

Introduction

Home to Disneyland, beautiful beaches, neo-Nazis, decadent housewives, and the modern-day Republican Party: this is Orange County, California, in the American popular imagination. Home to civil rights heroes, LGBTQ victories, Indigenous persistence, labor movements, and an electorate that has recently turned blue: this is the Orange County, California, that lies beneath the pop cultural representation, too little examined even by locals.

First advertised on orange crate labels as a golden space of labor-free abundance, then promoted through the reassuring leisure of the Happiest Place on Earth, and most recently showcased in television portraits of the area's hypercapitalism, Orange County also contains a surprisingly diverse and discordant past that has consequences for the present. Alongside its paved-over orange

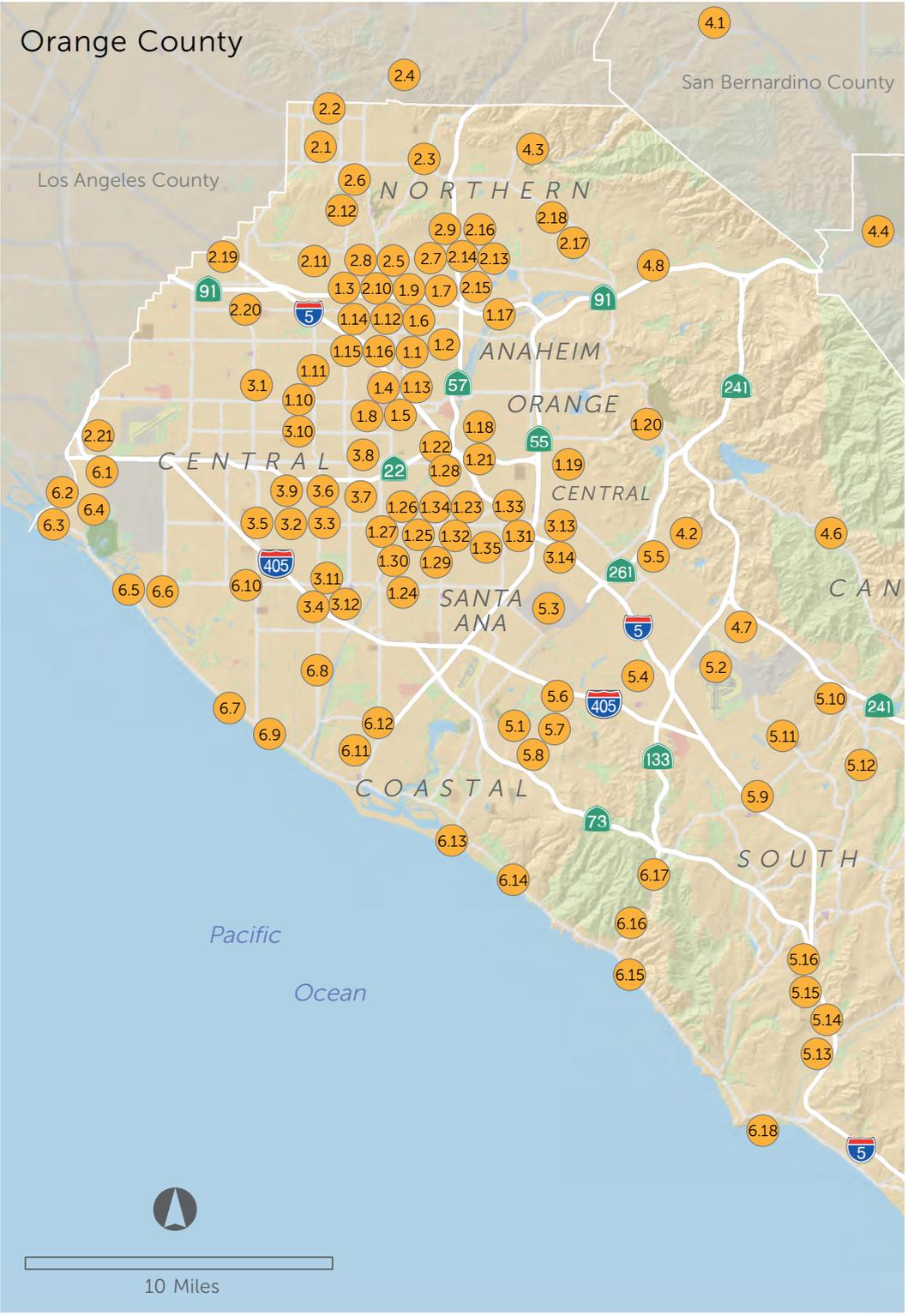
groves, amusement parks, and malls, it is a place where people have resisted segregation, struggled for public spaces, created vibrant youth cultures, and launched long-lasting movements for environmental justice and against police brutality.

