

# COMMENTARY

## ECONOMICS

THE DEMOGRAPHICALLY VIBRANT RESIDENTS OF THE INLAND EMPIRE, DERIDED BY SOME COASTAL DENIZENS, ARE CRUCIAL TO SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA'S PROSPERITY.



REGISTER ILLUSTRATION BY CHRIS MORRIS

# BLUE-COLLAR HEROES

The late comedian Rodney Dangerfield (nee Jacob Cohen), whose signature

complaint was that he "can't get no respect," would have fit right in, in the Inland Empire. The vast expanse east of greater Los Angeles has long been castigated as a sprawling, environmental trash heap by planners and pundits, and its largely blue-collar denizens denigrated by some coast-dwellers, including in Orange County, who fret about "909s" – a reference to the IE's area code – crowding their beaches.



JOEL KOTKIN REGISTER COLUMNIST

The Urban Dictionary typically defines the region as "a great place to live between Los Angeles and Las Vegas if you don't mind the meth labs, cows and dirt people." Or, as one blogger put it, a collection of "worthless idiots, pure and simple." Nice.

In reality, the people who live along the coast should appreciate the "909ers" since they constitute the future – if there is much of one – for

Southern California's middle class. The region has suffered considerably since the Great Recession, in part because of a high concentration of sub-prime loans taken out on new houses. Yet, for all its problems, the Inland Empire has remained the one place in Southern California where working-class and middle-class people can afford to own a home. With a median multiple (median house price divided by household income) of roughly 3.7, the area is at least 40 percent less expensive than Los Angeles and Orange County, making it the region's last redoubt for the American dream.

Without the 909ers, Southern California would be demographically stagnant. From 2000-10, according to the census, San Bernardino and Riv-

erside counties added more than 1 million people, compared with barely 200,000 combined for Los Angeles and Orange counties. And, despite the downturn that impacted the Inland Empire severely and slowed its growth, the area since 2010 has continued to grow more quickly, according to census estimates, than the coastal counties.

**1 MILLION**  
The number of people gained by San Bernardino and Riverside counties during 2000-10, according to the census. Los Angeles and Orange counties, by comparison, gained about 200,000 residents.

### FAMILIES & FOREIGN-BORN

Perhaps nothing illustrates the appeal of the region better than the influx of the foreign-born. In the past decade, Riverside and San Bernardino counties grew their foreign-born population by more than 300,000. In contrast, Los Angeles and Orange added barely one third as many. The rate of foreign-born growth in the Inland Empire, notes demographer Wendell Cox, was

roughly 50 percent, while Los Angeles and Orange counties managed 2.6 percent growth. The region, once largely white, now has a population that's 40 percent Latino, the single largest ethnic group.

And then there's families. As demographer Ali Modarres has pointed out, the populations of Los Angeles, as well as Orange County, are aging rapidly while the numbers of children have dropped. In contrast, families continue to move into the Inland Empire, one reason for its relatively vibrant demography. Over the past decade, while Orange County and Los Angeles experienced a combined loss of 215,000 people under age 14 – among the highest rates in the U.S. of a shrinking population of children – the Inland Empire gained more than 20,000 under-14s.

For these basic demographic reasons, the Inland Empire

remains critical to Southern California's success. And there are some signs of progress. Unemployment has plummeted from more than 13 percent to 9.6 percent, higher than in Orange County but considerably better than

**9.6%**  
The recent unemployment rate in the Inland Empire, versus 10.2 percent in Los Angeles County.

Los Angeles' 10.2 percent. There are also some signs of growth, as signaled by some new residential development, and interest in the area from overseas investors.

### COASTALS CALL SHOTS

The long-term outlook, however, remains clouded, in large part, because of state and regional economic policies that undermine the very nature of the predominantly blue-collar 909 economy. This reflects in part the domination of the state by the coastal political class, concentrated in the Bay Area but with strong support in many

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## EDUCATION

# One teacher can redirect a life



ERWIN CHEMEKINSKY REGISTER COLUMNIST

No one succeeds on his or her own. If we are fortunate, we have had teachers who changed our lives for the better. For me, it was a high school teacher – Earl Bell.

I grew up in a working-class family on the far south side of Chicago. Neither of my parents went to college. My Dad worked in a home improvement store, Courtesy Home Center. My Mom worked in the home. None of my friends had parents who had gone to college.

