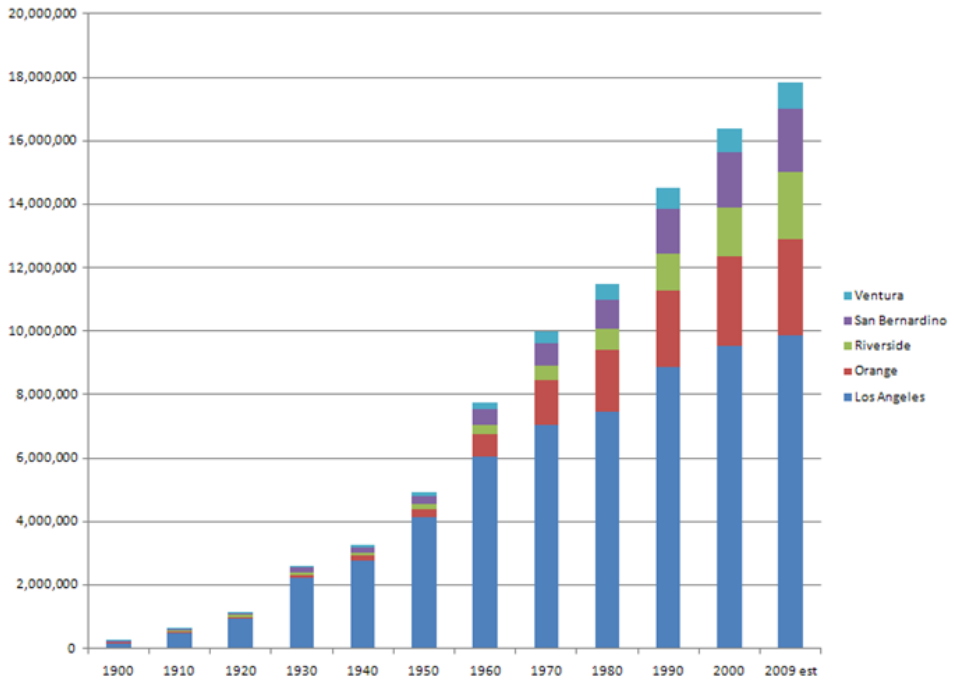
Handout 1 - Los Angeles

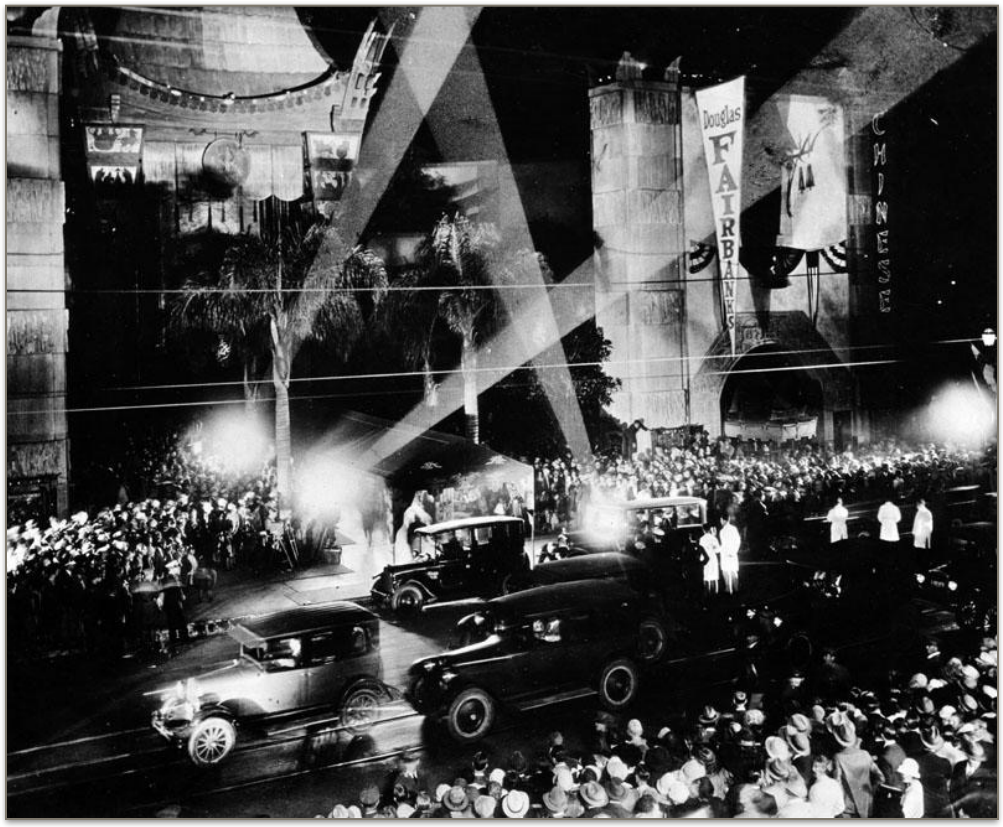
At well over 10 million residents, Los Angeles County is the most heavily populated region in the United States. However, when California became a state in 1850, Los Angeles County was home to only 3,500 people. Why did it grow so quickly?

From the second half of the 19th century until the present, California has been a beacon to the hopeful, offering varied versions of the American Dream. During the Gold Rush of 1848-52, more than 300,000 people moved to the northern part of the state in search of instant, transformative wealth. Most did not prosper from gold, but many stayed in the region. Much of lore of the American "Wild West"--quickly constructed wooden towns with saloons full of gambling, gun violence, and a tough "sheriff" that tries to maintain order--emanates from this era. South, in the Los Angeles area, real estate developers began to cultivate the city and actively promote it as an emerging metropolis. American migrants and foreign immigrants flocked to the area seeking jobs in agriculture, railroad construction, and later in the century, the oil industry. By 1900, Los Angeles County's population had risen to over 170,000. The emergence of Los Angeles as a "major" U.S. city, with a regional population of over 7 million by 1970, is, however, a distinctly 20th century story.



CA Population Growth Chart

The first feature-length films, or “movies,” were made during the first decade of the 20th century. The 1910 film, In Old California, was the inaugural “Hollywood” movie, made in the “Hollywoodland” neighborhood of Los Angeles, and it marked the opening of an era of studio building that quickly marked the region as the world center of film. By the 1920s, more than 80% of the world’s films were made in Los Angeles, and the word “Hollywood” had come to represent the genre writ large. Throughout the following decades, Hollywood cemented its reputation for film, producing an average of more than 800 per year, as well as adapting to ever evolving media outlets such as television. By the middle of the 20th century, Los Angeles was the image capital of the world.



The opening of the Chinese Theater, 1927