Memorably, Ronald Reagan called Orange County the place "where all the good Republicans go to die," but it is also a space where many working-class immigrants have come to live and work in its agricultural, military-industrial, and tourist service economies. While it is widely recognized for incubating national conservative politics during the Cold War, recently the legacy of Cold War global migrations has helped this county tilt Democratic, in a shift that has national consequences. It is a county whose complexities are worth paying attention to.

Every day, thousands of people drive past Panhe at the southern Orange County border without knowing that it is there. A village thousands of years old, where the Acjachemem Nation of Indigenous people

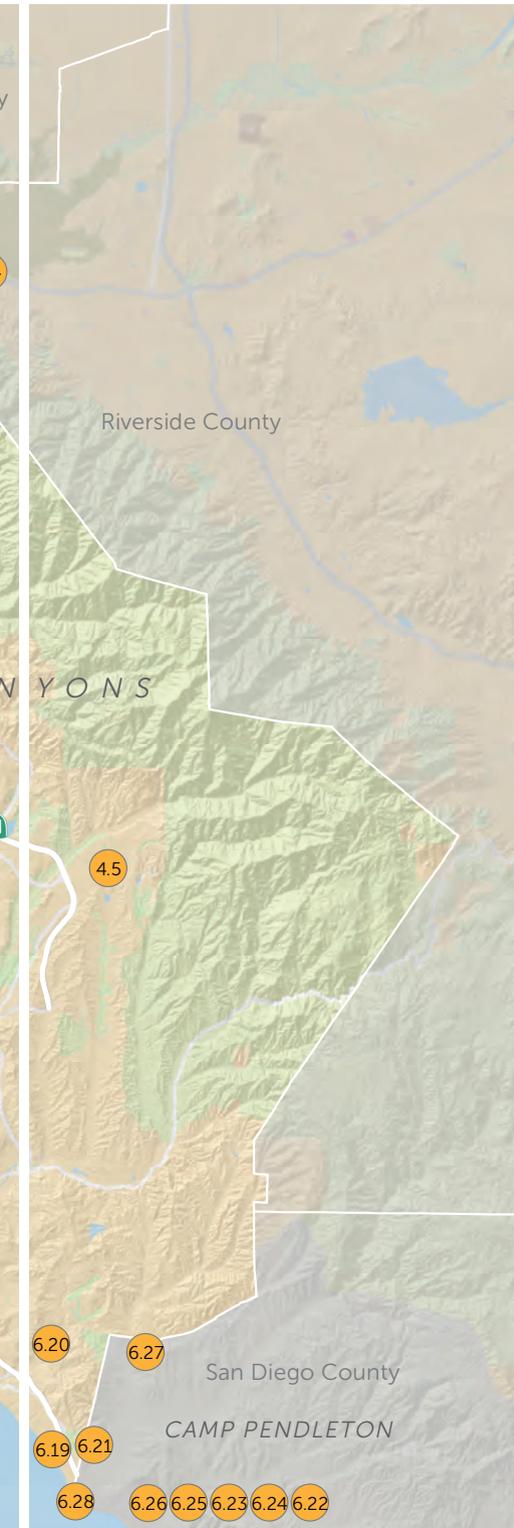
(Detail) Women working on an assembly line at the Central Lemon Association in Orange, in 1930.

