Silicon Valley's Rising Tide: Anticipations and Expectations for Bay Area Revitalization in High-Technology Manufacturing, 1979-1985

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"Ours is an age where the increasingly automatic process of production and urban expansion have displaced the human goals they were meant to serve"

- ***Lewis Mumford, The City in History***[1]

[1] Lewis Mumford, *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations, and Its Prospects*, A Harvest Book (Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1989). This was the epigraph to Raymond Brady's first letter to ABAG concerning the impact high-technology manufacturing had on affordability in the Bay Area. Brady's selection of this quote was perfect. It summarizes not just the process and consequence of automation but reveals a hidden irony in 'progress' — forcing the question who 'progress' is for and who it isn't.

Introduction

Throughout the 20th century, the San Francisco Bay Area became an economic powerhouse. Expedited by World War II industrialization and the mass migration of job seekers, the Bay Area spent the greater part of the 20th century as a vital pillar of the American industrial base. The Bay Area sat at the intersection of innovation and investment — a commercial industrial cluster, with public investment in defense technology and world ranking research universities.

As a late 1970s Association of Bay Area Governments regional economic report put it, World War II had provided "major stimulus for the accelerated growth of the young electronics industry."[2] While this industry grew, the highly commercialized character of modern-day Silicon Valley was still in the distance. At this point, much of this public investment fed right back into the defense industry. "At this time the military was the major market for electronics products, in the form of sophisticated weaponry," the ABAG report wrote.[3] The early electronics industry was characterized as a three-way effort, Stanford historian Christophe Lécuyer argues, between the government, the manufacturing, and the research.[4] The firms, enjoying the stability of public-private partnerships, operated as agents of the American public, researching and manufacturing products directly for government and defense consumption. "These firms," Lécuyer writes, "were highly dependent on military patronage and were oriented nearly exclusively toward technologies of direct interest to the Department of Defense."[5]

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[2] Association of Bay Area Governments, *San Francisco Bay Area Economic Profile*, with Bay Area Council (ABAG, 1979). Page 25
[3] Association of Bay Area Governments, *San Francisco Bay Area Economic Profile*. Page 25
[4] Christophe Lécuyer, *Making Silicon Valley: Innovation and the Growth of High Tech, 1930-1970*, Inside Technology (MIT Press, 2006).
[5] Lécuyer, *Making Silicon Valley*. Page 5

As the 20th century progressed, the relationship between private technology firms and the surrounding Bay Area would bifurcate as industry grew in size and profit. I will examine the public and private expectations of post-defense era high-technology manufacturing in the Bay Area and explore how those predictions unfolded over the late 1970s and early 1980s. In doing this, I find the birth and growth of the high-technology manufacturing industry in the Bay Area during the late 1970s and early 1980s arriving at a moment of economic peril for the Bay Area. Unshielded from a national offshoring trend deindustrializing the American economy, the Bay Area turned to high-technology manufacturing in hope of economic stimulation and regional employment revival. The impact of this industrial transition produced incalculable economic prosperity for many in the Bay Area — while simultaneously accelerating economic inequality, consolidated wealth, and division across the Bay Area labor force. Through public and private sectors, I track this transition, documenting the reactions to change in this new Bay Area.

Scholarship

The birth and growth of Silicon Valley is a deeply studied phenomenon. Silicon Valley captivates a diverse set of scholarly study — the Valley's growth was the result of a plethora of circumstances, innovations, and overlapping forces. From a business perspective, Silicon Valley introduced novel structures in firm organization. On an engineering side, Silicon Valley brought about life-changing innovation and technology. The Valley attracted large scale immigration, particularly from Southeast Asia, causing a sociological effect, and generated trillions of dollars in profit — an economic impact. Silicon Valley's supply chains have defined U.S. trade relationships with foreign countries, producing geo-political implications of the Valley — and fought unionization, impacting American labor relations. How Silicon Valley transformed the Bay Area, the U.S., and the world is as much its own story as it is the story of the 21st century.

With that, my work lives in an intersection of interdisciplinary scholarship — labor, economic, social, and technological. I look at how economic and social forecasting, the act of building the future through enacted prediction, private and public, transpired over the early days of Silicon Valley. In doing so, I seek to build a historical foundation of how the Bay Area was expected to develop, change, and grow upon the advent of high-technology manufacturing.

