

## 4. Cities

In "Cities," the author reflects on the intricate history and racial dynamics of Los Angeles, their birthplace, revealing how the city has evolved through various cultural and political landscapes. The narrative begins by detailing the geography of Los Angeles—a coastal plain influenced by the Tongva people and shaped by Spanish and Mexican rule before being annexed by the U.S. This history introduces the racial classifications that have influenced the city from its inception, highlighting how the initial settlers' identities—like “mulato,” “mestizo,” and “indio”—evolved through generations into a new identity termed “Californio.”

A key figure in this transformation is Pío Pico, an Afro-Español politician who exemplified the struggle for acceptance and evolution beyond racial labels. Despite his status in pre-U.S. conquest California, the arrival of white settlers imposed new racial categorizations that marginalized the Californios and redefined their identities as “Mexican.” The narrative continues to juxtapose the systemic racism of the past with the experiences of the author's parents in the 20th century, illustrating how they were racially categorized as “Caucasian,” despite their mixed heritage.

The chapter also explores the emotional weight of racial categorizations and the effects of segregation, revealing how these identities shape personal experiences. The author recounts a moment witnessing a child's innocent assumption of their role in a complex racial narrative at a soccer game, underscoring the learned racial hierarchies prevalent in society.

The text critiques the long-standing institutional efforts—exemplified by discriminatory mapping practices in the 1939 Federal Home Loan Bank map—that have shaped the racial landscape of cities. This segregation and the trauma associated with it manifest in the identities of community members, particularly within “barrios” and among people of color, enveloping them in a cycle of violence and resistance.

Ultimately, the chapter speaks to the beauty and complexity of hybrid identities within marginalized communities, illustrating moments of cultural pride amidst systemic oppression. The author emphasizes the need for recognition of these intertwined histories to understand the broader narrative of race and identity in urban America.