Oil and the California Mix (Harvey Molotch)

[*Dr. Molotch's presentation was based on the following paper, co-authored with William Freudenberg (University of Wisconsin, Madison) and Kristen Paulsen (University of California, Santa Barbara.)*]

History Repeats Itself, but How?

City Character, Urban Tradition, and the Accomplishment of Place

by

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Abstract

We strive to rescue the otherwise vague ideas of local character and tradition for use in concrete analysis and empirical investigation. In tracing how the same outside forces had different consequences on two urban areas, we show how character and tradition operate as both cause and consequence of place difference. Even as places change “on the surface,” they can remain the same, and different from one another, in terms of the distinctive ways their diverse elements like organizations, politics, and hardware mutually determine one another’s nature. Modes of conjuncture provide individual actors and groups with the available materials to constitute place in much the same way as it was before. We use theoretical advances in thinking about structure to understand place continuity and the power arrangements that create difficulties in generating basic change. We propose our exercise as methodologically useful for other efforts to understand local history and perhaps organizational life more generally.

History Repeats Itself, but How?

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We try to explain two interlinked facets of cities and regions: distinction and reproduction. Especially in contexts like the U.S., where a lack of “ancient roots” make place character or tradition something other than self-evident, there is need to investigate how place variations can nevertheless take hold and persist. By place variation, we mean differences not across one particular variable or another, but the idea that places vary in more holistic ways, akin even to personality differences at the individual level. Recent concern that globalization homogenizes cities adds timeliness to our examination of how place differentiation can occur.

Social science inherits only incomplete tools for understanding the distinctiveness of place, if it does not ignore the issue altogether. Typologies of cities and regions, whether based on quantitative indicators or qualitative commentaries, tend to rely on economistic characterizations—“manufacturing center,” “port town,” or, in more recent formulations, “global city” or “innovation center.” Sometimes subsumed into these categories are accompanying sociodemographic attributes like “working class town,” “elite bastion,” or “affluent suburb.” Such characterizations also tend to be temporally limited; they are snapshots, or at best a time-series of snapshots.

But more than half a century ago, Walter Firey (1945) offered an antidote based on studies of various Boston locales. He insisted that the economistic determinism then prevalent among the human ecologists was insufficient for explaining urban patterns; “sentiment and symbolism” also had to be taken into

account as “ecological variables.” Despite such a prescient lead and sociologists’ current enthusiasm for cultural difference as counting in social life, Firey’s concerns have only hesitantly been allowed to enter urban analysis. True, numbers of scholars now document the importance of cultural features for local development (Amin and Thrift, 1992; Lash and Urry, 1994; Storper, 1997; Zukin, 1995), but the analytic effort has not turned toward the detailed processes through which diverse aspects of place manage to permeate, cohere, and persist to make places different from one another.

To date, holistic characterizations have thus remained in the hands of poets, local boosters, and travel writers. For them, Paris is a “city of light” and Chicago has “broad shoulders.” Social scientists do recognize these imageries, in part because they know Chicago in something like the way Sandburg did—heavy industry, an enduring immigrant culture, a rough and tumble machine politics, some hard weather, and a certain open directness in routine life. But they apply such over-arching sensibilities primarily when they consider relocating or making travel plans, not in systematic efforts to understand just how diverse elements of urban settlement can cohere and persist. Reasonably enough, social scientists’ scholarly diffidence follows from their intellectual suspicion of the ineffable and essentialist imageries that notions like character or tradition seem to imply.

In general, Shils’s remark remains largely true that “the mechanism of recurrent self-reproduction is not sought” (Shils,1981: 7) and “the persistence of past practices is not taken up as something to be explained” (1981: 8). Suttles (1984: 284) advocated serious attention to the “cumulative texture” of locales, by which he meant cultural—as opposed to economic or material textures—but he did not go beyond the programmatic urging. Shils called explicitly for a study of “tradition” as the key, but he pressed an even more limited ideational orientation, restricting tradition to ideas, religion, literature, and symbols—the British coronation most famously—that could be used to mark off one social formation off from another. Not without justification, Raymond Williams (1995) saw this kind of tradition as mere “surface froth and evanescence;” Hobsbawm (1983) calls it ideological “invention,” in effect a hegemonic tool. While prompting elegant neo-Marxian studies (e.g. Maddox, 1993), the invention paradigm successfully debunks, but does not offer a different way of understanding how places may indeed differ.[i] Suspecting or even confirming ideological motives does not obviate the need to understand just how economic and cultural elements might bind and hold in distinctive ways.

Operating with a more benign attitude toward ideas as historic force, but working with empirical materials, Putnam explains contemporary differences among Italian regions as due to an ideational construct—whether or not they began, *in the fourteenth century*, with an “ethic of civic involvement, social responsibility, and mutual assistance.” For Putnam, “virtuous circles...preserved these traditions of civic engagement through centuries of radical social, economic and political change” (1993:135). Although substantively on a different track, Walton (1992)

also uses an ideational device to explain local distinctiveness. He finds a persistent sentiment of "resistance" in Southern California's Owens Valley, visible in Piute Indians' defiance of their colonizers, Anglo farmers' violent efforts to guard their water, and still more modern movements' efforts of self-determination. However important their contributions, neither Walton or Putnam focus on the detail of what Pred calls the "unbroken flow of local events" (1984: 280) that might indicate how a putative tradition at one point in time carries forward, and across material and ideational forces, into the next.

A number of theoretical contributions converge to offer assistance. From Giddens' notion of structuration, we can infer that those making history must respond to prior events and conditions, just as in enacting those very responses they instantiate the conditions for future action. Adapting Giddens to the study of place history, we can aspire to learn, in effect, how this process of structuration works differently across locales as people respond, over time, to distinctive surrounding spatial "fields" (Bourdieu, 1990). To draw in another complimentary strand of scholarship, structuration implies "path dependence" (Pred, 1984; Arthur, 1988), in which events at one time make those at a next proximate point more or less likely to occur—a version of reality at least implicit in various studies in human development, economics, and statistics (as in Markov chain analyses). Applied to the goal of understanding place, it means, as Pred put it (1984:281), learning "how any given time-space specific practice can simultaneously be rooted in past time-space situations and serve as the potential roots of future time-space situations."

Not all approaches to city and region would conform to this approach. Within the influential Marxian tradition, laden with economistic unfoldings and focus on revolution, achievement of persistence is less problematic than the conditions of radical change. Even though there is often acknowledgment of Braudel-like "conjuncture"[ii] among multiple forces, these are typically seen as economic forces, and arising from the outside. In contemporary world-system viewpoints, external capitalism penetrates at every turn; global finance and production systems enter the local in a more or less consistent way (but see Massey, 1994; also Morgan and Sayer, 1988:150). In some post-colonial critiques, homogenizing forces emanating from the cultural core are seen as taking over much of the world, albeit with the possibility of local resistance. In their "growth machine" focus on *internal* urban dynamics, Logan and Molotch (1987) tend toward a still different version of place homogeneity, in the form of local growth elites who almost everywhere shape political agendas in much the same way.

Granting such homogenizing forces as consequential, places can still respond to them differently. Local phenomena as diverse as artifacts and politics, nature and organizations, economy and sentiment, all enter in. The challenge is to understand how the resulting interaction operates to exemplify and reinforce place differences in the very process of drawing upon them. The need, put simply, is to explain how a trait moves across time or, more ambitiously, the way

a mode of conjuncture at one point constrains or enables a particular mode of conjuncture at the next.

A key starting point is that all identifiable durabilities—any thing or object—exist by virtue of the continuous actions that acknowledge, mobilize and hence secure them. In the framework of action-network theory, an accepted technology (like a train line) or scientific "fact" (like viruses cause disease), requires a complex "enrollment" of purposive allies, procedures, and hardware in "lash-up"[iii] or "fix" (Latour, 1986; 1996). An institution like classical music depends on a package of activities, organizations, and instruments , each of which presupposes the existence of the others. Actors changing one piece of the package risk the support of the larger material and institutional apparatus; the package thus contains inertial force, inhibiting change on the part of individual actors (Becker, 1995: 304). As Pickering puts it, the existence of a something is evidence that "disciplined human agency and captured material agency are... interactively stabilized" (Pickering, 1995:17; emphasis in original). In regard to places, by our definition, we can think of "character" as the distinctive way in which a place's elements mutually constitute one another at a given time, and "tradition" as the way this mode of interlinkage transposes itself from one time to the next.

In looking beyond surface characteristics, we parallel Sewell's distinction—which he uses for historical forces generally—of two types of phenomena often thought "structural." First, and here we return to the urban arena, are the kinds of attributes sociologists have so often noticed about cities: their occupational make-up, land-use configurations, levels of education and so forth. These change over time, as for example in the common shift from manufacturing toward service economies or the rise in environmental policies, to select two commonly noticed trends. But beneath, in Sewell's phrase, there is "a far more stable deep structure" (Sewell, 1992: 25). Without falling into the deep debates, whether of the Levi-Strauss, Chomsky or Hegelian variety, we observe that the *content* of activity may alter while *ways* of doing things persist. For us, the comings and goings of mundane attributes mask underlying continuities that give places their particular form because of differences in the way these otherwise common attributes operate; this is the realm of character and tradition.

How then do we make all this tractable as empirical research? A straightforward approach is to begin with urban areas that are quite similar in terms of standard sociodemographic indicators as well as other evident characteristics, and then examine the ways these places dealt with "outside" phenomena that came to both. As we will show, the search for underlying character and tradition—far from providing merely a poetic distraction—can prove fruitful in explaining the emergence of unmistakably different outcomes.

In the present paper, we focus on the two geographic locales of Santa Barbara and Ventura, California and follow the "career" of two exogenous forces as they came to both—oil development and a freeway. Besides attention to usual

economic and social variables, we have researched mechanisms we think are also heavily implicated in modes of self-replication: non-profit organizational contexts, and the way built environments, design elements, and consumption iconography enter in. By tracing in this way how, in each context, the same exogenous forces were dealt with, we can diagnose how two urban areas differ in the way they "digest" phenomena over which they have some at least partial control. The pattern of the response reveals, for us, the very nature of the places; it is our diagnostic tool for watching how the parts interact.

There are two things we are not doing. First, we are not following an agenda suggested by some versions of historical sociology (e.g. Griffin, 1993) that promote search for variables that cause place outcomes to be different. In structuration—as in other phenomenologically influenced fields—variable independence and dependence are lost in each other. Second, we are not trying to name traditions or develop new typologies based upon them; we leave open that task for others' efforts or ours at a later time. Instead, we strive toward a methodological contribution in the study of places by making more explicit the processes that yield them.

Santa Barbara and Ventura: Surface Similarities Vs. Deeper Difference

Located 60 and 90 miles, respectively, northwest of the city of Los Angeles (see Map 1), Ventura and Santa Barbara are both the government seats and historic centers of their counties of the same names. They have nearly identical and ideal climates, with little variation from the year-round average high of 70 degrees in Ventura and 72 in Santa Barbara. Both have low humidity and many days of sunshine (an annual average of 252 in Ventura and 308 in Santa Barbara; Seattle has 55 by comparison), and they support an extraordinary diversity of natural and exotic fauna and flora (e.g. oak, palm, eucalyptus, citrus, hibiscus, cacti). The adjacent ocean waters of the Santa Barbara Channel, on which both cities front, are protected by a shield of scenic offshore islands—served by recreational boat service from Ventura, which is closer. The Los Padres National Forest provides mountain backdrop to both places, although more visually dramatic from Santa Barbara. Both cities derive from early Spanish mission settlements that later became Anglo or "Yankee" towns; Santa Barbara ultimately incorporated in 1850, Ventura in 1866. Their hinterlands share a history of cattle ranching and citrus, with more diversified crops emerging later on. Although Santa Barbara had a 1925 earthquake unmatched in its destructive severity by any Ventura experience, the two places have otherwise been vulnerable to similar kinds of catastrophe, including periodic floods, droughts, and wildfires.

Map 1: Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties

In terms of standard indicators such as population and income, the two cities are similar as well, although Ventura has a somewhat larger population (97,000 vs. 87,000 in 1990). Ventura median family incomes are higher than in Santa Barbara ($46,361 vs. $40,912)—a surprise to those who confuse the notoriety of some very rich people in Santa Barbara and its suburbs with the city or county population as a whole.[iv] Santa Barbara's educational level, on the other hand, is somewhat above Ventura's (31.1 percent with a college degree in Santa Barbara, 24.6 percent in Ventura), meaning that if socioeconomic status is understood to involve a combination of education and income, the cities balance out closely. These standings, moreover, have been generally stable over recent decades (see Table 1). Per capita retail sales were also about equal, with one place taking the lead over the other depending on year. In 1989-90, for example, per capita sales (in 1983 dollars) were $11,632 for Santa Barbara and $11,935 for Ventura. For 1993-4, the order was reversed with Santa Barbara having slightly higher per capita sales at $9,246 compared to Ventura's $8,904 (the early 1990s recession battered both places). One difference is in minority population; while Hispanics are the largest minorities in both cities, the proportion in Santa Barbara (31.5 percent) was almost double that of Ventura in 1990 (17.6 percent)—a ratio that has also held roughly constant over the 1970–1990 period.

