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Columnists

Lotteries

City Guides

Government Guide

Talk Today

Money

Sports

Life

Tech

Weather



Page 1A

'New Brooklyns' replace white suburbs Anaheim, other cities reshaped by immigration wave

By Rick Hampson
USA TODAY

ANAHEIM, Calif. -- One day in the early 1950s, Walt Disney pulled his car onto the new freeway running south from Los Angeles and drove until he came to a village surrounded by orange groves. Here he decided to build "the happiest place in the world" -- Disneyland.

Over the next three decades, the community that grew up outside the park became as much a refuge from reality as anything inside it. People moved here to escape the crime, congestion or complexion of Los Angeles. Very conservative and very white, Anaheim epitomized the bland bedroom suburb where nothing ever happened and no one wanted it to.

Today, however, Anaheim has changed into something even Disney never imagined: a sprawling yet congested city with more people than Cincinnati, only a third of them Anglo. It is represented in Congress by a female Democrat named Sanchez and filled with people who weren't born in the USA and don't pray, curse or gossip in English.

In its diversity, its growth -- even the chip on its shoulder -- Anaheim is "the new Brooklyn," says Robert Lang, director of the Metropolitan Institute at Virginia Tech.

It's not the only one. A whole class of traditional, white-bread suburb has turned into a new kind of city that helps reshape the nation by effectively importing immigrants and exporting native-born residents. The latter move to communities farther out on the metropolitan periphery, contributing to sprawl.

In Anaheim, for example, whites are steadily giving way to large, poor, hard-working immigrant families -- much like the ones who settled in Brooklyn a century ago and helped to make it famously diverse and vibrant.

There's no official definition of the New Brooklyns. But here are some common characteristics:

* **They are surprisingly large** -- more than 100,000 residents. Santa Ana, Calif. (population 338,000 in 2000) and Anaheim (328,000), which anchor Orange County south of Los Angeles, are more populous than such traditional big cities as Cincinnati (331,000), Buffalo (293,000) and Newark (274,000).

* **They're fast growing**, with population increases of at least 10% in each decade since being classified "urban" by the Census Bureau. Moreno Valley, Calif.



(population 142,000) wasn't even incorporated until 1990. But it already has more people than Bridgeport, the largest city in Connecticut, and its population is expected to double in 20 years. Pembroke Pines, Fla., grew 110% between 1990 and 2000 to 137,000 residents, making it the fastest growing New Brooklyn.

* **They are racially and ethnically diverse.** The percentage of residents who are foreign-born or speak a language other than English at home far exceeds the national rates (11% and 18% respectively). Three quarters of the residents of Hialeah, Fla., were born outside the USA, and nine in 10 don't speak English at home. That out-Brooklyns even Brooklyn, where in the last Census 38% of the residents were foreign-born and 47% didn't speak English at home.

Ethnic diversity usually is associated with large cities of the Northeast, not the suburbs of the Sun Belt. But the New Brooklyns turn this assumption on its head: Compare Fremont, Calif. (37% foreign-born) and Coral Springs, Fla. (21%) with cities such as Cleveland (5%) and Pittsburgh (6%).

Although the New Brooklyns were once new settlements on the suburban frontier, they're getting old. Their housing, accordingly, is more attractive to immigrants looking for bargains and less attractive to longtime residents who can afford to trade up.

Sometimes, though, there is friction between newcomers and old-timers. In Irving, Texas, a member of the parks board created a stir last year when she claimed the rise in immigrants was "killing this city." Some New Brooklyns have been slow to adjust to the changes. Although three quarters of the residents of Santa Ana are Latino, less than a quarter of the municipal library books are in Spanish. Pembroke Pines, which is more than a quarter Hispanic, did not appoint its first Hispanic police sergeant until last November.

* **They're not No. 1.** At least one other community in the metro area is larger and better-known. Chula Vista, Calif. (population 174,000) is the same size as Providence, R.I., or Knoxville, Tenn., but is dwarfed by neighboring San Diego. Anaheim, larger than 32 of the 50 state capitals, is just another town in the vast Los Angeles area.

* **They get no respect.** It's another characteristic they share with the original Brooklyn, which was looked down on by haute Manhattan for its strange accent, odd foods and lowbrow enthusiasms. The New Brooklyns are often unknown, underrated or misunderstood. Lang calls them "stealth Brooklyns" -- more populous, more diverse and more happening than commonly thought.