Orange County



still gather regularly, Panhe is visible from the 5 freeway if you know where to look. Nearby, a few miles inland from Panhe, is the Capistrano Test Site, where President Ronald Reagan’s “Star Wars” program of laser missiles was secretly developed in the 1980s until its weapons of mass destruction were exposed by a brush fire. Both sites are reminders of the long, varied, and little-known history of Orange County, from an Indigenous village to a military-industrial laboratory. This book aims to reveal that diverse range of Orange County’s past and present, exposing stories that are too often forgotten.

Orange County is the fifth-most-populous county in the United States. If it were a city, it would be the nation’s third-largest. If it were a state, its population would make it larger than twenty other states, larger than Iowa or Nevada, larger than New Hampshire and Montana combined. Political scientist Karl Lamb declared in his 1976 book of the same name that “As Orange Goes,” so goes the nation, but it was not quite clear where Orange County was going in 1976 or, indeed, where it is going today. As queer studies theorist Karen Tongson explains: “Orange County is at once a conservative hotbed, an immigration hot zone, and a suburban fantasyland of modern amusement . . . a site of oscillation [between] provincialism and cosmopolitanism,” veering also between frontier nostalgia and postmodern sunbelt sprawl. Its Cold War growth, its supposed exceptionalism, and its separation from Los Angeles County have all earned it the descriptor of being “behind the Orange



Curtain,” but Tongson argues that looking and listening behind the Orange Curtain reveal a “mess and cacophony” that would shock Walt Disney, with his famed commitment to orderly control. It is the tangled stories and unlikely alliances that make Orange County such an intriguing and pivotal place, and those stories are the focus of this book.

Annually, forty-two million tourists visit here, but Orange County tends to be a chapter or two squeezed into guidebooks centered on Los Angeles. Mainstream guides direct tourists to Orange County’s amusement parks and wealthy coastal communities, with side trips to palatial shopping malls—the same landscapes that have long dominated popular knowledge of the region. If you have three days here, spend two of them at Disneyland and the third visiting shops, spas, or Knott’s Berry Farm, according to the Lonely Planet’s *Los Angeles, San Diego, and Southern California* guide. Careful readers may notice that some guidebooks also note the presence of Little Saigon, the shuttered conservative megachurch Crystal Cathedral, the quaint revivalism of Old Towne Orange, and the sentimentalized nostalgia of Mission San Juan Capistrano, but even in the longest guidebook, *Insider’s Guide to Orange County*, one must search for sites to visit away from Orange County’s predominantly wealthy, largely white coast. It is only *The Insider’s Guide* chapter on “Relocations” that mentions that those who cannot afford to spend millions on housing might need to live in the inland portions of this county. Of the guides for tourists, only the *Lonely Planet* recommends any

We have experienced tremendous loss of our sacred sites. In the 1920s people were encouraged to dig up ancient graves and funerary items across Orange County. In recent times Junípero Serra High School was built on our mother village, Putuidhem. Acjachemen people have experienced a terrible loss of sacred and ceremonial sites throughout the years. These sites are very precious and need to be protected. These are our last remaining power places. They are sanctified lands.

—Rebecca Robles, Acjachemen elder and culture-bearer, codirector of United Coalition to Protect Panhe, and codirector of Friends of Puvungna

sites in the half of the county north of the 5 freeway, and then only two: the Richard Nixon Library in Yorba Linda and Glen Ivy Hot Springs, a popular Southern California resort that is, oddly, across a mountain range and in another county entirely.