I build that historical understanding from two central sources of forecasts: the Santa Clara County Manufacturing Group and the Association of Bay Area Governments. The Santa Clara County Manufacturing Group (SCCMG) was the premier trade organization in Santa Clara County during the late 20th century. Founded by David Hewlett (of Hewlett-Packard) in 1978, the SCCMG advocated for business and development throughout the Valley's myriad political environment. By the 1980s, 85 of the Valley's largest employers were members of the group. The Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) fulfilled a similar purpose, but from the public's perspective. ABAG was founded in 1961 to combat the consequences associated with the Bay Area's hyper-atomized governments. It served as an unofficial regional government, comprised of officials from all nine counties, along with other local government agencies. While having no direct legislative power, ABAG exercised their influence by producing regional plans — a legislative direction given to regional governments to enact independently.

I follow both groups' anticipations of the Bay Area through the work of contemporary Silicon Valley scholars, namely David P. Angel, AnnaLee Saxenian, David Pellow, and Christophe Lécuyer, whose 2006 book *Making Silicon Valley* serves as my historical launch point.

Lécuyer saw Silicon Valley as a 'Marshallian' district, referencing the foundational micro-economist Alfred Marshall, arguing that the plethora of highly skilled and highly educated workers created the perfect and necessary conditions for the complex industrial cluster to come.

He argued that the industrial clustering in Silicon Valley not only richened the labor market but also made perfect rivalries — rivalries that spurred innovation. He writes "intense rivalries within industrial clusters stimulate the formation of new businesses. They also led to greater productivity and capacity for innovation."[6] Lécuyer also saw the development of highly specialized production facilities through public-private relationships with the Department of Defense and local contract firms as critical for the eventual development of a private consumer electronics market. Silicon Valley's largest innovation however, as seen by Lécuyer, was the development of highly-efficient and coordinated systems of manufacturing structure — systems that could move fast and connect a myriad of non-aligned productions partners. "They made major innovations in manufacturing processes, and these innovations enabled local firms to introduce innovative products to the marketplace. Silicon Valley engineers and entrepreneurs also learned how to manage process and people…This led them to develop innovative forms of management-employee relations."[7]

Saxenian's work on industrial clustering, organization structure, and business strategy characterizes the intentions behind the Valley's practices, explaining the envisioned future embodied in action. Saxenian attempted to understand why Silicon Valley chose to develop in the way it did. The Valley, Saxenian writes, "was organized to recombine components and subsystems made by specialist suppliers," and that as firms became more integrated, "they (were) reducing product development times and institutionalizing their capacity to learn from one another."[8] To Saxenian, efficiency was a major driver behind many organizational

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[6] Lécuyer, *Making Silicon Valley*. Page 5
[7] Lécuyer, *Making Silicon Valley*. Page 5
[8] Annalee Saxenian, "The Origins and Dynamics of Production Networks in Silicon Valley," in *Understanding Silicon Valley: The Anatomy of an Entrepreneurial Region*, ed. Martin Kenney (Stanford University Press, 2000). Page 141

innovations made in Silicon Valley. To this point, the Valley instituted thin, flexible barriers between firms — often collaborating for the sake of speed in innovation. The Valley also trimmed all possible fat, operating at the lowest possible price to massive the possible returns. It was this behavior that pushed Silicon Valley towards contract labor — and it was this behavior that eventually pushed out high-technology manufacturing from the Bay Area. "These production networks help account for the sustained technological dynamism of the Silicon Valley economy," Saxenian finishes.[9]

Finally, Angel and Pellow's works on labor in Silicon Valley root the impact of enacted futuring in real labor and social circumstances — the death of Fordism, the reliance on contract labor, the concentration and bifurcation of economic prosperity in tech — and give context to the fears festering in the Bay Area during the mid to late 1980s. In David Pellow's 2002 book *Silicon Valley of Dreams*, co-written with Lisa Sun-Hee Park, the authors carefully reveal the immigrant and working-class workforce that Silicon Valley depended on to maintain such extraordinary profits. They write that "an estimated 70 to 80 percent of people working in production jobs in the Valley are immigrants, women, and people of color," and that "most of these workers emigrated to the United States seeking an improvement in their economic situation, and most lack the skills and social networks needed to move up and out of these jobs." [10] Silicon Valley's reliance on contract labor extensively relied on cheap labor, even as company valuations shot past billions of dollars. This reliance on third party manufacturing kept profits in the hands of very few executives and engineers, preventing the wider region from collectively benefiting from Silicon Valley.