Table 1:
Comparative Socioeconomic Characteristics,
Ventura and Santa Barbara

		Ventura	Santa Barbara
Residents with 4-Year College Degree	1970	15.1%	18.1%
	1990	24.6%	33.1%
Median Family Income	1970	$11,552	$9,514
	1990	$46,361	$40,912

If we were to judge by standard indicators, in short, there would seem to be reason to expect these two cities to be virtually interchangeable. If we were to judge by almost any other accounts of the two, on the other hand, dissimilarity would be the more likely expectation. As a simplified overview, Santa Barbara is often seen as approximating development experts' pronouncements of a contemporary ideal—a "learning economy" on the forefront of information, technology, and leisure services (Sassen, 1991; Porter, 1990; Storper, 1997). In recognition of its emergence as a center of computer-based high-technology, many refer to it as "Silicon Beach."[v] In terms of consumption patterns that are said both to result from and to enhance such economic activities, Santa Barbara is a place of "advanced tastes," with dense offerings in design-rich goods and services—proclaimed by a *Los Angeles Times* style editor as one of the "hip spots." In terms of civic life, Santa Barbara's downtown has the kind of public space extolled by urban planners from Jane Jacobs to contemporary advocates of the "New Urbanism" who prize vibrant central cores of diverse uses (see e.g. Duany and Plater-Zyberk, 1991; Langdon, 1994.) Outside commentators tout Santa Barbara for its planning accomplishments along these lines including high levels of civic participation; planning consultants use video footage of its street life as a model for other cities to emulate.[vi] While hardly free of environmental problems such as traffic and pollution, as well as social problems found in most other parts of the United States, Santa Barbara has enough relative advantages on at least some dimensions to have attracted wide notice.

With a lesser amount of external adulation and atmospheric preciousness, Ventura's story has produced less fulsome accounts. While this city clearly has its own distinctions, as we will later elaborate, they are not the sort that make Ventura a model either in terms of economic development or civic planning for the rest of the state or nation. The area enjoys some of the charms of small cities, including less downtown traffic and lower commercial rents than found in major downtowns or in canonized places like Santa Barbara, but on most dimensions, Ventura more nearly typifies the qualities that preoccupy critics of U.S. urban places. In short, although these two cities overlap in various ways

statistically, as well as being just 30 miles apart geographically, they represent—at least within the boundaries of a more or less prosperous region of the country—almost opposite poles of what a small city can be.

These perceptions, moreover, are widely shared within the two areas themselves. As revealed by several dozen in-depth interviews we carried out in connection with this research—including interviews with officials in the Ventura county planning department, city tourist bureau, and the local California Coastal Commission office—the views of key observers in both cities have far more in common with the popular imagery than with the statistical profiles. Even the perception of what is ideal—and that Santa Barbara is closer to it than Ventura—is shared by numbers of local officials, citizens groups, and business activists in both areas. Much Ventura area policy, in fact, explicitly aims to emulate what they refer to as Santa Barbara's "success." For our purposes, however, we are less interested in which is "better" than in the analytic utility the differences can provide.

An advantage of comparing places with many common attributes, including shared geographic region and broadly similar historical experiences, is that we stand a good chance of talking about external events that are more or less equivalent in terms of their potential impacts on both locales. We are not, in other words, comparing events that are little more than nominally similar, as in the case of "revolutions" in the USSR, France, and China, whose separation of centuries, vast geographies, and cultural gulfs make comparability more troubling.[vii] In dealing with places that plausibly "could have" turned out more alike than they have, we meet the test of posing a "possible world" counter-factual (Griffin, 1993: 1101, 1102; Elster, 1978), tracing how "real" options were or were not taken. These, in short, are not historical straw men.

In the tracing of the actual options taken, we have gone back over 100 years, examining memoirs, local media, documents from election and assessor's offices, planning departments, citizens' groups, and many more private and public agencies.[viii] We also interviewed more than 100 persons across the larger region. We have also developed a number of quantitative indicators, which we will provide as triangulation. Finally, where appropriate, we also draw from the results of our larger investigation of 37 towns and cities in three California counties.[ix]

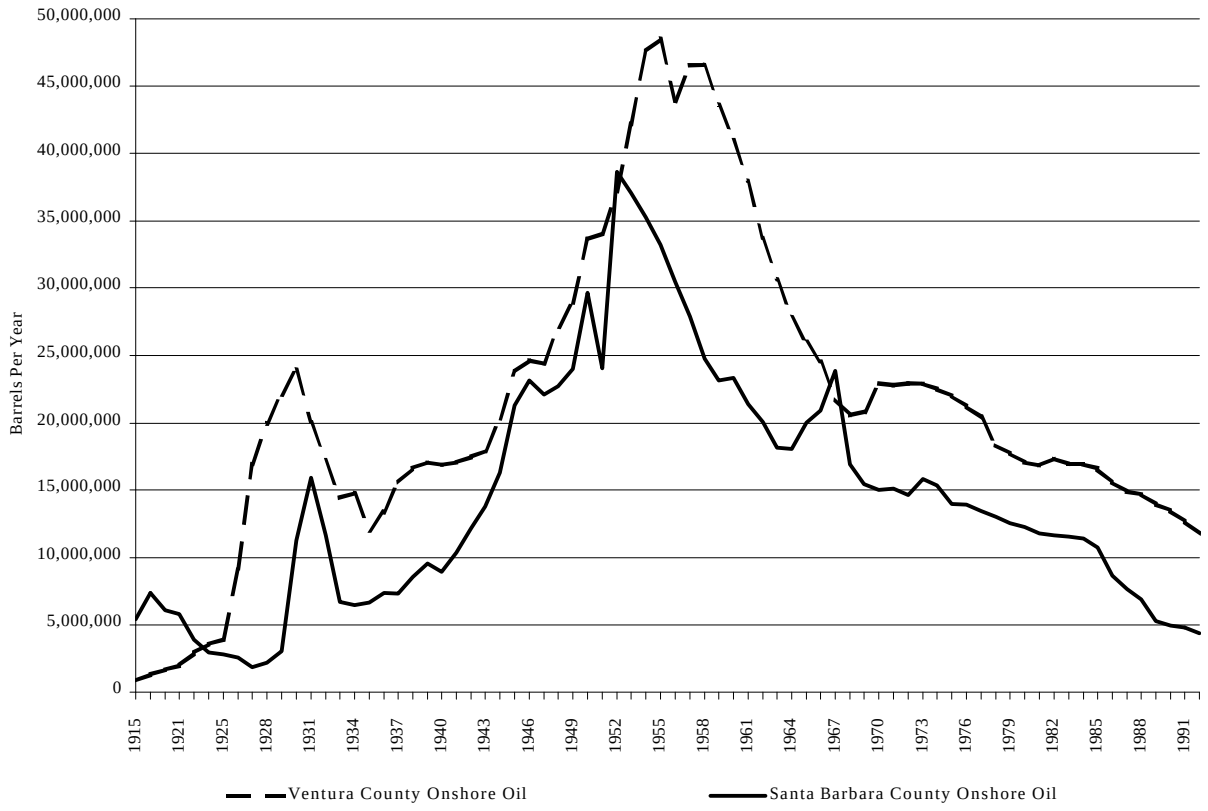
Oil

Oil development does not come gently to regions; it can create vast wealth, launch new enterprises, and destroy prior ones. It typically brings in its own well-paid workers, who tend toward strong solidarity both with one another and, at least in recent times, the company that employs them (Beamish, 1999; Freudenburg and Gramling 1994; Molotch and Woolley, 1994; Quam-Wickham, 1994).[x] It also tends to be messy; indeed, some of the world's most publicized

pollution events have involved oil spillage. With a rich iconography all of its own, the industry provides petroleum-producing regions with specific and potentially consequential imageries of tough work, rough settlements, and high-risk investing.

Given its economic scale, political power, and physical impact (Tarbell, 1966; Whitt, 1982), the industry presents a challenge to localities wishing to influence how it operates. In overall terms, the challenges have been comparable for Santa Barbara and Ventura; in production volumes and timing the two cities and their counties have been equally bound up with oil (see Figure 1) (Tri-county Onshore Oil Production, 1915-1992)). In terms of specific choices and their implications, however, the stories have ultimately proved to be far more divergent.

Figure 1
Onshore Oil Production, 1915-1992



Oil Comes to Ventura

Commercial oil production first began in the hills of Ventura county in 1861, just two years after Titusville and 26 years ahead of Santa Barbara, in 1887. When oil prospectors arrived in Ventura County they found only a few scattered grazing and dry farming operations, with citrus taking root soon after—the economies first of indigenous Chumash people and then of the Spanish-speaking Californios had both been vanquished (Pitt, 1966; Almaguer, 1994). Most of the early oil strikes were on hillside lands sufficiently out of sight to avoid hindering an early tourist trade in the nearby valley hamlet of Ojai—a place the *Los Angeles Times* in 1878 called "the magnetic center of the earth" where "spirit-minded people come to reach the God centers in themselves" (in Fry, 1983: 243). The oil pipelines through citrus groves apparently did little damage to such sensibilities, and some farmers benefited from oil royalties. Several served on oil company boards, including that of the soon to be dominant Union Oil Company (later the global giant Unocal).

The initial oil strikes were well outside the city of Ventura, but they had important implications for the city nevertheless. In particular, the city was the area's port for oil shipping (along with agricultural produce), a role that brought oil-storage facilities and otherwise predisposed Ventura's waterfront to industrial use. Several decades later, oil would be found within a few hundred yards of the city center; the Ventura Avenue oil field became economically viable in the 1920s. Unlike the case of other areas that have experienced boom-and-bust cycles of oil development within the course of relatively few years, technological advances and the discovery of ever-deeper oil deposits led to continuing drilling in a compact area, through the 1950s and beyond. This combination of factors—the "first-mover" advantage of the early oil discoveries, combined with the geological happenstance of vertically stratified pools—helped make parts of the local landscape a quasi-permanent installation of oil service firms adjacent to and reaching into the city of Ventura—an "industrial district" of mutually complementary functions (Scott, 1988). This district ultimately sustained an oil support industry that also served sites elsewhere in California and to a degree, other parts of the United States.

Ventura Avenue, also called "the oil patch" by locals, was the city's major artery running perpendicular to the ocean. As the industry developed, the Avenue became lined with oil service and supply firms along with bars and restaurants frequented by oil workers, like the still remaining "Derrick Room" (pictured in photo 1). It has also been home to low income residents. So here is the flow: nature bequeathed the oil; geologic formation stimulated technologies that gave the industry a durable presence; and that presence affected local residential

patterns, types of stores, and their appearance—all within a series of political and civic conjunctures (see below) that reinforced at each iteration.