Anaheim suffers from this kind of image problem. It has become the opposite of the homogeneous, xenophobic community its critics detested. It has a Boeing facility, a larger convention center than Los Angeles, San Francisco or Seattle and two major league sports teams -- baseball's world champion Angels and the National Hockey League's Mighty Ducks, who are in the Stanley Cup finals. Still, Mayor Curt Pringle complained this year that "Anaheim hasn't gotten its due."

During the World Series last fall, a newspaper columnist explained the difference between the two host cities: San Francisco has everything but parking, he wrote; Anaheim has nothing but parking. Mayor Willie Brown said he wished his Giants were facing the Yankees: "Can you imagine the embarrassment if we lose to *Anaheim*?" When the Angels beat the Giants to win their first World Series, Pringle's predecessor, Tom Daly, called it "redemption day."

There was much to be redeemed.

Founded in the mid-19th century by German winemakers, the community by 1924 had fallen under the sway of the Ku Klux Klan, which secretly gained control of the city council. People started calling the town "Klananaheim" -- a tag that stuck even after the council members were ousted.

Disneyland, which opened in 1955, transformed Anaheim's economy far more than its outlook. The city became a bastion of the arch-conservative John Birch Society and a favored destination of Angelenos fleeing urban crime and congestion. Meanwhile, Disney kept drawing more tourists, which meant more workers were needed to clean the park and make the hotel beds. Most of them were not Anglos.

Anaheim became a hotbed of anti-immigrant sentiment. City voters supported state ballot initiatives to make English the official state language and deny children of illegal immigrants access to schools.

But Anaheim kept changing. Between 1990 and 2000 the Anglo population dropped by nearly 25%, and the Latino population nearly doubled. In 1996, Rep. Robert Dornan, one of the most conservative Republicans in Congress, was defeated by Democrat Loretta Sanchez, who a few years earlier couldn't even get elected to the Anaheim city council.

Today Anaheim is about half Latino, a tenth Asian and about a third Anglo. Its people speak more than 60 languages, and one study concluded that the city has more integrated and diverse neighborhoods than Los Angeles.

"You just get used to everybody being different than you," says Meghan Shigo, 26, a real estate agent who lives with her husband and baby in a 1923 Mission-style home in Anaheim's historic Colony District. "Some people don't like it, but I do."

In the older working-class neighborhoods, cars are parked bumper-to-bumper along the curb; a bicyclist is as apt to be a man riding to work as a kid at play; large extended families spill out of small, aging houses onto sagging front porches and into dusty yards.

These neighborhoods seem to get more crowded by the day. The city's average household size (3.34 people) is 29% higher than the national average, and the percentage of families with children under 18 is a third higher. People are poor but generally hard-working. For example, 75% of students at Anaheim High School, one of eight that serve the city, are eligible for school lunch aid, but only 6% of the school's families are on welfare.

Jorge Solares, 34, an immigrant from Guatemala, moved here from Los Angeles for reasons the settlers of the 1960s would understand: He wanted to get away from gang violence and airport noise. He likes it here, even though he wasted thousands of dollars putting stucco on the bungalow he bought in the historic neighborhood where the town was first settled. His new neighbors informed him that stucco, a fixture in Latino architectural styles, was not appropriate. He agreed to strip it off. "That's how they do things here," he says. "So I go along. It's still better than L.A."

Not everyone is so enthusiastic. Ellen Lavalley, 42, who lives less than a mile from Solares, said she will soon move to one of the newer desert communities to the east. "It's gotten too crowded here -- too many people on the street, too much

noise," she said.

Although Latinos still are far less likely to register or vote than Anglos, the city's demographic changes have been reflected in politics. Last November, voters for the first time elected two Latinos to the five-person city council. And this week, the Angels pass into new ownership when Latino businessman Arturo Moreno becomes the first minority with a controlling stake in a major league baseball franchise.

When Disney's Tower of Terror thrill ride opens later this year, those who ride to the top will, for a few seconds before they plunge back toward earth, look out on the great panorama of Anaheim, the new city of Angels. But they won't see any sign of the village that once charmed Walt Disney.

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