Tourists who rely on these guidebooks do not get to see Orange County’s most heterogeneous half, the northern and inland spaces where, in the county’s first half century, the vast majority of oranges were grown alongside oil derricks, herds of sheep, and groves of loquats and lemons. Now many of the wealthy suburbanites of southern Orange County depend on service sector workers who live in northern Orange County or beyond, often forced into long commutes by the high costs of housing closer to the coast. Orange County is not simply the wealthy “California Riviera” that Fodor’s *Los Angeles with Disneyland* claims it is—and even the Riviera requires workers who merit attention.

Geographically, Orange County is a wide basin, stretching from the mountains at its eastern edge to the ocean at its west, situated between the powerful metropolitan regions of Los Angeles to the north and San Diego to the south. Many popular tourist guidebooks do not even name Orange County in their titles, instead referring to Los Angeles, San Diego, and Disneyland. The county's boundaries are two creeks—Coyote Creek to the north, which feeds into the San Gabriel River, and San Mateo Creek to the south—and Orange County itself centers on the broad floodplain of the Santa Ana River. Current-day residents may forget about these waterways as they drive along freeway overpasses above the concrete basins that contain intermittent water. Southern California is famous for forgetting its own past, but it also holds the archival records and memories to correct that widespread cultural amnesia, and the landscape itself still has stories to tell.

Although existing guidebooks minimize it, Orange County has a deep history. Human habitation of Southern California began more than nine thousand years ago, when Indigenous people thrived along Orange County's coast and rivers, foothills and mountains, as well as the Channel Islands nearby. The county is now full of sites associated with Native American people as well as ongoing, contemporary Indigenous activism. The Tongva people, whom Spanish missionaries called Gabrieliño, inhabited northern parts of present-day Orange County. The Acjachemem people, whom Spanish missionaries later referred to as Juaneño, were centered on San Juan

Capistrano. Their tribal networks reached far: both the Tongva and Acjachemem languages are part of the Uto-Aztecan family, which stretches from current-day Utah to Texas to central Mexico.

During the Spanish colonial era of 1769–1821, Indigenous people were dispossessed of much of their land, especially along the coastal plain, and the Spanish crown granted large tracts of land to Spanish settlers. The largest Spanish land grant in all of California, Rancho los Nietos, stretched from Whittier in Los Angeles County across Orange County to the Santa Ana River, covering a territory of three hundred thousand acres (today eighteen different towns), all presented to retired Spanish soldier Manuel Nieto. This grant was so vast that the San Gabriel Mission in Los Angeles contested its terms, claiming it encroached on mission land. Colonial courts did not mention that it also encroached on Indigenous land. In 1810, the Spanish king gifted another retired soldier, Jose Antonio Yorba, with Rancho Santiago de Santa Ana, stretching twenty-five miles along the southern side of the Santa Ana River, where Yorba had already been grazing cattle with his father-in-law. Those rancho cattle disrupted the environmental resources that the Acjachemem and Tongva people had relied on, increasingly pressuring Native people into coreced, unpaid labor in the missions. The enormous Spanish land grants and the colonial system of forced labor also set the stage for later rounds of land transfer and dispossession, shaping Orange County's ongoing disparities between rich and poor, owners and workers.

When Mexico gained its independence from Spain, after 1821, Rancho Los Nietos was broken into six smaller ranchos, and mission property was redistributed, with ongoing controversies over Indigenous land claims. Some Mexican settlers were given land in the northern foothills of present-day Orange County, slightly more modest grants the size of present-day cities. Larger ranches in southern Orange County were granted to the Sepulveda, Serrano, and Pico families and were also sold to newly arrived Anglo merchants like John Forster, Abel Stearns, and William Wolfskill, who became Mexican citizens in order to legally own land here. While Orange County contains the largest land grant in California, Rancho los Nietos, it also has the smallest, the Rios Adobe: a house lot of 7.7 acres in San Juan Capistrano, presented in 1843 to the Rios family, members of the Acjachemem Nation, who still live in the home their ancestors first built there in 1794.