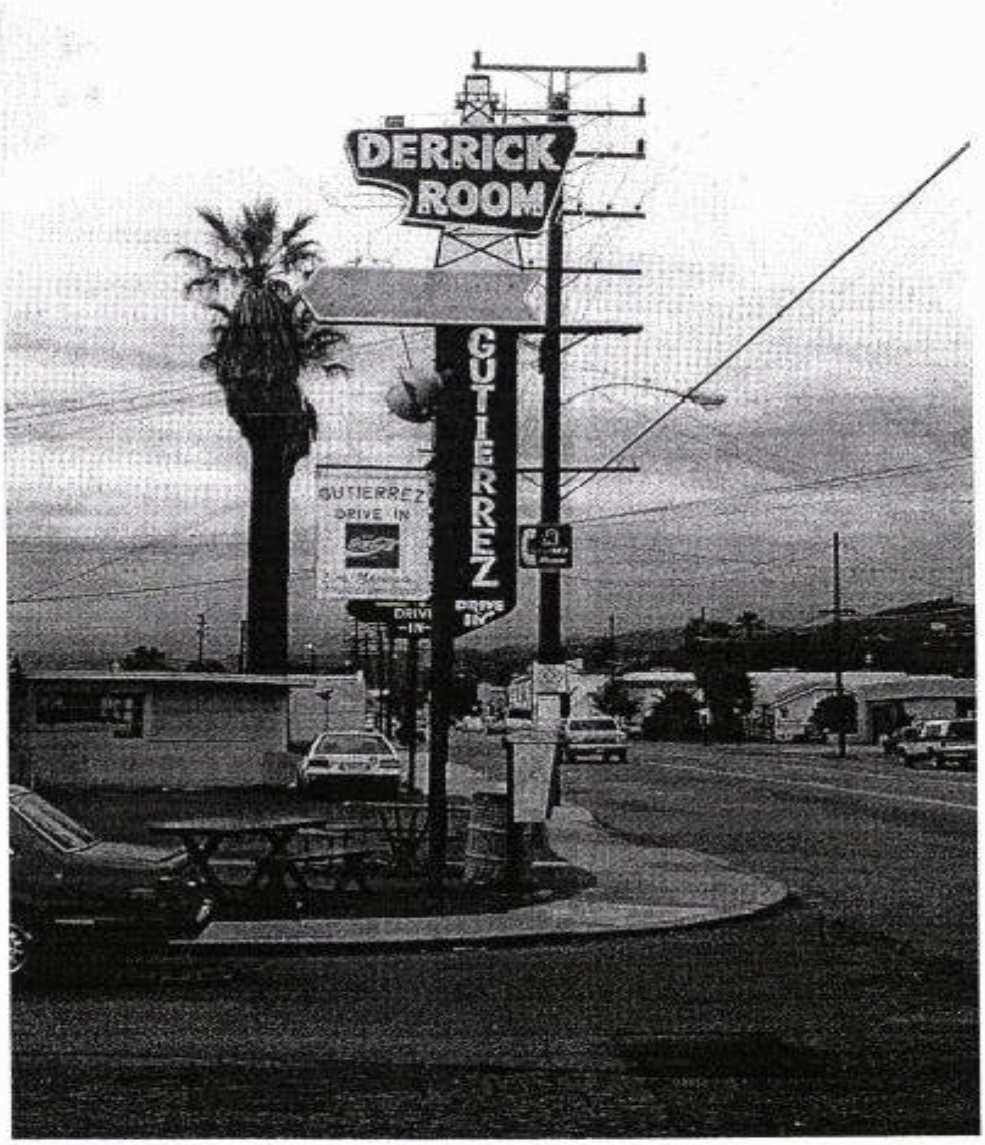
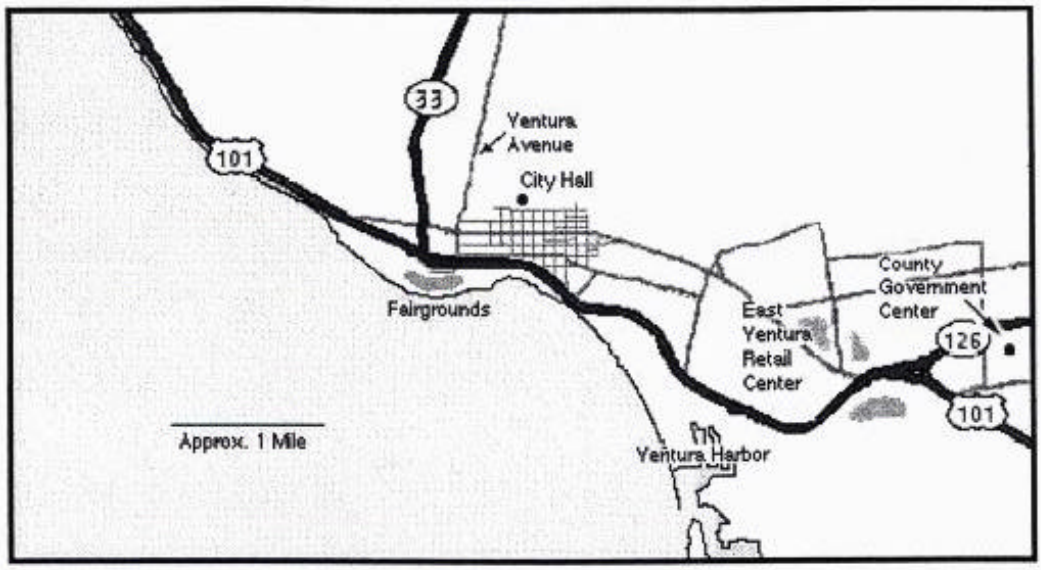


Photo 1: Stores and Facilities along "The Avenue"

Ventura's beach, a different kind of natural attribute than oil, stretches a greater distance than Santa Barbara's and is more consistently wide and sandy—a closer fit to the idealized California beaches of travel brochures. But some of the adjacent industrial and residential uses tilted against the affluent settlement, tourist services, and upscale shopping often accompanying ocean development elsewhere along the California coast. One large beachside hotel (the Pierpont Inn) was constructed , but it was south of the downtown area and separated from a then-existing coastal park by large oil storage tanks; even the hotel would later be separated from the beach by the freeway that will be discussed below. In the 1950s, beach-front lots sold cheaply, even given away as promotional items with the purchase of a new car. In the 1960s, some ocean-oriented high-end housing was built adjacent to a new artificial recreational harbor but this development took place about three miles south of Ventura Avenue and downtown.

Adjacent to the oil patch, the central business district was, as described in a Clark University geography dissertation written at the time, "hemmed in by blight on the west, hills on the north [and] the sea on the south" (Reith, 1963:148). The only way for retail activity to expand was toward the east; department stores, national outlets, and other expanding retailers leapfrogged adjacent built-up areas to end up miles away, effectively splitting Ventura' s shopping district into two discrete units and also moving retailing farther away from the waterfront area (see Map 2). More subtly, this movement to the periphery eliminated the high-end shops and services whose owners might have demanded clean-up and had the clout to get it. Vacated downtown spaces became thrift shops, antique and used book stores—uses that persist to this day. Perhaps because of the devaluation of the core, the county had less reason to remain downtown when it needed new administrative and court house space, nor were there organizations demanding it remain. So it also went east but to a still different part of the city, leaving the stately downtown court house (designed by Albert C. Martin in Beaux Arts classical style) to become the city hall in 1971.

The configuration now became two distinct and separate retailing districts, with county government—the far larger of the public employers—out of downtown and separate both from retailing and from city government. Each element of dis-integration supported the other. The fact of oil is not sufficient to explain these separations, so common across urban America, and indeed, it appears that locals of the time seldom if ever made the connection. No organized groups surfaced in our research to oppose the operations of oil in the city or the indirect consequences of its activities. But even as the oil activity itself began to wane, its presence remained strong through the conjunctural elements that both affected it and that it helped induce. The city, now acknowledged by locals as having "turned its back to the ocean," took its modern shape.



Map 2: Ventura's civic, recreational and retail centers

Although these events reduced the desirability of the seaside, there had been counter forces also at work to make the downtown oceanfront an amenity. Through a gift from the region's most prominent banker, E.P. Foster, the city gained its 62 acre "Seaside Park" at the end of the nineteenth century, "to fulfill Mr. Foster's dream of (it) becoming a miniature Golden Gate Park" (Percy, 1957:6). In 1914, the park site became home to the Ventura County Fair and its annual judging of animals, produce, crafts, baking and canning, first under tents and then in permanent structures. Over time, the fair's facilities—now including an off-track betting structure (largely windowless to the sea) and parking for 2,500 cars—replaced the trees, lawns, tennis courts and stone barbecues. Writing in 1957, the philanthropist's surviving friend ruefully remarked that Mr. Foster "would be very disappointed today if he could see what future management had done to his dream" (Percy, 1957:6).

The current configuration was by no means predetermined; indeed, there were moments of plausible reversibility. During the 1970s the Ventura County Fair Board[xi] considered moving the attraction to a larger site to gain space for horse racing and gambling. But the controversy and "grave choice," as it was termed in

the local newspaper editorial,[xii] turned on what would do more for downtown business, continuing with the fair or possibilities like high-rise apartments, hotels, and a new roadway at the location. Pressure from advocates of coastal access and from fair volunteers and enthusiasts—about 3,000 strong and by far the largest voluntary group we ever came upon in the county—defended what they called the "homey feeling" of things as they were and forced the Board to relent (Smith 1971:A6; Garnica, 1980).[xiii]

Just south along the coast, the city sponsored a high-rise Holiday Inn and parking garage, spanning the only remaining downtown ocean front. The hotel uses one of the same generic designs employed in high-rise Holiday Inns elsewhere; according to our communication from the son of the original developer, his father found it easy to gain building permission for this hotel compared to his tribulations in developing a similar project in Monterey at the time. The city's only high-rise structure, the hotel and parking garage closed off many views from the beach to the city and mountains and from the town to the sea (see Photo 2). These combined developments further nullified the philanthropist's endowment. But by now the town had few stakeholders for view preservation (like affluent residences or tourist facilities), nor institutions oriented toward ocean amenity goals.

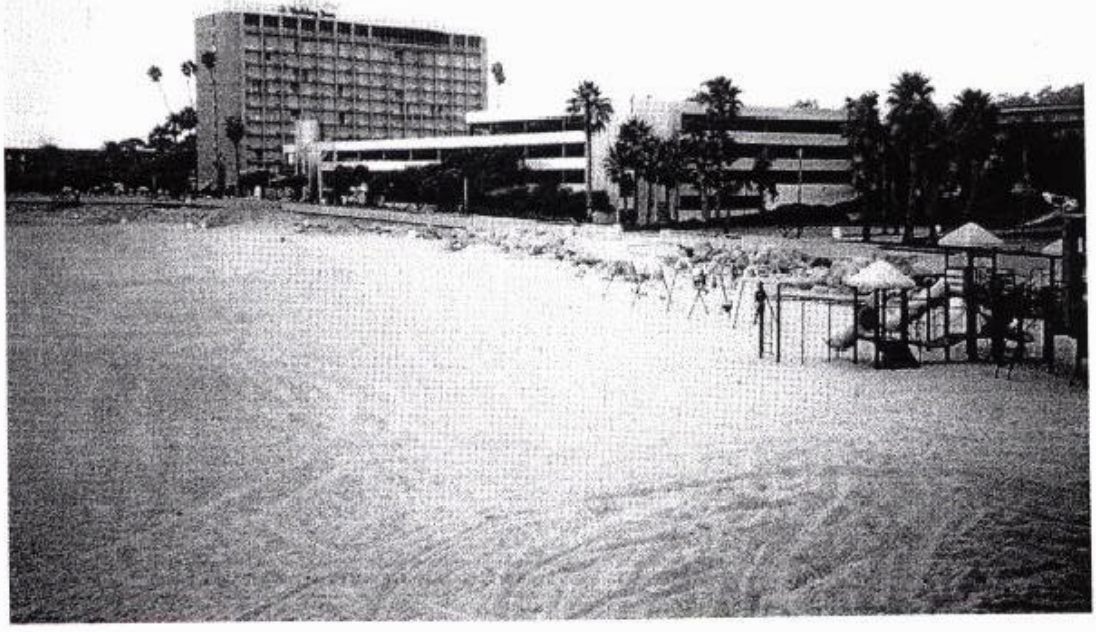


Photo 2: Hotel and parking structure on Ventura's beachfront

Throughout the controversies, restoration of the “Seaside Park” site to its original intended use was a non-issue. Even those fervently wanting to move the Fair did not invoke park restoration as a possible advantage—despite the fact that the debate took place at a time in history when state voters ushered in the California Coastal Protection Act. The coast remained land upon which non-coastal uses would dominate and in a way unlikely to implant social or physical elements oppositional to the petroleum industry.

