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2-1-2006

## Reinventing San Jose, California: An Experiment in Multiculturalism

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### Recommended Citation

Jan English-Lueck. "Reinventing San Jose, California: An Experiment in Multiculturalism" *Anthropology News* (2006): 17. <https://doi.org/10.1525/an.2006.47.2.17.1>

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2006 "Reinventing San Jose, California: An Experiment in Multiculturalism." *Anthropology News* February 2006: 47 (2) 17

## Reinventing San Jose

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In San Jose people come to work, and they come from all over the planet. The region known as Silicon Valley boasts a productivity level two and a half times the national average. A full 10% of US patents are generated in Silicon Valley. Forty percent of the population is foreign-born, and literally dozens of languages are spoken in the region's schools. Yet a community so tied to work, especially volatile high-technology work, is vulnerable. San Jose struggles with a boom and bust economy. The gap between rich and poor gets bigger with each passing year as the people who occupied the middle class in 2000 now seek working-class jobs, and those in the working class struggle to patch together a living wage. The latter story is vividly captured in anthropologist Christian Zolniski's new ethnography, *Janitors, Street Vendors and Activists* (2006). The denizens of San Jose are engaged in an experiment in multicultural, late capitalist living.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, immigrants transformed San Jose into an agricultural center, especially in fruit tree production, earning the epithet, "Valley of Heart's Delight." Italian, Portuguese, Greek, Chinese and Japanese communities stem from this era. Prunes from San Jose were globally distributed until warfare with Germany stifled a key market, forcing the transition to manufacture and defense-related industrialization. Ethnographic historian Glenna Matthews writes about the women who struggled in this transition in *Silicon Valley, Women, and the California Dream* (2003). The new immigration of the latter half of the 20th century transformed the face of the region yet again, as numerous groups came to live in San Jose. James M Freeman's ethnographies, *Hearts of Sorrow* (1989) and *Changing Identities: Vietnamese Americans 1975 – 1995* (1996), and historian Stephen Pitti's treatise on Latinos, *The Devil in Silicon Valley* (2003), illustrate the complexity of San Jose's immigrant communities.

The local Native American people, the Muwekma Ohlone, are in a struggle to regain their federal recognition, having been declared "extinct so far as all practical purposes are concerned" in a widely cited reference in Kroeber's 1925 *Handbook of the Indians of California*. Now a San Jose State University anthropologist, Alan Leventhal, acts as tribal ethnohistorian and Berkeley visiting scholar Juliette Blevins consults with the Muwekma to revive the Chochenyo language using records from J P Harrington.

The Silicon Valley phenomenon itself now draws anthropologists. The long-term Silicon Valley Cultures Project was founded in 1991 by San Jose State University anthropologists C N Darrah, J M Freeman and J A English-Lueck to study the cultural phenomena of the region. *Cultures@SiliconValley* (2002) and the forthcoming *Busy Bodies*, as well as an active website housing many working papers, represent part of the anthropological activity in the area. British archaeologist Christine Finn' *Artifacts: an Archaeologist's Guide to Silicon Valley* (2001) critically examines its material culture. A vital network of applied anthropologists is integrated into the region. Indeed, the fields of business and design anthropology are being gestated around the water coolers of the IBM Almaden Research center and Xerox PARC.

San Jose civic leaders use the technological metaphor of reinvention to suggest that San Jose is continually adapting to new realities. That makes it a particularly interesting location for the 2006 AAA Annual Meeting as we approach the "critical intersections" and "dangerous issues" of our own discipline.

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