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[9] Saxenian, "The Origins and Dynamics of Production Networks in Silicon Valley." Page 141
[10] David N. Pellow, *The Silicon Valley of Dreams: Environmental Injustice, Immigrant Workers, and the High-Tech Global Economy*, with Lisa Sun-Hee Park, Critical America (University Press, 2002). Page 88

In many ways, this senior thesis is a case study in David P. Angel's work on new labor systems in Silicon Valley. Angel's view, as is mine, was that Silicon Valley innovated structures of labor and public economics in a way that changed how we understand today's world. The arrival of Silicon Valley came at the precise moment it needed to have — as America adopted a neo-liberal slant, the nation needed a new labor system that prioritized maximum efficiency and privatization. Silicon Valley, to Angel, was a "potential solution to the industrialization and manufacturing job loss experienced by older industrial regions."[11] To a degree, Angel saw Silicon Valley as Fordism's Grim Reaper. Innovations in the flexible, contract-based labor and production networks of Silicon Valley made it impossible for the older, more integrated system of Fordism to compete.

The Bay Area in the 1970s

In the mid-1970s, the Bay Area labor force was beginning a reinvention. In a 1979 economic report, the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) noted that labor force growth had severely dropped off between 1970-1975, compared to 1960-1970. "Bay Area growth rates in…labor force fell behind the United States and California rates in the 1970-1975 period," the report writes, "slowing down considerably from the high rates of the 1960-1970 decade."[12]

By the mid-1970s, the economic malaise plaguing the industrial mid-west had arrived in the Bay Area. Although less exposed to the closures of steel and automotive factories, the Bay Area was

[11] David P. Angel, "High-Technology Agglomeration and the Labor Market: The Case of Silicon Valley," in *Understanding Silicon Valley: The Anatomy of an Entrepreneurial Region*, ed. Martin Kenney (Stanford University Press; Stanford University Press, 2000). Page 124
[12] Association of Bay Area Governments, *San Francisco Bay Area Economic Profile*. Page 89

not immune to the accelerating flight of manufacturing abroad.[13] [14] By the early 1980s, General Motors and Ford would both close their Bay Area production plants — two of the region's dominant manufacturing facilities. [15] [16]

Simultaneously, the end of the war in Vietnam, paired with the placating of Cold War and space race tensions, resulted in the gradual but impactful decline of aerospace and defense funding. "The drop in aerospace employment in California has been precipitous, with only 36,000 employees in 1977, contrasted to 50,000 in 1972 and 100,000 in 1964," says the 1979 economic report by ABAG, noting that this decline was "probably due to the winding down of the Vietnam War."[17] A California Defense Conversion Council report found that by the end of the Cold War, California would lose "520,000 direct and indirect jobs" as a result of defense industry cutbacks and military base closures, "primarily in the … San Francisco Bay regions."[18]

This was an economy in transition. The decline of traditional manufacturing jobs in the Bay Area was met with a growth of service-industry jobs, many of them for highly skilled and college-educated workers. "Generally, the Bay Area's economic base has shifted from goods-producing to service-oriented activities to a greater degree than has occurred nationally," wrote the same 1979 ABAG report. "The goods-producing activities (agriculture, construction, and manufacturing) have become relatively less important components of the economy, while

[13] William K. Stevens Special To The New York Times, "Shutdown of Steel Works Stuns Youngstown," *The New York Times*, September 21, 1977.
[14] Judith Miller Special To The New York Times, "Miller Warns on Impact Of a Bankrupt Chrysler," *The New York Times*, November 8, 1979.
[15] "G.M. SETS CLOSING OF 4 PARTS PLANTS," *The New York Times*, February 26, 1982.
[16] "Ford Plant Closing," *The New York Times*, January 12, 1983.
[17] Association of Bay Area Governments, *San Francisco Bay Area Economic Profile*. Page 22
[18] California Defense Conversion Council, *Defense Conversion in California: Economies in Transition* (The Council, 1996). Page xi

service-oriented activities (trade, finance, government, business, professional, and other services) have grown in importance."[19]