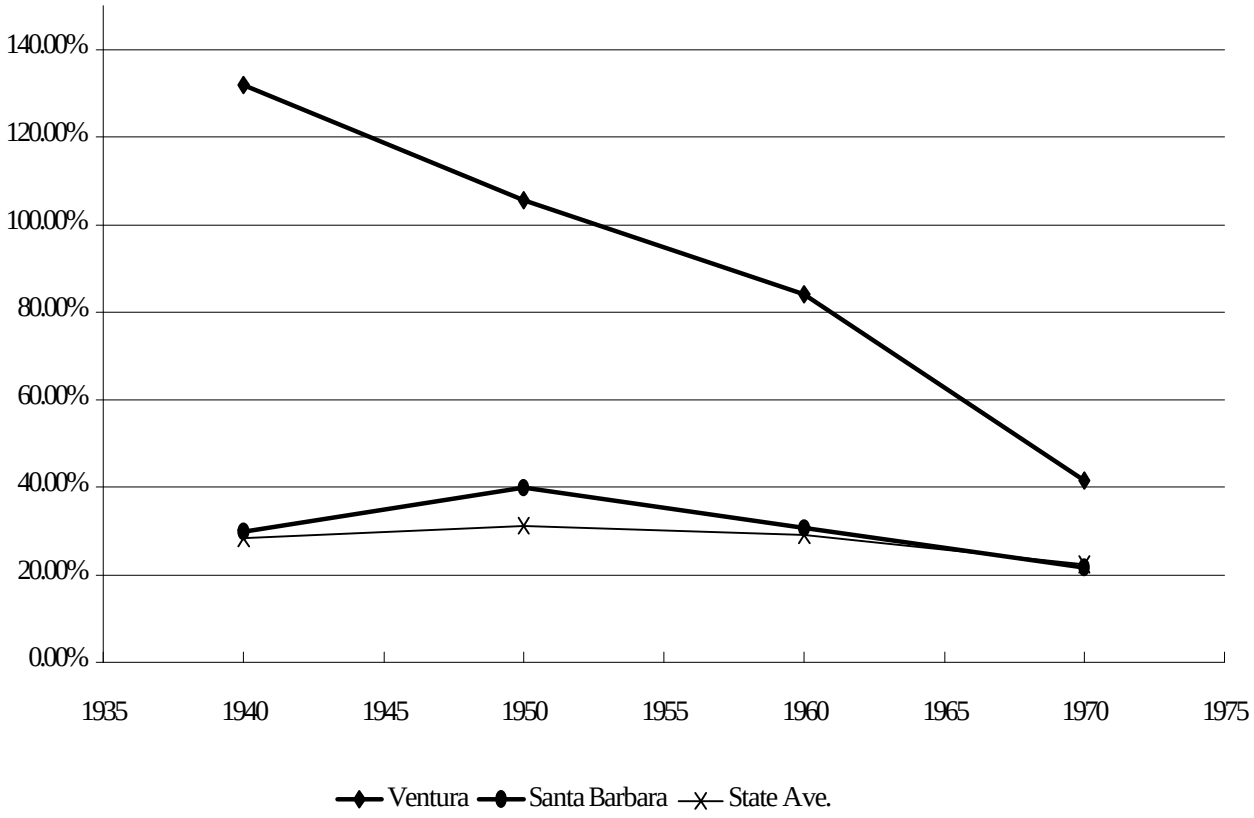
At each turn, the city and the county of Ventura welcomed oil development, with oil firm owners and employees taking up prominent roles in civic life. Oil companies sponsored local activities, from concerts to little league teams, and the local paper celebrated the industry with an annual “Oil Progress Week” supplement, including homage to the many oil employees who played a role in community groups.[xiv] Oil men and their families also came to serve in local government, including the Ventura City Council (none ever served in Santa Barbara). At the time of the great Santa Barbara Channel oil spill of 1969—which actually came ashore first in Ventura County before blackening 40 miles of beachfront along both counties—the Ventura City Council opposed federal bans on ocean drilling, even as other California cities vociferously demanded (and gained) such a moratorium from the Nixon Administration.

Ventura’s support for oil belied the ongoing decline in oil’s local economic significance. As noted earlier (recall Figure 1), the two counties were virtually equal in volume and pacing of oil exploitation, with steep decline by the 1990s. Indeed, by 1970, shortly after the 1969 oil spill, Ventura County’s ratio of oil jobs to tourism was nearing the ratios in Santa Barbara county and California as a whole (See Figure 2). Although the oil industry continued to be extolled at the time as a bulwark of the local economy and civic life, its political and social potency came not from economic *necessity* , but from accumulating contextual fit that involved a broader range of “variables” than its share of economic base.

Figure 2:

Ratio of Mining to Tourism Employment,

Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties, 1940-1970



Oil Comes to Santa Barbara

When oil came to the Santa Barbara area, the city and adjacent suburb of Montecito were already becoming tourist and retirement areas, albeit at a rather small scale. The local Arlington Hotel (at 150 rooms, far larger than any in the adjacent county) was built in 1875—13 years after oil was first exploited in Ventura, but 12 years before oil came to Santa Barbara County. Both the Santa Barbara and Ventura areas, like Southern California in general, were promoted widely for health restoration and the good life. Oil on the beaches and natural slicks at sea, evident from Chumash times to the present day, might seem to put Santa Barbara at a tourism disadvantage; Ventura lacks such contamination. Instead Santa Barbara's boosters touted the fumes as good for respiratory ailments (Tompkins, 1975:56), in effect portraying the oil they could not control as a health remedy.

As in the case of E. P. Foster's donation of a beachfront park to Ventura, a number of Santa Barbara's prominent citizens also acted to conserve the waterfront. Through gifts and public action, industrial facilities at the beach were gradually removed. Max Fleishmann (the "yeast king") funded a good part of the cost to build a harbor so he could berth his private yacht. Fearing "honky tonk" development at the ocean, a group of the area's wealthy residents bought up much of the city's beachfront and held it prior to the city votes—in 1925, 1927 and 1931—that approved the bonds that secured almost the entire ocean-front as public park. To catch views of the evolving amenity, developers gradually laid out housing and the main hillside boulevard to run parallel, rather than perpendicular to the waterfront, roughly in the form of a vast amphitheater to the sea. This mobilized natural aesthetics into amenity-enhancing and commercially valuable infrastructure. In the end, Santa Barbara gained more benefactions—ocean-oriented as well as of other types—than Ventura, one of the causes plausibly being the contrasting examples made in the use of the early ones. Reasonably enough, people tend to give when they think their donations will have their intended effects, which means where they can sense that the social and environmental contexts—viz. local traditions—will provide appropriate long-term support.

Santa Barbara's emerging amenity orientation continuously generated tension between the locality and the oil industry (and other industries as well). While residents tolerated oil development in parts of the county distant from the city and its affluent suburb of Montecito, the closer-in projects soon came to provide a different story. The world's first offshore oil development took place at adjacent Summerland in 1894, but in the summer of 1899 when the offshore development came closer to Santa Barbara itself, residents took direct action. Here is an excerpt from the lead story in *The Santa Barbara Morning Press* at the time:

> That the property owners on the sea front are determined that no unsightly oil derrick shall disfigure the beautiful views of land and sea was demonstrated last night, when a party of the best known society men of Santa Barbara armed to meet any resistance, and with workmen employed for the purpose, utterly demolished a new oil derrick ... *(Santa Barbara Morning Press*, August 3, 1899).

Although the action indeed proved effective in blocking further expansion up the beach, such sentiment was not universal. The rival *Daily Independent* denounced this "vigilantism" as revealing an "animal instinct" (August 3, 1899). The self-designated "business supporter" *Independent* also mocked the aesthetic concerns of oil's opponents, facetiously suggesting painting the derrick like a barber pole.[xv] This sort of ridicule of an overly fussy Santa Barbara, both from within the area and from outside critics, presages a theme that would also continue for generations. Although Santa Barbara had, and continues to have, the kind of pro-development political elements that support growth of virtually any

sort, the hardware of oil—so visible in Ventura—would simply not exist, at least in parts of the area valued for other purposes. Oil was in the ground, but at least in certain locations, social and organizational features would keep it from the surface, or in other cases, alter the procedures used to bring it up.

Finally overcoming internal conflicts in 1953, the city banned all oil drilling within its borders. Lacking jurisdiction over the ocean—all of which comes under state or federal authority—the city used litigation and political pressure to oppose the offshore drilling that nevertheless became prevalent later in the post-war era. It was the 1969 oil spill, however, that unleashed the most intense opposition. World media attention amplified the outcry to a global level (Molotch and Lester, 1975), forcing first a temporary moratorium and then more permanent changes in oil—and other development—nation-wide under the newly passed National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).[xvi] In 1972, the California electorate voted for the state coastal protection act (Ventura county and city split almost equally on the vote; Santa Barbara city voters approved it by two-thirds with county approval at 62 per cent). At the local Santa Barbara level, the city banned any servicing of oil industry craft from the city pier, finishing the gradual deindustrialization of the waterfront that had begun early in the century.

Besides providing bases for conflict, the Santa Barbara milieu had mechanisms for using the riches of oil in ways different than in Ventura. Most notably, local politicians used oil property tax revenue to help pay for the spectacular downtown Santa Barbara County Court House, completed just after the 1925 earthquake that leveled most of downtown. Since 1922, the local “Plans and Planting” community group had been pressing for a consistent “Spanish style” for the city, providing *pro bono* architectural advice to local home builders and entrepreneurs. Under its urgings, as well as those of other groups, the city created, just after the quake, the country’s first architectural board of review, to ensure that all downtown buildings conform to the preferred motif. Although the controversial board was to go in and out of existence over the decades, the style triumphed over the years—sometimes to the chagrin of even enlightened local developers who found it and other successive planning requirements unduly burdensome. The court house became the quintessential representation of the style and of Santa Barbara’s commitment to beautification, with towers, tiled corridors, murals and ornate ironwork (see photo 3)—an ongoing ceremonial space for local civic and political events, as well as a tourist attraction and backdrop set for TV and movies. In effect, the county put the oil money into concrete forms that were to persist as an aesthetic and semiotic resource, emulated in still other structures. In later years, when federal authorities forced offshore development, local agencies exacted special oil contributions toward improving shore-related recreation facilities—in effect, as before, offsetting rather than reinforcing the tendency for the oceanfront to bespeak industrial activities.

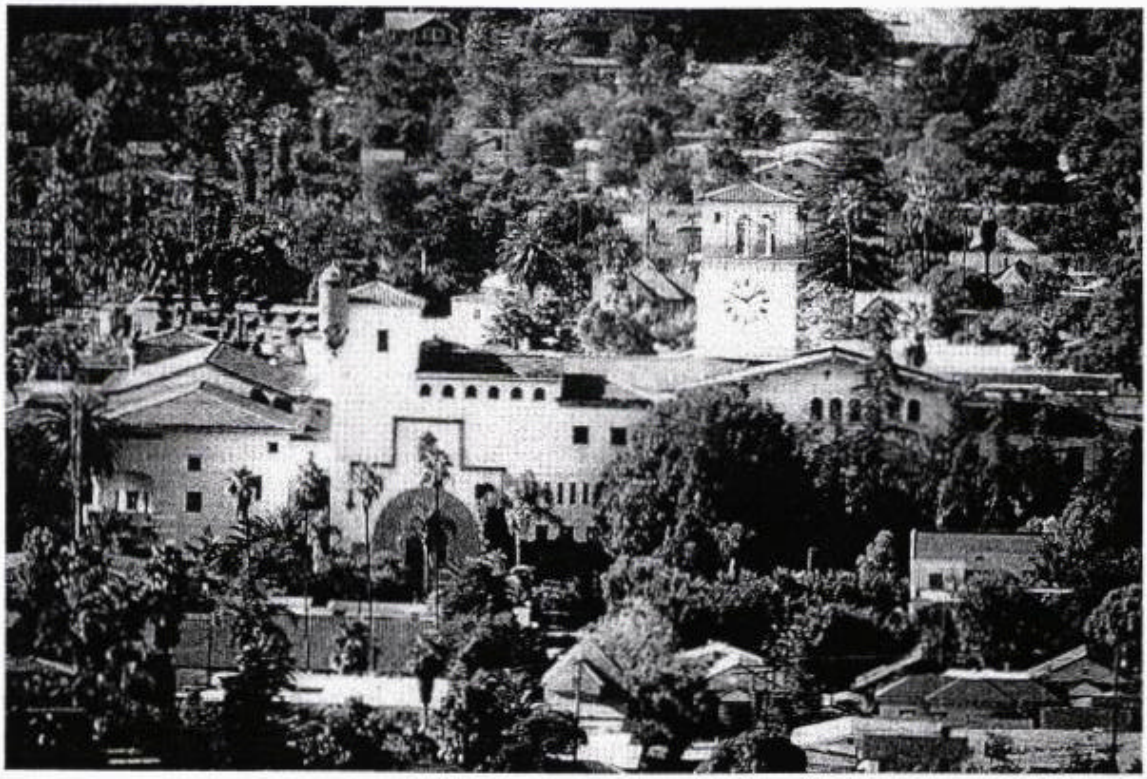


Photo 3: Santa Barbara County Courthouse

The pre-existing range of place attributes influenced how specific parts of the oil industry would distribute themselves. Numbers of oil company owners, and especially their heirs, made homes in the Santa Barbara area. For example, regional oil heiress Cynthia Wood (whose family's ranch sat atop the Ventura Avenue oil field) bred famous horses at showplace Montecito stables; national oil heiress Alice Keck Park (of Keck Oil) made her life in Santa Barbara, where she also endowed a public garden. Local retiree Samuel Mosher, founder of Signal Oil and early supporter (as a University of California Regent) of the creation of UC Santa Barbara, also had a local residence as well as large ranch outside the city. Environmental consulting firms, whose creation the high-regulatory regime had helped bring about, overwhelmingly centered in the Santa Barbara city area. Oil workers, on the other hand, tended to settle in Ventura and other parts of the two counties.

