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## Dan Walters: Latest numbers reveal two-tier California

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A quarter-century ago, I wrote a series of articles about California's megatrends that transmogrified into a book, "The New California: Facing the 21st Century."

My chief premise was that intertwining cultural, demographic, economic and political forces were radically transforming the state.

I quoted one academic study that saw "the possible emerging of a two-tier economy with Asians and non-Hispanic whites competing for high-status positions while Hispanics and blacks struggle to get low-paying service jobs."

Last week's release of detailed 2010 census data and this week's unveiling of a massive statistical study of Californians' educations, incomes and health confirm that what was theory in 1985 has become reality.

The census tells us that the state's rapidly growing Latino population will surpass a declining and aging white population to become its largest ethnic group within a few years.

Meanwhile, data from "A Portrait of California," a 170-page statistical study from the Social Science Research Council, reveal a growing gap of personal well-being between a relatively small white and Asian overclass and a largely black and Latino underclass.

Both sets of data also confirm that there is a large geographic component to California's socio-economic stratification.

The research council's study, backed by foundation grants, developed a 1 to 10 index of well-being and applied it to communities and to ethnic, gender and geographic subgroups. It concluded that there are five distinct strata.

At the top, 1 percent of Californians live in "Shangri-Las" in and around Silicon Valley and portions of Southern California with an index of 9.35.

They're followed by 18 percent in a "metro-coastal enclave" (7.82), 38 percent in "Main Street California" (5.91), another 38 percent in "struggling California" (4.17), and finally, "the forsaken 5 percent" in central Los Angeles and rural areas (2.59).

"The analysis reveals that some Californians are enjoying the highest levels of well-being and access to opportunity in the nation today, while others are experiencing levels of well-being that characterized the nation decades ago," the report declares.

It cites these details:

- Asian American women have a life expectancy of 88.6 years, 18-plus years longer than African American men.
- A "stunning" \$58,000 gap in median personal earnings exists between Silicon Valley residents and those in East Los Angeles – \$73,000 a year in the former and \$15,000 in the latter.
- While only about 7 percent of white adults lack high school diplomas, it's 45 percent of Latino adults in the Los Angeles metropolitan area. More than half of public school students come from families in poverty, and just 100 of the state's 2,500 high schools produce nearly half of its dropouts.

Two tiers indeed.

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