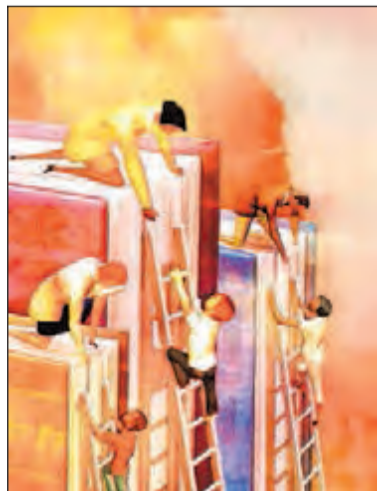
I went to the local Chicago public schools through the eighth grade, but, through a series of coincidences, ended up taking the test for admission to the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools. The Lab School

was then – in 1967 – one of the most prestigious schools in the country. It still is today.

It is where President Barack Obama's children went before they moved to Washington, D.C. It was started by John Dewey to be a laboratory for his theories of education. The students are primarily the children of professors at the University of Chicago.

I was accepted to the Lab School and given a partial scholarship. I was the only person in my neighborhood to go there and it was a 30-45 minute bus ride each way on the Chicago city buses. But I quickly discovered that it was worlds away from anything I had ever experienced.

I recall on the first day of high school, sitting at a table in the cafeteria and listening to my classmates discussing their summer trips to Europe. The furthest I had ever been was to my



MCT ILLUSTRATION

aunt's house in Gary, Ind. Their life experiences and their sophistication were vastly different from mine. I felt painfully out of place.

In my first week of high school, an announcement was posted that the school was going to start a debate team and the initial meeting was on Friday afternoon. I have no idea why I went. I was a shy child and an activity based on public speaking did not seem likely to appeal to me. The coach, Earl Bell, was new to the school, having previ-

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## CULTURE

# Headed toward inequality far worse than economic



MARK STEYN SYNDICATED COLUMNIST

One consequence of the botched launch of Obamacare is that it has, judging from his plummeting numbers with "millennials," diminished Barack Obama's cool. It's not merely that the website

isn't state-of-the-art, but that the art it's flailing to be state of is that of the mid-20th century social program. The emperor has hipster garb, but underneath he's just another Commissar Squaresville. So, health care being an irredeemable downer for the foreseeable future, this week the president pivoted (as they say) to "economic inequality," which will be, he assures us, his principal focus for the rest of his term. And what's his big idea for

this new priority? Stand well back: He wants to increase the minimum wage!

Meanwhile, Jeff Bezos of Amazon (a nongovernment website) is musing about delivering his products to customers across the country (and the planet) within hours by using drones.

Drones! If there's one thing Obama can do, it's drones. He's renowned across Yemen and Waziristan as the Domino's of drones. If he'd thought to have your health insurance cancellation notices dropped by drone, Obamacare might have been a viable business model. Yet, even in Obama's sole area of expertise and dominant market share, the private sector is already outpacing him.

Who has a greater grasp of the economic contours of the year after tomorrow – Bezos or Obama?

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# KOTKIN: Joblessness falling, home sales rising in Inland Empire

FROM PAGE 1

Southern California coastal communities. The Inland Empire, where almost half the population has earned a high school degree or less, compared with a third of residents in Orange County, is particularly dependent on the blue-collar employment undermined by the gentry-oriented direction of state regulatory policy.

Losses of jobs in these blue-collar fields, notes economist John Husing, have helped swell the ranks of poor people in the area, from roughly 12 percent of the population to 18 percent over the past 20 years. Part of the problem lies in a determination by the state to discourage precisely the kind of single-family-oriented suburban development that has attracted so many to the region. The decline of construction jobs – some 54,000 during the recession – hit the region hard, particularly

its heavily immigrant, blue-collar workforce. This sector has made only a slight recovery in recent months. Ironically, the nascent housing recovery could short-circuit further gains by boosting housing prices and squashing any potential longer-term recovery.

Other state policies – such as cascading electricity prices – also hit the Inland Empire’s once-promising industrial economy. With California electricity prices as much as two times higher than those in rival states, energy-consuming industries are looking further east, beyond state lines.

Indeed, according to recent economic trends, job growth is now occurring fastest in places like Arizona, Texas, even Nevada, all of which compete directly with the Inland Empire. As the nation has gained a half-million manufacturing jobs since 2010, such jobs have continued to leave the region. Had the regu-

latory environment been more favorable, notes economist John Husing, the Inland Empire, with industrial space half as expensive that in Los Angeles and Orange, would have been a major beneficiary.

