fremont, California, you’re there.” In 2012, the credit card giant reported that Fremont had more than 21 technology startups for every 100,000 people—a ratio that was nearly as much as the next three cities combined.¹⁰⁶

By 2010, the transformation of Silicon Valley from a landscape of cauliflower fields and White working- and middle-class suburban communities to the hub of Asian American life in northern California was complete. Nearly a half century of immigration had transformed once-fledgling Asian American destinations into mature immigrant gateways (Maps 2 and 3).

Between 2000 and 2010, while Santa Clara County's Asian American population grew by 140,000 to over 565,000, San Francisco County added only 28,000 new Asian American residents, with a population totaling less than half that of Santa Clara. By 2010, Santa Clara County had also eclipsed San Francisco in its percentage of foreign-born residents, 37% to 36%. As historian Margaret O'Mara observed, the rise of Silicon Valley resulted in a



MAP 2. In 1980, Asian Americans could be found in limited numbers throughout many Silicon Valley communities. Image by the author.



MAP 3. By 2010, the Asian American population in Silicon Valley exploded. Chinese Americans and Indian Americans, who tend to be employed as scientists and engineers in the valley, made up the bulk of new migrants, particularly in the region's middle-class suburbs such as Fremont. Image by author.

pattern of residents moving from the “suburbs in which they live to the suburbs in which they work.”¹⁰⁷ For a new generation of middle-class Asian Americans, the suburbs were the only America they knew or needed.

This new geography widened generational and ethnic divides among Asian Americans. Among Chinese Americans, while earlier generations of immigrants tended to concentrate in relatively poor urban enclaves, speak Cantonese, and hail from Hong Kong or China’s Guangdong Province, latter generations tended to live in middle-class Silicon Valley suburbs, speak Mandarin and fluent English, and come from major urban centers in Taiwan and mainland China. These two groups coexist but with very little social or professional interaction.¹⁰⁸ Whereas Asian Americans’ social isolation in suburbia once led them to find common cause with their urban counterparts, the geographic and social distance between generations increased the chasm to a gulf. While San Francisco and Oakland Chinatowns struggled to survive amid a long process of bleeding businesses and residents to the suburbs, Silicon Valley suburbs thrived as destinations for young professionals who had a far different sense of what it was to be Asian American.

The emergence of middle-class Silicon Valley suburbs such as Fremont also increasingly separated Asian Americans from African Americans and Latinos, who had not suburbanized at the same rates. When they did, these groups tended to live in more working-class suburbs farther from the Silicon Valley core. By 2010, African Americans comprised 3% and Latinos about 15% of Fremont’s population. Asian Americans were learning to build community in more diverse neighborhoods than many had left behind in Bay Area urban centers and the countries from which they hailed, and certainly more so than the waves of White Americans who had moved to the suburbs before them. But their suburban communities were also more diverse ethnically than racially and more so racially than economically. The diversity that had come to characterize Silicon Valley softened the racial and class lines that had once defined cities and suburbs but, at the same time, also signaled the creation of more complex spatial and social geographies *within* suburbia.

. . .

The path to the New Gold Mountain, like the old, has been littered with stumbling blocks and stop signs. Prior to 1965, Asian Americans’ struggles in Silicon Valley were defined primarily by their efforts to find permanence and

avoid the threat of displacement. They toiled on the land, seeking through their labor to legitimate their claims to it. But they were constantly threatened by their tenuous legal status as citizens and property owners. For civil rights–era Asian Americans, hard-won battles settled many legal questions, but their status as suburbanites was still widely questioned. They lived in constant tension with neighbors who openly fought for communities that did not include them. Excluded from one suburban dream, Asian Americans began to carve out another.

It was not until the birth of high-tech industry in Santa Clara Valley that Asian Americans' claims to the region finally seemed settled. Among this generation, their challenge was to build homes and communities in suburbs that had not yet established a comfortable place for people like them. They did so at a time of great dynamism, when waves of immigrants with little resemblance to those who had come in previous decades were flooding into the region. More likely upwardly mobile, educated, and professional, these migrants brought their own American Dream with them. Together they started restaurants, travel companies, banks, real estate firms, language schools, ethnic newspapers, and cultural and religious institutions. This generation was no longer fighting *for* suburbia; they were building it anew.

Today, Asian Americans are moving into Silicon Valley suburbs in which they are in the majority and where the landscape is beginning to affirm their desired lifestyles. Chinese and Indian Americans now dominate the engineering and research sector of high-tech firms, and many have broken through the infamous “bamboo ceiling” to enter positions in management and launch their own firms.¹⁰⁹ Shopping malls, restaurants, and stores catering to the needs and desires of Asian Americans abound. Asian American students are in the majority at many of the region's top-performing schools. They now live in some of the valley's most exclusive neighborhoods and, in general, feel far less pressure than previous generations to shed their ethnic identities and customs during their move to the suburbs.¹¹⁰

Asian Americans' inclusion in suburban life, however, has never been on equal terms to that of White Americans, nor has it been complete.¹¹¹ As the remaining chapters make clear, despite their many advantages, Asian Americans are still fighting to make the valley their home and for broader recognition of their rights as suburbanites. Just as Japanese American tenant farmers once hoped to put down roots and leave their mark on the land upon which they worked and raised their families, so too are today's Silicon Valley migrants. Their challenge is to build communities that reflect their identities,

broad geographic ties, mobile lifestyles, extended social and familial networks, and everyday social and cultural practices. They struggle with how to express their dreams in a suburban landscape precast for a different set of dreamers. Their battles are not fought on the streets or with neighbors openly hostile to their presence and instead are waged more quietly in city council meetings, with planning commissions, in development reviews hearings, in school board meetings, at parent-teacher conferences, and over the white picket fences of their well-manicured lawns.

Undoubtedly one of the arenas in which Asian Americans' pursuit of their suburban dreams have been the most rigorously pursued and hotly contested has been local schools. In the next chapter, I explore how the premium that Chinese Americans and Indian Americans have often placed on enrolling their children in high-performing schools has reshaped Silicon Valley neighborhoods, Fremont city politics, and the lives of Asian American youths. The chapter shows how the changing racial and ethnic composition of some of the region's most competitive schools has raised tough questions about what constitutes a quality education and equitable schools in Silicon Valley's diverse suburbs.