While Santa Barbara's civic leaders had major reservations about oil, they had more consensus about higher education as the fitting kind of growth pole for the area. The long-lived Thomas Storke—besides publishing the local newspaper—was, at various times, also a University Regent, a friend of FDR and several

California governors as well as a U.S. Senator appointed to complete an incumbent's term (Storke, 1958). With the help of local allies, including oil-man Mosher, he managed to have the federal government hand over its ocean-front Marine Base north of the city to the UC Regents. The Regents, in turn, responding to the site's beauty and Santa Barbara's "long cultural background" (Storke, 1958: 435), as well as strong support from local planning group leaders, designated Santa Barbara's modest public college as the core of a new general UC campus to be built on the old military base (Kelley, 1981: 4, 6).

Constructed next to what had once been an oil field (Coal Oil Point), the university's students, staff and faculty joined the anti-oil ranks, adding new levels of expertise as well as political energy.[xvii] The confrontation became direct when, in the mid 1990s, Mobil Oil proposed an onshore rig on university-owned land to slant-drill into an offshore field (offshore platform construction was precluded by the field's location in a scenic sanctuary along the coastline). Under lobbying pressure from faculty and students as well as local environmentalist groups, the university ultimately refused access to the former oil field, foregoing the revenue it would have received and, in effect, sealing in the deindustrialization of the site.

Symptomatic of the more subtle ways place character builds up, the university's influence operates not just through big events, but through micro-reinforcements of local milieu. Here is an anecdote involving a businessman's visits to his undergraduate daughter. Bega Lighting is a firm that designs and builds lighting projects around the world as well as high-end fixtures for commercial applications (e.g. Washington D.C. National Cathedral, the Mexico City subway system). The founder of the U.S. component of the corporation (partnered with Bega of Germany) started it in Santa Barbara because he "was inspired to start a business after visiting his daughter, then a student at UCSB. He said he decided, 'This is a great place; I've got to find a way to live here'" (Ross, 1994:B4). With a payroll of 55 employees and revenue above $5 million, Bega then initiated a donation of $100,000 worth of exterior decorative lighting for the courthouse, further enhancing the local landmark. So these are the path adjacencies: Citizen groups limit oil impacts, in part by using oil's tax contributions to build up the local ambiance (e.g. the court house); the local ambiance and social networks of its residents (Storke et al.) induce the University's presence; the University attracts the daughter; the daughter (along with the ambiance) brings in the father, who pulls in the business. The business "gives back" a little with its donation, further enhancing the ambiance, which strengthens the anti-oil posture, which is where we started. Santa Barbara becomes more like Santa Barbara, evidenced at any point along the way by the kinds of people who come to live there, local political and organizational decisions, and the "look and feel" of the place. This is not a simple series of successive causal events; at each point things could have gone differently, but were made more likely through the reinforcing complementarities in place at each juncture.

Within the powerful push/pull macro forces of migration, people self-select on place character and tradition, even within the oil industry itself—a self-selection process that steers one type of functionary to Santa Barbara and a different type to Ventura. Once attracted, migrants vote for the candidates, pass the tax measures, shop at the stores, and join the organizations that induced their own entry.

It would be easy to argue after the fact that Santa Barbara always had some natural advantage, but both places had oil as well as good weather and attractive scenery. Indeed, it would be just as plausible to say Ventura's setting—closer proximity to Los Angeles tourist markets, broad tar-free beaches, and boat access to the scenic off-shore islands—provided better opportunities. That Ventura had oil wealth a bit sooner gave it riches that its leaders could have used to set the place up for long-term economic and cultural innovation (something Norway did, but the Dutch failed to do in regard to North Sea oil—see Ellman, 1977; Feagin, 1990; Andersen, 1993). In this long-term sense—at least in the hindsight of the city's current leaders—its former elites, engaged in the oil support mission, made the wrong move. Nature is only an "amenity" (as opposed to geographic fact) if there is a cultural, political, and organizational context that interprets and shapes it into such. "Geography matters," say Massey and Allen (1984), but contingently; Freudenburg et. al. (1995) refer to it as "conjoint constitution" of the natural and social (see also Bunker, 1984).

Akin to a first mover effect or the proverbial butterfly's wings in chaos theory, a string of linked land use decisions each then encouraged and constrained successive actions. Had more substantial tourism, even just a bit more, been "in the way," Ventura's oil might have come out in the same volume but with different implications for local history. Similarly, if state or national coastal protection laws had come sooner rather than later, they might have preserved Seaside Park, which might then have affected other local infrastructures, creating the basis for a different kind of local economic and cultural fix. Again, the evolving and strengthening complementarities in place at each moment were what insulated the oil-based trajectory in Ventura. In contrast, as oil came up the Santa Barbara coast, it met with an amenity-oriented element. The buy-up of the beachfront was another timely intervention made meaningful not just by rich people on hand, but also by local organizations and public sentiment among a not especially wealthy citizenry ready to take on the bonding debt.

Freeway

As with oil development, freeways affect what places can be. Funded and administered through a combination of federal and state sources, they are an omnipresent element of U.S. urban life that virtually every American city has had to deal with—one way or the other. At least until the early 1970s, when urban groups began to rebel, localities welcomed them as a means of movement and

as a mechanism of slum clearance (Greer, 1965; Gans, 1968; Whitt, 1982). U.S. Interstate 101 came to be the dominant thoroughfare in both our cities; the state completed the Ventura stretch in 1963, but the Santa Barbara portion took 30 years longer—a telltale delay we will explain.

The Freeway Comes to Ventura

The Ventura freeway replaced the old U.S. highway 101 that created traffic tie-ups as it went through downtown. For the new routing, the State acquired the commercial and residential land—then home to many Hispanics—along the ocean and west of downtown, land made attractive and less costly for highway expansion by uses accumulated in the wake of petroleum. The highway builders also filled in some low-lying oceanfront using earth excavated for the city's new recreational harbor. The resulting configuration was a freeway so close to the downtown oceanfront that there was room enough only for a narrow strip of grass along the beach, the Holiday Inn, the fairgrounds complex, and parking. There could be no critical mass of ocean-oriented residential, commercial or recreational services near the central city (See Map 2). In their guidebook to Southern California architecture, Gebhard and Winter (1977:515) advise prospective visitors that the Ventura beach recreation area "is only tolerable if one is close enough to the beach so that the sound of the breakers can drown out the din of the freeway traffic."

In our interviews with local officials and planners, and our inspection of media published when important decisions were made, we found virtually no evidence of opposition to the highway's final routing, much less to the fact of its creation (there was a single letter to the editor of complaint). Showing a seldom-expressed appreciation for ocean views, a newspaper editorial did congratulate the city for negotiating a partially depressed freeway that would preserve the vista from the then County Courthouse to the sea. But the main issue raised by "the public," as indicated by news coverage at the time and minutes of requisite hearings, was concern that a lack of exits into the old downtown would hurt merchants. As a result, the state constructed an extra entrance, although its "make do" configuration (see below) was much inferior to the interchanges built where the suburban malls were taking shape.

In contrast to the 1950s era, by the 1990s the freeway's impacts were of major concern to planners and boosters, who saw it as antithetical to a tourist or high-tech milieu (the city spends about $400,000 annually to attract visitors). The decision to depress a portion of the freeway creates a canyon effect for cars coming through the heart of the city, meaning that neither beach nor mission can beckon travelers. At the same time, the freeway cuts the city from the ocean. The highway's offramp dangerously and uninvitingly configures the pedestrian route from downtown to the water, a distance of only a few blocks (see Photo 4, "pedestrians prohibited"). To avoid blocking traffic in the freeway exit lane, cars must spill into a crosswalk unimpeded by traffic light or stop sign. The freeway,

raised at various points, also obscures pedestrians' views to the ocean, as does an old railway bridge carrying train tracks that were moved during freeway

construction and then replaced *in situ* upon the freeway's completion (see Photo 5). The attention to detail that might have mitigated these impacts, either from city hall or community organizations, was not there at the crucial moments.

Photo 4: Pedestrian access from downtown Ventura to Beach

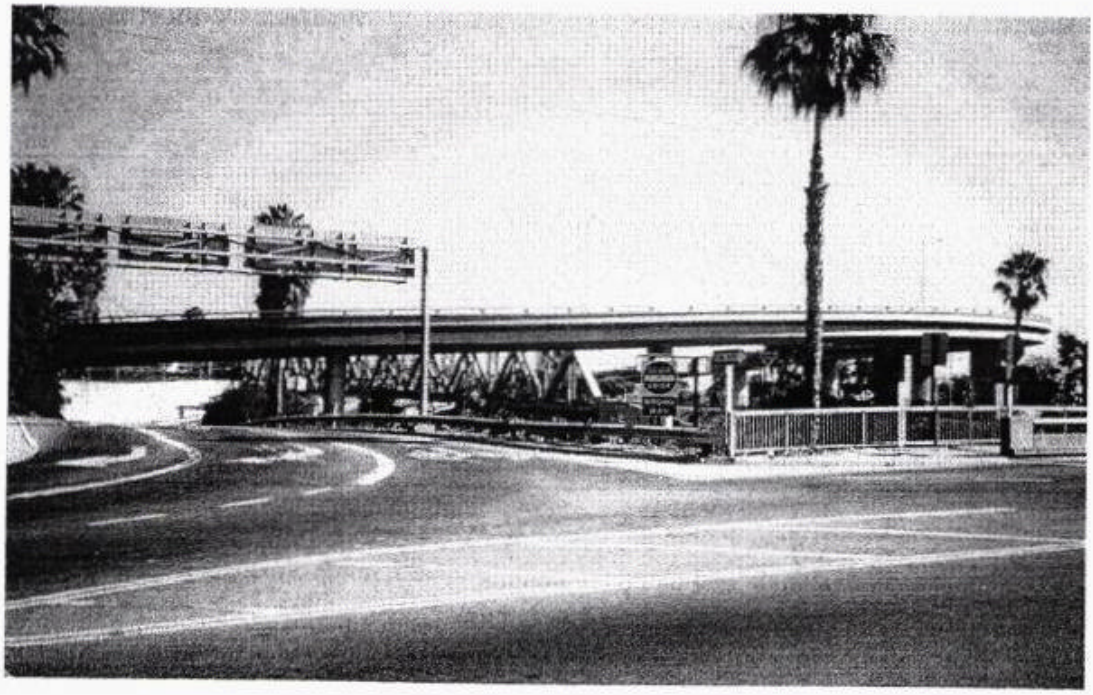


Photo 5: Freeway configuration between downtown Ventura and waterfront

The Freeway Comes (Eventually) to Santa Barbara

For many years, Santa Barbara's "fussiness" was marked, for some, by the set of three adjacent traffic lights that ultimately became the only signals stopping highway traffic between Los Angeles and northern California. The city repeatedly rejected the state's upgrading proposals as damaging beachfront and downtown, instead requesting a combined highway and rail corridor, sunk below ground where the main street crossed to the ocean—an option rejected by the state as unfeasible. Dozens of hearings were held, and hundreds of citizens turned out. We found scores of letters to the editor (over 100 when we stopped counting) and editorial comments. The city's architectural review board expressed positions, as did the city's landmarks commission and planning-oriented citizens' associations. Business groups were also active, albeit often condemning the civic organizations for imposing costly delays in contesting the state's good offers.

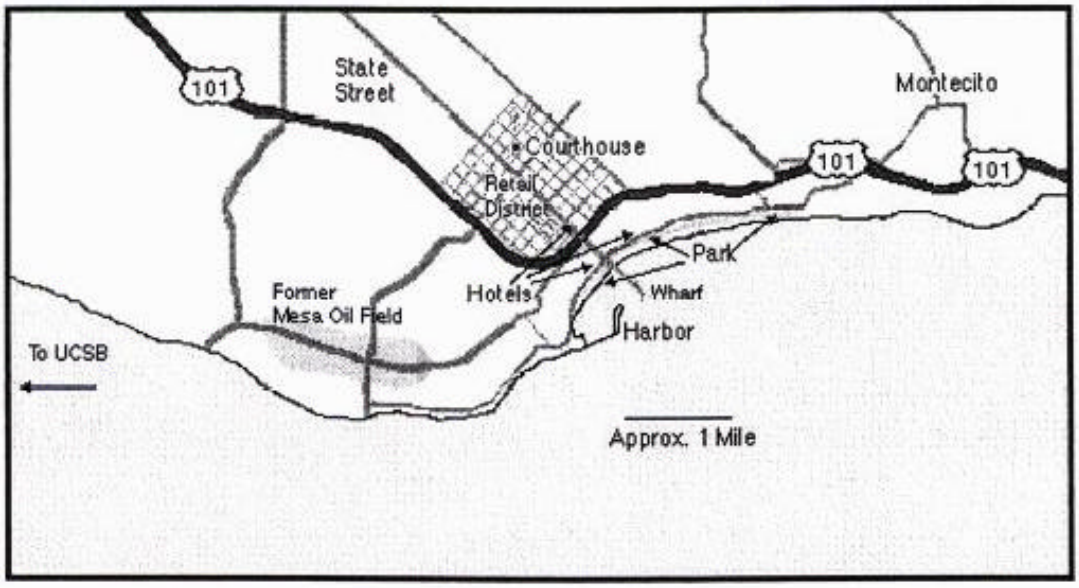
Finally, city and state agencies compromised with a partially raised freeway, allowing the city's main street to pass under on its way to the beach area. The city contributed an extra $400,000 to upgrade landscaping and architectural detailing beyond state standards. The social and cultural capital of residents kicked in as eminent experts appeared, sometimes as paid consultants and sometimes as locals providing *pro bono* service. Citizen groups scrutinized pedestrian experience, views, and even the texture and tint of the concrete. The result, still offensive to some local critics, is a profusely landscaped freeway segment as it passes through downtown with the major underpass appearing to its users as an ersatz medieval archway linking downtown and the ocean.