Finally, there is a major threat to the logistics industry, which has grown rapidly over 20 years, adding 71,900 jobs from 1990-2012, a yearly average of 3,268. The potential threat is posed by the expansion of the Panama Canal, and the resulting expansion of Gulf Coast ports, all of which could reduce these positions dramatically in coming decades. Husing suggests that attempts by the regional Air Quality Management District to slow this industry’s expansion is a “a fundamental attack on the area’s economic health.”

## KEYS TO REBOUND

Can the Inland Empire still make another turnaround, as it did after the previous deep re-

gional recession 20 years ago? Some, such as the Los Angeles Times, see the key to a rebound in boosting transit, something that, despite huge investment, accounts for barely 1.5 percent of the IE’s work trips, even less than the 7 percent in Los Angeles or 3 percent in Orange County.

This “smart growth” solution remains oddly detached from economic or geographic reality; more transit usage may be preferable in some ways but can only constitute a marginal factor in the near or midterm future. What the Inland Empire needs, more than anything, is an economic environment that spurs middle-class jobs, notably in logistics, manufacturing and construction.

Equally important, the area needs to focus more on quality-of-life issues that may attract younger, educated workers, increasingly priced out of the coastal areas. This means a

commitment to better parks and schools, attractive particularly to families. This approach has helped a few communities, such as Eastvale, near Ontario, become new bastions of the middle class.

Without a resurgence in the Inland Empire, all of Southern California can expect, at best, to see the area age and lose its last claim to vitality. This should matter to everyone in Southern California whether they live there or not. Without the 909ers, we are not only without the butt of jokes from self-styled sophisticates, we will have lost touch with the very aspirational dynamic that has forged this region throughout its history. It’s time maybe to give them some respect.

Register opinion columnist Joel Kotkin is R.C. Hobbs Professor of Urban Studies at Chapman University. He is the executive editor of [www.newgeography.com](http://www.newgeography.com).

# STEYN: Hard to be visionary when pointing in wrong direction

FROM PAGE 1

ma? My colleague Jonah Goldberg notes that the day before the president’s speech on “inequality,” Applebee’s announced that it was introducing computer “menu tablets” to its restaurants. Automated supermarket checkout, 3D printing, driverless vehicles – what has the “minimum wage” to do with any of that? To get your minimum wage increased, you first have to have a minimum-wage job.

In my book (which I shall forbore to plug, but is available at Amazon, and with which Jeff Bezos will be happy to drone your aunt this holiday season), I write:

“Once upon a time, millions of Americans worked on farms. Then, as agriculture declined, they moved into the factories. When manufacturing was outsourced, they settled into low-paying service jobs or better-paying cubicle jobs – so-called ‘professional services’ often deriving from the ever-swelling accounting and legal administration that now attends almost any activity in America. What comes next?”

“Or, more to the point, what if there is no ‘next?’”

What do millions of people do in a world in which, in Marxian terms, “capital” no longer needs “labor”? America’s liberal elite seem to enjoy having a domestic-servant class on hand, but, unlike the Downton Abbey crowd, are vaguely uncomfortable with having them drawn from the sturdy yokel stock of the village, and thus favor, to a degree only the Saudis can match, importing their maids and pool boys from a permanent subordinate class of cheap foreign labor. Hence the fetishization of the “undocumented,” soon to be reflected in the multimillion bipartisan amnesty for those willing to do “the jobs Americans won’t do.”

So what jobs will Americans get to do? We dignify the new age as “the knowledge economy,” although, to the casual observer, it doesn’t seem to require a lot of knowledge. One of the advantages of Obamacare, according to Nancy Pelosi, is that it will liberate the citizenry: “Think of an economy where people could be an artist or a photographer or a writer without worrying about keeping their day job in order to have health insurance.” It’s



KIRK WALTERS / KING FEATURES

certainly true that employer-based health coverage distorts the job market, but what’s more likely in a world without work? A new golden age of American sculpture and opera? Or millions more people who live vicariously through celebrity gossip and electronic diversions? One of the differences between government health care in America compared to, say, Sweden is the costs of obesity, heart disease, childhood diabetes, etc. In an ever-more sedentary society where fewer and fewer have to get up to go to work in the morning, is it likely that those trends will diminish or increase?