Regardless of economic headwinds, by the late 1970s, Bay Area economic leaders had little fear of the future to come. In and around Santa Clara County, a region increasingly being known as 'Silicon Valley', a new manufacturing industry was rapidly growing, one with astronomical economic promise for the Bay Area — high-technology manufacturing. By 1979, high-technology manufacturing, including computers, electronics, and instruments, was being deemed one of the Bay Area's most important and rapidly growing economic bases.[20] Between 1972 and 1977, Bay Area high-technology manufacturing gained north of 50,000 jobs, roughly on pace with the loss of defense jobs.[21]

"The Bay Area's high-technology manufacturing sector is…growing in the volume of income it brings into the region and in the jobs it provides," wrote an ABAG report, declaring the growth of high-tech manufacturing "crucial to the Bay Area's economic base."[22] Another report noted that with the arrival of high-technology manufacturing, the Bay Area was "expected to actually improve its relative position in the U.S. economy."[23]

The private sector was experiencing similar excitement. The Santa Clara County Manufacturing Group (SCCMG), a Santa Clara County chamber of commerce group with connection to the emerging technology sector, published an employment growth prediction on July 11th, 1979. Their report, titled "Report on Estimates of Job Growth and Building Expansion of Sixty Santa

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[19] Association of Bay Area Governments, *San Francisco Bay Area Economic Profile*. Page 9
[20] Association of Bay Area Governments, *San Francisco Bay Area Economic Profile*.
[21] California Defense Conversion Council, *Defense Conversion in California*. Page 9
[22] Association of Bay Area Governments, *San Francisco Bay Area Economic Profile*. Page 27
[23] Association of Bay Area Governments, *Projections 79: 1980-2000, Population, Employment, Housing* (Association of Bay Area Governments, 1980). Page II-6

Clara County Companies 1979 – 1985," was co-authored by executives at the largest high-technology manufacturing firms, namely IBM, Hewlett-Packard, Fairchild Systems, National Semiconductor, and General Electric. Predicted within the report, the industry group expected firms to "add a total of 49,220 jobs between 1979 and 1981," with about half coming from the nascent high-technology manufacturing sector.[24] The survey made local headlines, spreading the economic buzz amongst the general public. "A recent survey by the Santa Clara County Manufacturing Group indicates [high-technology manufacturing] could produce another 25,000 jobs over the next two years and another 30,000 between 1982 and 1985," wrote one 1979 Santa Rosa Press Democrat article.[25] The report expressed the expectations industry leaders had on high-technology manufacturing growing quick and strong in the Bay Area. These expectations were quickly adopted by both public and private sectors.

Three months after SCCMG's jobs forecast was released, ABAG met to create similar economic forecasting. Reports from their October 29th, 1979 conference cite SCCMG's jobs forecast as cause for economic excitement in the coming decade. As the *Argus-Courier,* Petaluma's daily paper, published the day after the conference, "one of the most important areas of growth occurred in the Santa Clara Valley in high technology manufacturing, including aerospace, computers, electronics and instruments. One-fifth of all jobs created in this section nationally between 1972 and 1977 were in the Santa Clara County's 'Silicon Valley' — some 50,000 jobs."[26]

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[24] Santa Clara County Manufacturing Group Jobs/Housing Task Force et al., *Report on Estimates of Job Growth and Building Expansion of Sixty Santa Clara County Companies 1979-1985 / Prepared by the Jobs/Housing Task Force of the Santa Clara County Manufacturing Group.* (publisher not identified, 1979). Page 3
[25] "ABAG Focus on Growth of Economy," *The Press Democrat* (Santa Rosa), October 29, 1979.
[26] "Bay Area Economy Still Growing, ABAG Says," *Argus-Courier* (Petaluma, California), n.d.