US conquest in 1848 brought new land commission policies challenging the terms of Spanish and Mexican land grants, forcing the ranchos' owners to defend their land titles in expensive court cases. Anglo squatters, new taxes, lack of access to capital, and droughts all combined to force most of the earlier owners to sell their land. During the devastating droughts of 1862 and especially 1864, wheat crops wilted and thousands of starving cattle were driven in mercy killings off the cliffs into the ocean. Most of Orange County's land passed from Indigenous and Mexican American owners to Anglo ones. James Irvine, Lewis Moulton, Richard

O'Neill, and Dwight Whiting consolidated some of the earlier ranchos into their own vast landholdings for the next century.

In between the ranches, in the swamplier areas around the Santa Ana River as well as the foothills, Orange County also gave birth to utopian communities that challenged class hierarchies. Before it became a center of twentieth-century conservatism, many of Orange County's nineteenth-century European settlers were actually radicals taking advantage of cheap land that had been expropriated from Indigenous people and then Mexicans, where the Europeans could experiment with new societies. A cooperative colony of German wine makers founded Anaheim in 1857, relying on Chinese laborers. Polish artists also attempted a utopian society in Anaheim before moving in 1888 to Modjeska Canyon near Santiago Peak. So many Mormons and Methodists settled in the floodplain of the Santa Ana River, in present-day Garden Grove, Santa Ana, and Fountain Valley, that it was known as Gospel Swamp. Vegetarian spiritualists lived in Placentia from 1876 to 1923, near Quakers in Yorba Linda. Other Quakers settled in El Modena, while free-love socialists from the Oneida community established a colony in Santa Ana in the 1880s, gaining enough respectability to serve as the county's first judges. Few remember those early experimenters, but they were here.

The completion of transcontinental railway connections to Los Angeles in the 1880s helped connect Orange County agricultural products to national markets and encouraged a speculative land boom. Rising land

prices here increased political power among Orange County's landowners, who probably bribed the state legislature to allow them to secede from Los Angeles County in 1889. This county could have been called Grape, Celery, Walnut, or Lima Bean County, since those were the area's major crops at the time of secession, but boosters decided that the luxurious, exotic image of oranges would sell the most real estate. Eventually, the citrus industry grew so that Orange County did live up to its name. In 1893, citrus growers organized the Southern California Fruit Exchange, later renamed Sunkist, an oligarchical corporate organization that consolidated power across Southern California. Employing Native American, Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Mexican American, Dust Bowl, and Jamaican workers, the Sunkist corporation exercised tight managerial control over the diverse people who planted and harvested the orange groves. The conditions of labor were justified by growing ideas about racialization. As Japanese American farmer Abiko Kyutaro observed in the early twentieth century, California was "A wasted grassland / Turned to fertile fields by sweat / Of cultivation: / But I, made dry and fallow / By tolerating insults."

While Orange County's agribusinesses created a racialized workforce, they also marketed a vision of this state as a nearly labor-free paradise of abundantly productive land. Huntington Beach farmer Luther Henry Winters designed much of the California exhibit at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, bringing Orange County products to a wide audience. Fullerton's Charles Chapman

pioneered the use of orange-crate labels to market both oranges and Southern California. Few people of color ever appeared on these orange-crate labels, and when they did, it was either as servants, cast members in California's Spanish-fantasy past, or signifiers of nature. Enormously popular and widely circulated, orange-crate labels did not picture most of the transnational workers; nor did they show the oil derricks, the cyanide sprayers, the heavily patrolled fields, the vibrant cultural communities of "picker villages," or the labor protests that also emerged from Orange County's agribusiness.

World War II was a turning point for Orange County, as for much of California. Its strategic location, open space, fair weather, and political influence drew the Santa Ana Army Air Base, the Seal Beach Naval Weapons Station, and Marine Corps air stations in Tustin and El Toro, as well as Camp Pendleton just over the border in San Diego County, which brought in military personnel as well as defense-related industries. The military presence here enabled new employment opportunities, especially for Orange County's Indigenous people and African American people.