Consider Vermont. Unlike my own state of New Hampshire, it has a bucolic image: Holsteins, dirt roads, the Vermont Teddy Bear Company, Ben & Jerry’s, Howard Dean ... And yet the Green Mountain State has appalling levels of heroin and meth addiction, and the social chaos that follows. Geoffrey Norman began a recent essay in *The Weekly Standard* with a vignette from a town I know very well – St. Johnsbury, population 7,600,

motto “Very Vermont,” the capital of the remote North-East Kingdom hard by the Quebec border and as far from urban pathologies as you can get. Or so you’d think. But on a recent Saturday morning, Norman reports, there were more cars parked at the needle-exchange clinic than at the farmers’ market. In Vermont, there’s no inner-city underclass, because there are no cities, inner or outer; there’s no disadvantaged minorities, because there’s only three blacks and seven Hispanics in the entire state; there’s no nothing. Which is the real problem.

Large numbers of Vermonters have adopted the dysfunctions of the urban underclass for no reason more compelling than that there’s not much else to do. Once upon a time, St. Johnsbury made Fairbanks scales, but now a still-hand-some town is, as Norman puts it, “hollowed out by the loss of work and purpose.” Their grandparents got up at four in the morning to work the farm, and their great-great-great-whatever-parents slogged up the Connecticut River, cleared

the land, and built homes and towns and a civilization in the wilderness. And now? A couple of months back, I sat in the café in St. Johnsbury and overheard a state official and a chamber of commerce official discuss enthusiastically how the town could access some federal funds to convert an abandoned building into welfare housing.

“Work” and “purpose” are intimately connected: Researchers at the University of Michigan, for example, found that welfare payments make one unhappier than a modest income honestly earned and used to provide for one’s family. “It drains too much of the life from life,” said Charles Murray in a speech in 2009. “And that statement applies as much to the lives of janitors – even more to the lives of janitors – as it does to the lives of CEOs.” Self-reliance – “work” – is intimately connected to human dignity – “purpose.”

So what does every initiative of the Obama era have in common? Obamacare, Obamaphones, Social Security disability expansion, 50 million people on food stamps. The assumption is that mass, multigenerational dependency is now a permanent feature of life. A coastal elite will devise ever-smarter and slicker trinkets, and pretty much everyone else will be either a member of the dependency class or the vast bureaucracy that ministers to them. And, if you’re wondering why every Big Government program assumes you’re a feeble child, that’s because a citizenry without “work and purpose” is ultimately incompatible with liberty. The elites think a smart society will be wealthy enough to relieve the masses from the need to work. In reality, it would be neofeudal, but with fatter, sicker peasants. It wouldn’t just be “economic inequality,” but a far more profound kind, and seething with resentments.

One wouldn’t expect the governing class to be as farsighted as visionaries like Bezos. But it’s hard to be visionary if you’re pointing in the wrong direction. Which is why the signature achievement of Obama’s “hope and change” combines 1940s British public health theories with 1970s Soviet supermarket delivery systems. But don’t worry: Maybe one day soon, your needle-exchange clinic will be able to deliver by drone. Look out below.

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# CHEMERINSKY: Trajectory toward success launched by instructor

FROM PAGE 1

ously taught at a high school in Virginia. His manner was gruff, and his message was demanding for those who wanted to participate.

I don’t know why I was drawn to him or to this strange, new activity. But it gave me a place to belong in a school where I did not fit. I was in the right place at the right time, since the debate team was just beginning. Bell took me, two sophomores and a senior and made us his varsity. We got our butts kicked, but, by my sophomore year, we were respectable. By my junior and senior years, we were among the best debate teams in Illinois and, likely, the country.

Earl Bell spent incalculable hours working with me. The debaters met every day after school, and he was there. We went to tournaments almost every weekend, and he took us. He and I spent about an hour every night on the phone, talking about the details of our team and the strategies for our upcoming debates. But at the same time, I realize, now he also was teaching me countless life lessons, including how to thrive in a place that was so foreign to me.

In my junior year, my Dad developed a serious illness needing surgery and was out of work for a long time. There was no family income, and there were no funds for me to continue at the Lab School. I already was receiving the maximum scholarship allowed under their rules.

Bell, though, told the school he would quit unless they provided the funds to let me stay. They did. He paid the costs for me to attend the debate tournaments until my Dad got back to work.

By my junior year, I had begun to feel comfortable at the Lab School and had finally made friends there. My senior year, I was chosen to be president of student government and was very much part of the school. But I knew that I would not have remained there if not for Earl Bell and the debate team.

I went on to graduate with honors from Northwestern University and Harvard Law School and to a career as a lawyer and law professor and, now, a law school dean. I know that all I have achieved is because of the enormous amount of time that one teacher took with me.

Erwin Chemerinsky is dean of the UC Irvine School of Law.



This view of the University of the Chicago Laboratory Schools is from the schools’ Facebook page.