As eventually built, the downtown and seashore form an unbroken "T" of pedestrian access for recreation, shopping, government services (city and county), and tourism (see Photo 6; Map 3). Santa Barbara's downtown combines retail activity (the bulk of all sales occur there, not the suburbs), entertainment (16 movie screens in five theater complexes are within a six-block strip), and cultural institutions (museums, live theaters, libraries), along with the parks and beachfront recreation areas. This concentration of complementary functions dramatically contrasts with the dispersion of retail, government, and recreation in Ventura, which inhibits a critical mass of civic activity either by day or night. In terms of the ocean, Ventura's lash-up included acceptance of oil, an uncontested freeway, and a venerated county fair that reflected, in social and symbolic terms, the complementarity of agriculture and these other elements. It had activists but their "anti-business" protests targeted changes to the fair rather than threats to other local amenities. As in Santa Barbara, it could have gone differently, but the interlocking of so many diverse particulars increased in consequentiality at each turn.

Even big and expensive hardware, consequential as it may be, gains much of its impact from the way it is locally assimilated and from the ongoing attitudes toward it. Freeways, after all, have at times been taken down, especially with

some help from earthquakes and aroused citizen groups.[xviii] Santa Barbara's pre-1925 built environment itself represented a massive sunk cost in hardware, but due to organizational prowess it was not rebuilt as it had been before—the typical post-disaster response (see Dynes and Tierney, 1994; Quarantelli, 1978). At a more detailed level, the configuration of both freeway and oil infrastructure differed in our two places by virtue of evolving politics and institutions. Those physical outcomes then, through further impacts on nature, hardware and the social realms, helped anchor urban character and conveyed tradition.

Photo 6: Santa Barbara's Waterfront



Map 3: Santa Barbara's civic, recreational and retail centers

Organizational and Consumption Milieus: A Comparison of Densities

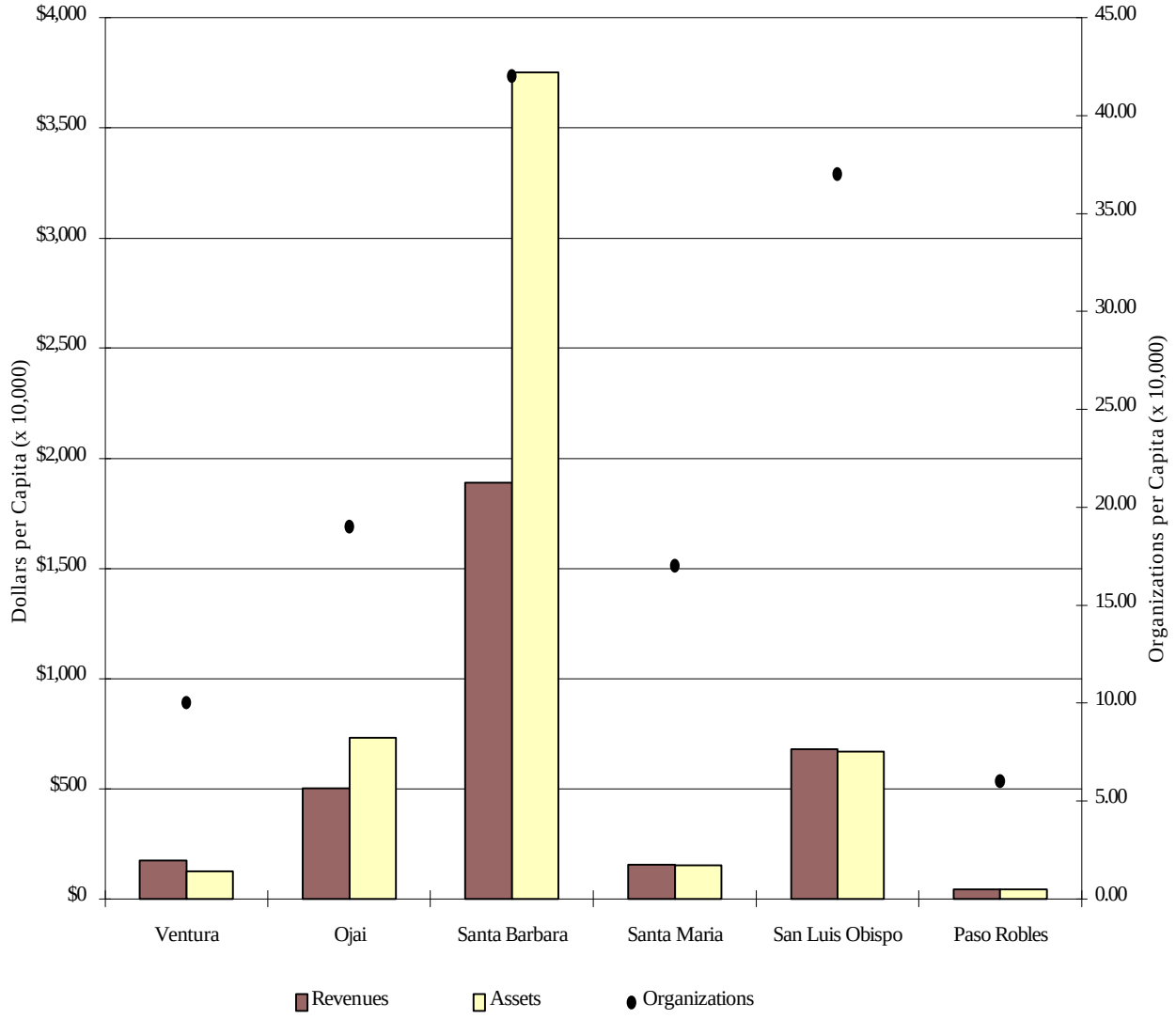
No less than the outcomes of the physically durable, the presence (or absence) of mobilized community groups influence and perpetuate milieu. Beyond whatever ennobling role participation in community organizations may have for individual participants or general democratic processes, as averred by observers from Tocqueville to Putnam (see e.g. Gamm and Putnam, 1999), voluntary associations also affect substantive outcomes. For us, in a way that is consistent with much work by organizational sociologists, organizations help hold things in place so that all does not melt into air. While we are uncomfortable with anthropomorphizing organizations as having attributes like the capacity to "remember," they do act as a space, sometimes a physical one, through which individuals make contact over similar concerns, interact, share tales, convey know-how, and spread sensibilities as people come and go, live and die. In effect, they harbor the "memory traces" through which, as Giddens argues (1984: 17), something like a social structure can transpose itself from one time or place to another. Once established, they overcome the "liability of newness" (Stinchcombe, 1965: 148) that otherwise encumbers social action, including individual action by those who are otherwise weak in strategic knowledge. When disturbances occur—whether through natural disaster, government action, or

proposed constructions—pre-existing networks can spread news and coordinate across issue areas. These connections are another form of social capital as a place characteristic.

Given the apparent salience of organizations in our place histories, we compared their numbers across places. Ideally, we would have compared organizational densities over time, to determine the mix at various oil and freeway decision points. Methodological and resource limits precluded such longitudinal analysis; appropriate data exist only for recent periods. But contemporary comparisons can nevertheless offer some confirming or disconfirming evidence; it is unlikely that strong contemporary differences developed "overnight;" indeed, the patterns we report run parallel not only to the content of oral histories for the areas, but also outside historical accounts (see especially Starr, 1990: 231-302).

Our data sources were the non-profit directories maintained in each county by their respective voluntary sector associations as well as the *Yearbook of California Charitable Organizations*. Between them, these volumes list groups, by type, with each organization's annual budget and asset value (buildings, endowments); we standardized these figures for population size.[xix] We also interviewed voluntary association leaders we thought would have a wide view, like United Way officials and heads of local community foundations, to adjust the lists for any methodological inconsistencies across directories.[xx] The results, as shown in the comparison of organizational densities, including all significant[xxi] towns in our larger study (see Louch, 1995), robustly reinforce the narrative: Whether in number of organizations, their aggregate revenues or their assets, Santa Barbara has highest totals.

Figure 3:
Voluntary Organizations in Town and Cities



The city of Ventura is organizationally weak on all indicators, the strength of its County Fair participation not withstanding. We examined the possibility that, although Santa Barbara may be high in aggregate terms, it may be weaker in certain sub-sectors. Wolpert (1988; see also Tiebout, 1956) has suggested there is "balanced generosity" across places, with some "specializing" in different arenas of charity and service organizations (e.g. arts versus social services). Indeed, some of our informants said they considered Santa Barbara's putative "elitism" led it to support the arts but not social service and health groups. To test these assertions, we broke down our place comparisons in terms of organizational functions used in the directories themselves: 1) Health & Human

Services; 2) Arts & Cultural organizations; 3) Recreation & Leisure and 4) Counseling & Support Organizations.[xxii]

Contrary to our informants' impressions, the findings show no evidence of "trade-off." Figures 4 and 5 show, respectively, that the high density of Santa Barbara's Health and Human services parallels its density in Arts & Cultural organizations. When we looked at the other two categories (Recreation/Leisure and Counseling/Support),the pattern held as well. It may be, of course, that Ventura's organizations are more likely than those in Santa Barbara to operate "under the radar" of our historical studies as well as the data bases we have used. Even if this is the case, which we doubt, these would, almost by the nature of things, be relatively ineffective organizations. Achieving visibility, whether in accounts of events or in listings and documents, is ordinarily an important part of organizational significance.