After 1945, Cold War federal defense spending led to sprawling growth centered on a military-industrial and service economy, in a pattern of expansion repeated across the Sunbelt South and West. The Department of Defense budget ballooned in the 1950s to \$228 billion, including \$50 billion to California alone, more than any other state, and most of that sum went to Orange County and its neighboring counties. By 1960,

the county contained thirty-one thousand workers in defense-related industries, including Hughes Aircraft, American Electronics, and Beckman Instruments in Fullerton, Autonetics and Nortronics in Anaheim, Collins Defense Communications / Rockwell International in Santa Ana, Lockheed Martin in Irvine, and Ford Aeronutronics in Newport Beach. Related industries, from fast food to real estate development, followed. Construction of the I-5 freeway, connecting Los Angeles to Santa Ana to San Diego in the 1950s, further spurred business and residential growth. The county's population increased nearly fourfold from 113,760 in 1940 to 703,925 in 1960, then doubled again to 1.5 million by 1970 and doubled again to more than 3 million today.

That disorienting, sudden growth and the lack of traditional town centers in postwar suburbia converged with the individualist philosophies of earlier ranch owners and right-wing local media, so that many of Orange County's Cold War migrants eventually found ideals of community and tradition within new megachurches and a new strain of conservative politics that took root in Orange County's postwar tract housing. Suspicious of federal power even though dependent on it, a grassroots cadre of mostly female Orange County conservative activists spread their political message at coffees and backyard barbecues, organized "Freedom Forum" bookstores, served on local school boards, and pressured the local Republican Party in ways that eventually reoriented conservatism in America as they

advocated for the elections of Goldwater, Nixon, and Reagan.

Philip K. Dick found postwar Orange County an ideal space from which to write dystopian science fiction, including in his classic *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, later filmed as *Blade Runner*. Dick describes this space memorably in *A Scanner Darkly* (1977) when his disillusioned narrator observes: "Life in Anaheim, California, was a commercial for itself, endlessly replayed. Nothing changed; it just spread out farther and farther in the form of neon ooze. What there was always more of had been congealed into permanence long ago, as if the automatic factory that cranked out these objects had jammed in the *on* position. How the land became plastic." Despite that vivid and often-apt description, the tract homes and mini-malls of Orange County do change and are also contested.

In the decades after 1945, Orange County became a leader of privatization, developing the nation's first planned gated community, one of the first age-segregated retirement communities, the first homeowners' associations, and the first privatized toll road. Along with the enclosure of newly privatized residential communities and roads went increasing construction of carceral spaces, from local jails to a military brig and an international border checkpoint. Yet conservative politics, privatization, and enclosure are not the only stories here. Environmental and Indigenous activists waged decades-long movements, eventually achieving the preservation of Bolsa Chica Wetlands in 1989, the shuttering of the San Onofre Nuclear Gen-

erating Station in 2013, and the defeat of a proposed privatized toll road at Trestles surf spot in 2016.

Even before those environmentalist successes, local people of color allied with civil rights organizations to bring pathbreaking lawsuits here: housing covenant case *Doss v. Bernal* (1942), school desegregation case *Mendez et al. v. Westminster* (1946), and housing desegregation case *Reitman v. Mulkey* (1967). That resistance came at a steep cost: too many of this county's midcentury radicals died young from stress-related illnesses. Nevertheless, their achievements belie the county's well-earned reputation for conservative politics, which grew from the prominence of the extremist John Birch Society in the 1960s through the antigay Briggs Initiative of 1978 and the anti-immigrant Proposition 187 campaign that originated here in the 1990s.