Figure 4:
Arts and Cultural Organizations in Town and Cities

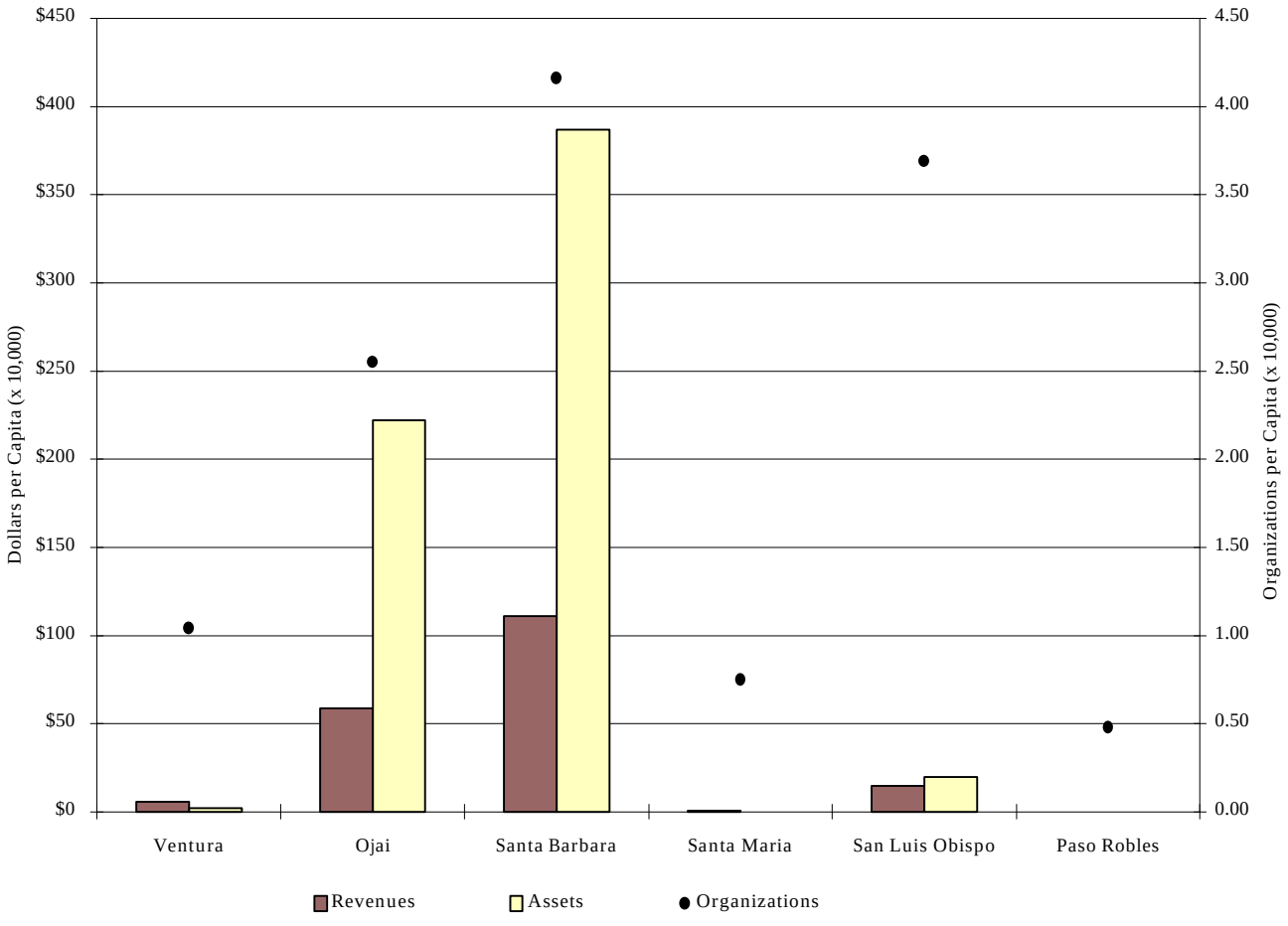
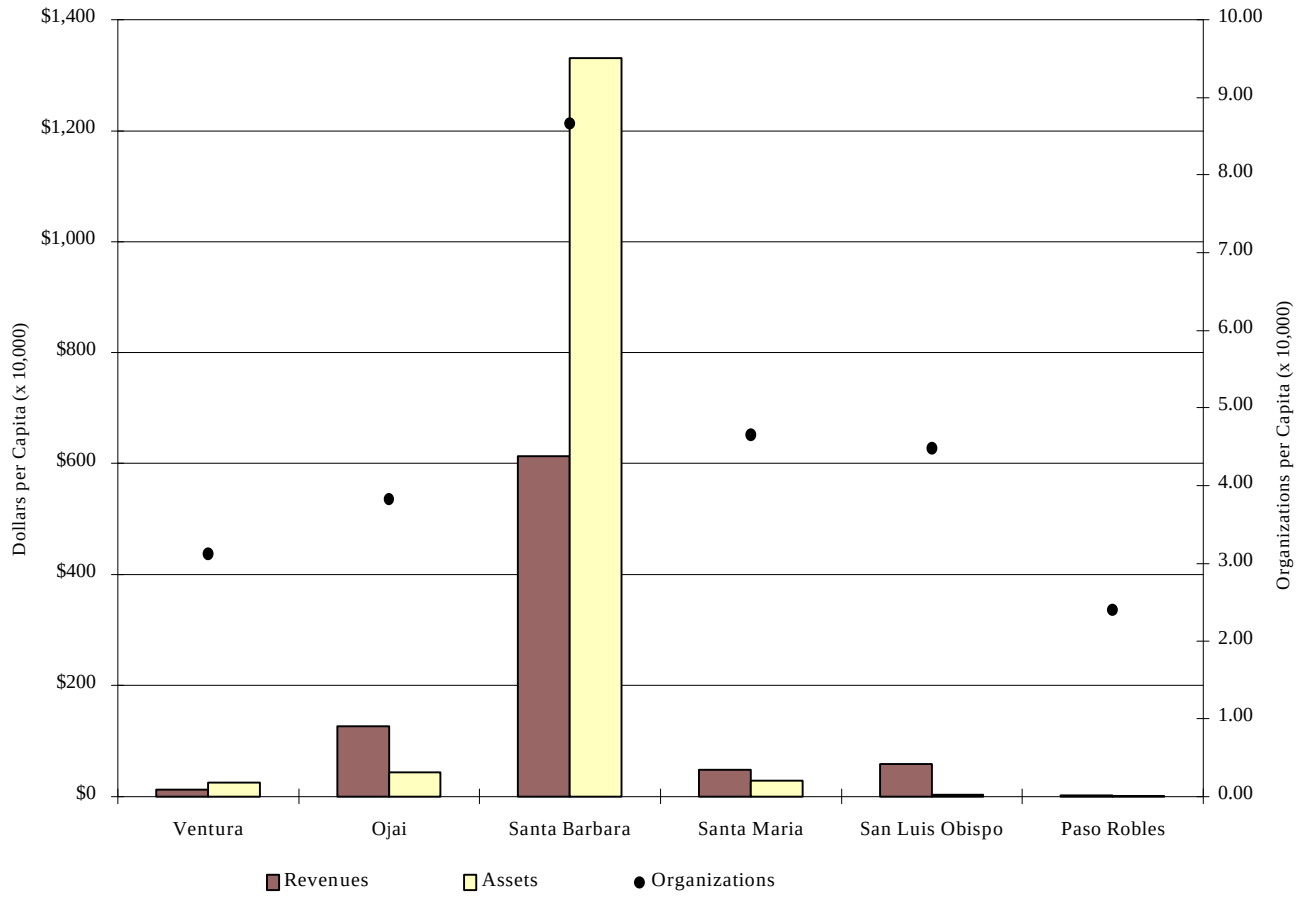


Figure 5:
Health and Human Services Organizations in Town and Cities



As we suspected, and our interviews confirmed, "counts" such as these still miss one of the mechanisms that make organizations effective, namely the way their connections with one another create additional synergies. For example, a Santa Barbara theater company, Access Theater, was initially funded by the Fund for Santa Barbara, a source of start-up dollars for "social change" projects. This theater company, headed by an actor, writer, and producer with severe physical challenges, had as its mission increasing handicapped people's life chances. It depends on organizations in health, school, and social services to provide audiences and generate financial support. This support changes the nature of what a theater company can be, just as the theater alters what it means to be doing work in "health."

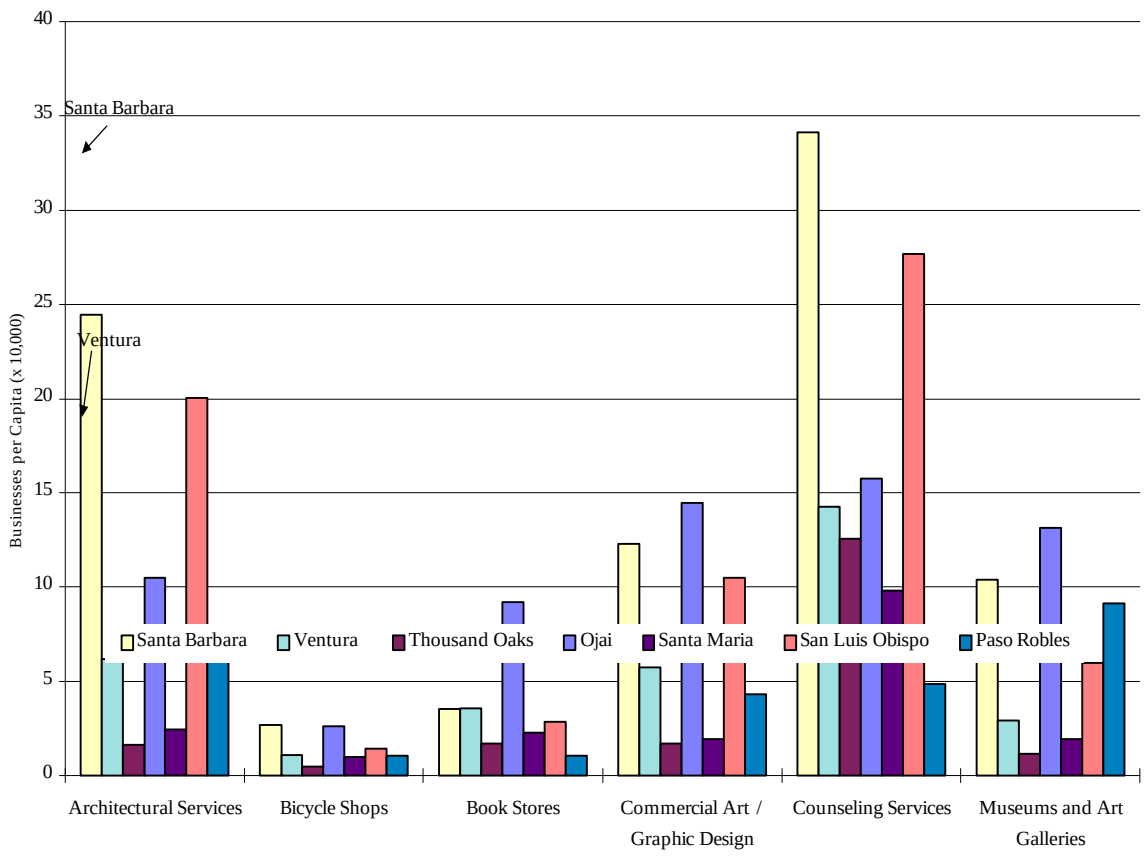
Inter-organizational linkages may also impact places physically. Through the [xxiii]Plans and Planting organization's early efforts to preserve historic adobe buildings, local groups captured what became office space for several different

community non-profits (including the well-endowed Santa Barbara Foundation). Another physical change is the ongoing Community Flag Project, created by a former director of the city art museum, which commissions local artists to design flags for voluntary groups in the arts, welfare, health, environment, and social services (43 different flags to date). Each design can be repeated as logo on stationery, publicity, vehicles, and so forth. The flying flags provide the organizations a more visible presence in the city—and the city, in a locally characteristic way, gains a beauty asset as the flags fly at public sites. So the arts build other organizational realms and vice-versa. Besides their external results, such projects create interpersonal linkages across organizational realms that serve, as with other so-called "weak ties" (Granovetter, 1975), to strengthen the basis for future actions. Albeit with lower stakes than those involving oil and freeway, outcomes like the Flag Project cumulate to create a different "structure of feeling" or "aura" in the public spaces of the two cities.[xxiv]

Part of this aura also consists of the goods and services available inside and flowing out of the buildings—the details of shop offerings, modes of window display, and mannerism of service. They not only attract and sustain workers in particular fields, but also offer up place stories—more memory trace material. We compared our two areas, along with the six primary towns and cities used in our more general studies, in terms of the degree to which they offered goods and services we associate with those in information, technology, and leisure service sectors. Using ratios of number of establishments to population size, we compared densities for each type of the following: Architectural Services, Book Stores, Commercial Art and Graphic Design, Museums and Art Galleries, Counseling Services, Bicycle Shops, and Computer Programming Services. We used a computer phone directory data base,[xxv] roughly equivalent to the "yellow pages."

While other indicators could no doubt be substituted for the ones we chose,[xxvi] the differences as indicated in Figure 6 form a clear pattern—consistent with out initial portrayal of the differences between the two places, but based on a more subtle element in local ensembles. In the patterning of consumption goods, Santa Barbara was first in architects, counseling services, and bicycle shops—the latter perhaps reflecting local environmentalism and its material consequences. In the two art categories (Commercial Art & Graphic Design/Museums and Art Galleries), it was surpassed, in per capita terms, only by the art colony town of Ojai. Number of bookstores was the only category in which Ventura outscored Santa Barbara (albeit by a small margin), and in this case the count is affected by the many small used book shops in low-rent Ventura as compared to the many larger-scale bookstores in Santa Barbara.

Figure 6:
Businesses and Services Per Capita,
Selected Fields



Such environmental elements reveal to all, not just the professional analyst, something of what Becker (1998:44) calls in regard to physical objects in general the "congealed social agreements" that lie behind them. The two places' buildings,[xxvii] shops, and goods "say" different things about the people and organizational structures that would result in such a thing happening—and in that way facilitate place replication. Ordinary folks are also semioticians, and able to at least glimpse the congealed social agreements on display and make what they see part of future behavior.

Our interviews also revealed that the places would even be more different if it were not for diffusion among them, as actors in one place mimic what is happening in the other. The borrowing was mostly in the direction of Ventura following Santa Barbara—evident, for example, in zoning, sign controls, or the type of trees used in downtown street plantings. In regard to an alternative newspaper, AIDS-support organization, and a public interest law firm, the

Ventura version was established by the Santa Barbara "parent." Not only does this put Ventura at least somewhat "behind the times" in substantive terms, the general fact of ordering becomes another signal of place difference.

Final Speculations: Place as Rolling Inertia

By invoking ideas of character and tradition, but now reformulated as modes of structurating acts, we can better see how local histories produce difference even in the face of homogenizing external pressure or similarly short-term minded local growth elites. Easy enough to observe, Santa Barbara and Ventura both experienced massive oil development as well as the freeway—along with tract housing, fast food, the internet, and so much of the other paraphernalia of U.S. modernism. But surface similarities mask underlying differences in local unfoldings because what is distinctive is not the list of attributes but the way they combine. More than saying "everything counts," things count because of the way they are in conjunction with one another. The meaning of any single element derives from the others in the local context. In the language of various current schools, elements of the conjunction are mutually determinative, indexical, and conjointly constituted. These practices come to make up a "going concern" (Hughes, 1971:52), so stable they may be taken for granted, "naturalized," made into an unquestioned "black box" (Latour, 1987).