Many of the stories in this book are contrapuntal ones, as this county often contains the seeds of its own oppositional movements. This area that boosters advertised as a white rancher's paradise relied on transnational workers on Indigenous land claimed by successive waves of colonizers: Spain, Mexico, and then the United States. The Sunkist corporation promoted strict capitalism for workers but a sort of socialism for owners, as they pooled their resources collectively. The postwar military-industrial complex here fueled much of the county's conservatism, but it was those same large aerospace and electronic corporations that first employed minority workers here in anything other than menial or agricultural

jobs, partly to meet federal antidiscrimination requirements. Orange County's megachurches led some of its conservative activism, but faith-based organizations have also made this a center for international refugees who have brought their own wide range of politics. The military presence here encouraged some of Orange County's conservatism, but it was also military personnel who desegregated much of this county and created openings for LGBTQ individuals to express themselves.

Academic observers debate whether Orange County's thirty-four cities are an enormous suburb or a multinucleated post-suburban space, where housing is interspersed with extensive retail and light industry, while some agriculture and military uses remain alongside neighborhoods that range from working class to ultraelite. Orange County is both its suburban image *and* the cracks in its own veneer. Orange County also contains more than a dozen unincorporated communities. Some of these are remote canyon areas such as Modjeska, Santiago, Silverado, and Trabuco Canyons. Others are wealthy regions on the coast as well as in the foothills—Coto de Caza, Cowan Heights, Capistrano Beach, Ladera Ranch, Lemon Heights, and Rossmoor—where powerful people prefer to create their own privatized governance. Other unincorporated areas are the former colonias of Mexican American citrus workers. In Colonia Independencia between Anaheim and Garden Grove, El Modena near Tustin, and Olive in Orange, generations of mostly Latinx residents have planted their own

parks and operated their own water districts. Some residents now question whether it is worth preserving their underserved independence and whether it would be better to allow themselves to be absorbed into nearby cities.

In coastal South County, Laguna Beach's art scene attracted famous gay bars and enabled the first openly gay mayor in California, but it was in North County, in a space that had recently held small dairy farms and strawberry patches, that even more gay bars flourished, as community entrepreneurs found opportunities in an overlooked space with affordable rents. Eventually, international refugees also settled in pockets of cheaper land that others had not wanted in Westminster and its modest neighboring communities, establishing Little Saigon, Little Arabia, Koreatown, and enclaves of Filipinos, Armenians, Cambodians, and Romanians in Orange County.

In 2004, the US Census Bureau announced that Orange County had become majority minority: more than 50 percent of its residents were people of color, a trend that has continued its upward trajectory so that in 2019, 60 percent of the county was not white. The county's steadily increasing racial diversity is a legacy of its role in the Cold War as well as a result of its location near the US-Mexico border and its role as an important hub in the Asian-Pacific economy. Orange County holds the largest Vietnamese community outside Vietnam and for years contained the largest city in the United States with an all-Latinx city council.

The Orange County Visitors Association advertises this county as a space for "family-friendly fun . . . a taste of the good life" and "the real California dream." That pervasive image of California leisure has a global appeal, inspiring an "Orange County" gated community outside Beijing, as well as two "Orange County" luxury resorts in India. Orange County's image is global because Orange County itself is global. In the 1980s, Newport Beach was the first place in the US outside Washington, D.C., to have an export-licensing office. The county's seat, Santa Ana, is overwhelmingly Latinx, while other cities across the county, from La Palma to Irvine, are majority or near-majority Asian. It may be one of the few counties in the United States where most Starbucks baristas can correctly spell and pronounce the name of one of our coauthors, Thuy. It is also the county where the coauthor whose family has been here the longest, Gustavo, is the one most often mislabeled as an immigrant. It is a varied and contradictory place of multicultural borderlands and economic struggles rooted in geography, history, and politics.

Genevieve Carpio, Wendy Cheng, Juan de Lara, Romeo Guzman, and Carribean Fragoza have all recently published thoughtful works recentering the margins of Southern California studies. As Carpio observes, an "Anglo fantasy past" has suffused much heritage tourism in Southern California, showcasing Anglo pioneers while obscuring the nonwhites who have also been here all along. Indigenous, Asian, and Latinx people have been part of Orange County since its beginnings as a county. During the