Whatever the terminology, people must use these interlinked arrangements around them to make their lives and livelihoods. This is the "blood" of conjuncture; as people live "within" them, conjunctures receive their vivacity, not just for the moment, but as a force of reproduction. Individuals' repeated actions across the local spheres do the job. Big events, dramatic happenings and intense social relations would be too gross within so complex and populous an arena; it is urbanity's weak ties that push place distinction forward. People know among themselves that flags go up in a certain way, particular policies are normal, shop goods of a distinct type will be there. All these expectations become more or less of apiece. Even if only vaguely (or poetically), many people, both experts and lay, recognize in these textures a particular kind of place character and tradition; hence the persistent if uneven (and even somewhat involuntary) use of these notions in life and scholarship.

At a methodological level, our emphasis on mutual determinacy promotes an open attitude toward the proper substantive focus of urban analysis. Since the way of doing things is "everywhere," there is no need to debate whether research focus should be on the economy, civic organization, architecture, or nature; it should be on the *connective tissues* among all of them. Where to start is a matter of research resources and accessibility; oil and freeway were useful to us because they were of similar magnitude in their potential effects on both places, and they created a good deal of accessible data. The search becomes not one of finding evidence to bolster one variable as opposed to another, but of following the tradition trace across the variables to see how the place works.

In doing this for our two cases, we think we have also come to some substantive issues of concern to urban analysts, particularly with those with an interest in power. The so-called dead hand of the past, we have come to see, is not just a problem for the proletariat, but something that entangles the privileged as well. Ventura's past elites, however unwittingly, were complicit in generating a future that their present-day counterparts would much like to reverse. Similarly in Santa Barbara, some current projects of the rich and powerful must accommodate restrictions that carry fingerprints of their predecessors who perhaps never meant for things to have "gone so far." For those with only weak resources, the weight of accumulating conjunctures and the routines they imply are that much more difficult to ignore—however unhealthy, inegalitarian, or otherwise troubling they may be. We thus come upon, after a roundabout route, the core meaning of local power, with a contribution perhaps to ongoing arguments of how hegemony works. That even revolutionaries must draw upon, as best they can, the complex arrangements they may so passionately wish to change, thus makes sense (Calhoun, 1983).

Nowadays there are efforts to contrive the kind of urban character and tradition we have described, represented most ambitiously in the "New Urbanism" movement. As in the prototypical case of Disney's Celebration in Florida, the developers take every opportunity to invoke an idealized urban way of life in buildings and spatial arrangements. Constructed mostly on vacant scrub near Orlando, a "new town" rises with imaginings of high levels of civic interaction, focused on a downtown of concentrated commercial and cultural activities. To make it all happen, Disney assiduously creates "old time" architecture (including a requirement that every house have a front porch), nostalgic street signs, and ersatz "mom and pop" store fronts. Compared to prior modes of development, these projects—and they now dot the country—do coordinate across a wider array of institutions to gain their effects (schools, business, and residence). But in profound ways, the New Urbanism may represent a contradiction in terms. If nothing else, we have shown how an urban tradition arises through interactive layering over time, something that is difficult to produce all at once no matter how large the resources behind the effort. Despite the skills of very smart planners and architects, anyone can read the Disney landscape as "instant," and in that sense something entirely different than, say, a Santa Barbara that did it over the longer haul. Again, we are in no position to pronounce places like Celebration a success or failure (but see Ross, 1999); we only can indicate what the creators are up against.

Similar challenges, although of a different sort, confront those striving to alter the trajectory of already existing places. Much to the frustration of "change agents," designing a new streetscape, creating a community organization, setting up a museum, or injecting a credo into ongoing routines does not often set new dynamics into action. It is not easy, in particular, to boost local standing vis-à-vis other places with a project here and another there; perhaps we have shown why

place stratification so endures in the U.S. (Schneider and Logan, 1982). Accrued advantage grows even through interaction with similar external forces.[xxviii] And when places try to overcome limitations by imitating the more advantaged locales, it is *not the same thing* that is being done, because the context is different, including the fact that the often crucial first-mover advantage has been lost.

What about instances of radical urban shift that do occur, but that have been beyond —both in geographic terms and conceptual framing—our research purview? The mountains at Aspen once provided ore to the rough mining town that grew in their shadow but then collapsed when the ore ran out; now the same topography provides ski runs for the rich and famous. South Beach in Miami is "back," very different from what it was when poor old people rocked on its porches or even what it was in its original art deco heyday. Bilbao, Spain, thanks to the new Gehry-designed Guggenheim Museum, seems to be shifting from an industrial hollow into a cultural capital of Europe. We suspect, but urge others to study how it happens, that something like total decay of social infrastructure and economic base facilitates such transformation, as underpinnings of prior lash-ups wither away. Ventura's steady upward swing in population and development (albeit modest compared to other parts of Southern California), we speculate, worked to maintain its continuity. But even Ventura may shift; we spell out not what will inevitably be its future, but the challenges that its change-oriented actors are up against.

Putting aside the cases of dramatic shift, we hope our overall perspective is useful enough to enrich the study not only of most places, but perhaps also of institutions and organizations of virtually any sort. Even sociology departments, we believe, operate through conjunctures that indicate character and have continuities that bespeak tradition. Investigating character and tradition in our sense might augment narrower specifications, like constraints imposed by government rules or sunk costs, as a way to understand inertia in organizations (see, e.g. Hannan and Freeman, 1984). Our version of inertia, akin to Becker's (1995) broad use of the term, broadens even further to inject ongoing change. It is a *rolling inertia* that allows for continuous flux within a stable mode of operation. Working with ideas borrowed from newer ways of understanding structure and applied to geographic place, we have attempted to show how this happens and to offer ways of making the process, otherwise so vague and opaque, more accessible for systematic study.

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[i] Maddox defines tradition as "a set of strategies that involve using cultural materials from the past to authorize contemporary relations of domination" (1993: 259).

[ii] Invoking Braudel, Orum (1995: 191) makes an advance by focusing on the "concatenation of circumstances" in his several U.S. cities. But Orum aims to

discover how, at different historic stages, one or the other type of factor (e.g. government *vs.* economy) is "dominant" (Orum, 1995: 144). We presume these factors make up different aspects of all social action rather than characteristics of certain historical moments or places (for a more ambitious version of the logic implied in Orum's treatment, see Mann, 1986).

[iii] Latour attributes the term to Law (1986), but gives no page number and we did not find the term in the cited work. In personal conversation Latour could not elaborate on a source.

[iv] Unless otherwise indicated, data correspond to central cities; we use the term "area" to denote central city and immediate suburban ring, not the surrounding county.

[v] A business section front-page story in the *Los Angeles Times* declared: "Blading to work, surfing at lunch. No wonder Santa Barbara is the newest Mecca for high-tech companies" (Helft, 1997:D1). By one measure (internet domain names per number of local employees), Santa Barbara County is the second-densest internet site in the U.S. (Zook, 1998, Table 4).

[vi] For example, consultants who successfully advanced Santa Monica's Third Street mall used Santa Barbara as their exemplar. In their survey of California's natural and social landscapes, Brechin and Dawson single out Santa Barbara's "civitas" as virtually unique in California (Brechin and Dawson, 1999). For other acclamations, see e.g. Langdon, 1994: 161; Franklin, 1926: 42; Plunket, 1995.

[vii] In critiquing Skocpol (and others), Sewell cautions on this score as well as warning against turning history into mechanistic quasi-experiments that contradict the nature of historical events as mutually determinative and contingent (Sewell, 1996: 259, citing Bloch, 1967:47).

[viii] We build toward a "consilience of induction" approximating the "confidence test" that, as in much of science (for example, paleontology) substitutes for deductive reasoning. See William Whewell as quoted in Gould, 1986. Methodological details as well as extensive description of these places can be found in Beamish, et al, 1999' Molotch et al. 1996; Nevarez et al. 1996; Nevarez et al. 1999; Paulsen et al. 1996; Paulsen et al. 1999..

[ix] Examples from our study areas of other matched places include the towns of Ojai and Fillmore, Santa Maria and San Luis Obispo, Simi Valley and Thousand Oaks. Each pair reflects similar geographic and economic situations, but distinctly different characters. For additional details on all our cases Beamish, et al, 1999; Molotch et al. 1996; Nevarez et al. 1996; Nevarez et al. 1999; Paulsen et al. 1996; Paulsen et al. 1999.

[x] For some detailed accounts of social and economic impacts of oil and related extractive industries, see Bunker, 1984; Freudenburg and Gramling, 1994; Hallwood, 1986; Lloyd and Newlands, 1987, Feagin, 1990.

[xi] As with other California fairs, Ventura's technically falls under the State's authority, but local board members manage its affairs. Besides general interviews (including with the Fairgrounds staff person whose tenure goes back to the advent of off-track betting at the site), our information comes from 24 different news stories published in the local newspaper and the *Los Angeles*

Times.

[xii] "Whither the Fair?" *Ventura County Star Free Press*, July 23, 1978: C-10.

[xiii] One of the Fair's board members was also board chair of a large oil company (Marlow, 1988:A-4); the others were two agriculturists, the owner of an equipment leasing firm, a welding company manager, a "housewife," a social service official, and one representative each from the fire department and law enforcement.

[xiv] See, e.g., *Ventura Star-Free Press*, Oil Progress Week Special Section, October 18, 1950. The paper contained long lists of oil industry workers and the groups in which they participated—including Boy Scouts, Rotary, fraternal societies and professional groups.

[xv] *Santa Barbara Daily Independent*, August 7, 1899.

[xvi] Numerous commentators consider the Santa Barbara oil spill to be the event—the "blowout heard 'round the world"—that sparked the modern environmental movement (e.g. Easton, 1972; Mowrey and Redmond, 1993; Freudenburg and Gramling, 1994; Plunket, 1995:39). Within the year following, Nixon's approval of NEPA introduced the environmental impact statement as part of the country's development regimen.

[xvii] For other evidence that a university presence has strong, but not inevitable impacts on local culture and economies, see Bassett, et al. (1989) and Cowen et al. (1989).

[xviii] The cases we know, representing partial freeway tear-downs, are in San Francisco, Boston, Oakland, and Munich.

[xix] The directories used were: Blue Book: The 1995 Directory of Health and Human Services throughout Ventura County, published by Helpline, a non-profit organization under the umbrella of Interface Children, Family Services; and for Santa Barbara, The Community Resources Information Services (CRIS) Directory for 1995, published by the Family Service Agency of Santa Barbara. Private voluntary or non-profit organizations include branches of national organizations (e.g. American Lung Association) as well as local organizations (e.g. local, private health outreach organizations). Revenues and assets are for private, non-profit organizations with assets over $25,000 as listed in the Yearbook of California Charitable Organizations. Revenue refers to the "total of all contributions (support), program service revenues (subscription fees, counseling fees, etc.) and other revenue (interest, rents, gain or loss on sales, etc.) received by the organization;" assets refers to the "dollar value of an organization's assets including cash, accounts receivable, savings, loans due, inventories, investments, land, buildings, and equipment."

[xx] When certain categories of organization were not included in a given list, we added additional lists from other directories to create comparable data sets. For details, see Louch, 1995.

[xxi] The criterion for "significant" was that the place had to have its own chapters of multi-locational agencies like United Way, Visiting Nurses Association, Sierra Club, and so forth.

[xxii] In instances of ambiguity we relied on organizations' self-designation of the function they performed, using interviews or phone calls to clear up uncertainties caused by multiple listings or ambiguous phrases.

[xxiii]

[xxiv] Raymond Williams (1954:22) uses "structure of feeling"; "aura" comes from Walter Benjamin; in both cases, the original authors put the terms to use in critical analysis distinct from our more general objectives.

[xxv] SelectPhone on CD ROM. The data base makes possible cumulating aggregate totals by SIC code within specifiable geographic zones.

[xxvi] To a significant degree the list self-selected because other seemingly appropriate indicators could not be used; for example, SIC codes (upon which the phone classifications are based) treat Denny's type "coffee shops" as identical with an independent espresso bar. We used all the candidate business types we could think of for which appropriate data exist.

[xxvii] We examined the *Guide to Architecture in Southern California* (Gebhard and Winter, 1977), the standard source, to compare the number of buildings included from each place. The Guide lists 178 Santa Barbara structures that meet the authors' test of being "important," compared to 29 for Ventura.

[xxviii] These patterns, including differential strength of local charitable organizations, imply that devolving welfare responsibility to private and local levels will likely increase place stratification and individual inequality in the U.S.

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