During the 1970s, the national economy was stuck in a period of hesitancy and retreat. High inflation, slow economic growth, and high unemployment pulled business and government closer to the economic attraction high-technology manufacturing offered. As David Pellow and Lisa Sun-Hee Park write, the promise of economic deliverance from high-technology manufacturing came at a time of fear in the future of industrial employment. Many firms made high profile commitments intended to calm fears. Amongst these were "empty 'no layoff pledge(s),'" write Pellow and Park, that "many Silicon Valley companies made during the 1970s, when business and political leaders were claiming that this industry was immune to recession."[27] The predicted growth of high-technology manufacturing served a pair of needs: it calmed concerns about the impacts of a national recession within the Bay Area and it sugarcoated hesitations about shifts within the region's industrial base. "It appears California will continue to fare better than the rest of the nation in the current crippling recession," writes *The Hanford Sentinel* in 1980. "The strength and stability of the high-technology manufacturing sector in the state...were listed as elements in favor of the state's resiliency."[28] For many Bay Area leaders, a monoculture economy dependent on the success of high-technology manufacturing wasn't a gamble — rather, it was following the natural progression of American industrial evolution.

Labor and Production in Silicon Valley

The growth of high-technology manufacturing in the San Francisco Bay Area was a labor revolution as well as a technological one. To understand the implications brought about with the advent of Silicon Valley, and the hopes and fears associated with it, it is critical to understand the industrial context from which it emerged — a system that it would come to upend. Prior to

[27] Pellow, *The Silicon Valley of Dreams*. Page 65
[28] "State Economy, Bankers Optimistic," *The Hanford Sentinel*, July 23, 1980.

Silicon Valley's decentralization of the industrial process, American industrial production mirrored Fordism, the industrial organization technique engineered by the Ford Motor Company.[29] The term *Fordism,* coined by Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, described a new formation of industrial capitalism, quickly becoming the standard process of American industrial labor. Fordism, in the American labor system, was a "comprehensive application of scientific management to the labor process," as writes Mike Davis in *Prisoners of the American dream: Politics and Economy in the History of the US Working Class*.[30] Ford's greatness was not in what it made, but how Ford made it. Profit sharing was crucial for the success of Fordism. In 1914, the Ford Motor Company introduced the famous five-dollar-a-day wage, doubling the income for many of their workers.[31] Their largely immigrant work force received education and cultural enrichment, bringing their foreign labor into the fold of American society. It allowed the Ford Motor Company to scale and homogenize their industrial labor base, unlocking the assembly line and introducing mass production at levels unseen. "[Fordism] transcended the 'narrow technological-economic perspective' and regarded the changes in the forms of production and standardized mass production as the change towards a new civilization model and form of hegemony'," write Joachim Becker and Rudy Weissenbacher in their essay *Fordism*.[32] The Ford model not only shaped how industrial labor was managed in American manufacturing, but it set the expectations and obligations of an industry to its producers. These included collective

[29] Saxenian, "The Origins and Dynamics of Production Networks in Silicon Valley." Page 143
[30] Mike Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream: Politics and Economy in the History of the US Working Class*, The Haymarket Series (Verso, 1986). Page 106
[31] Joachim Becker and Rudy Weissenbacher, "Fordism," in *The Routledge Handbook to the Political Economy and Governance of the Americas*, 1st ed., with Anne Tittor et al. (Routledge, 2020), https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351138444-11.
[32] Becker and Weissenbacher, "Fordism." Page 114

bargaining, corporate integration, and the "family wage."[33] [34] The Fordist model was inward conscious — to a certain degree, corporations sold the idea of the corporate family, an integrated body in pursuit of a single outcome. It vertically integrated operations under a single roof. It shared profits. It democratized wealth. And for this, it could not compete with foreign manufacturing.

As the economy stagnated during the 1970s, cheaper industrial production in Asia threatened the vitality of the American industrial base. The cost of labor became a point of concern in board rooms, sending executives looking for cheaper production markets. Fordism — the embodiment of American manufacturing prowess — was in decline. In *High-Technology Agglomeration and the Labor Market: The Case of Silicon Valley*, David P. Angel writes "As Fordist mass production has been displaced from its position as the predominant mode of industrialization within advanced capitalist economies, the interest of many new researchers has shifted to alternative manufacturing forms."[35] The organizational innovation that brought Fordist and American manufacturing to global dominance had reach its end. This was the beginning of the tech age, and this new era called for a new system of industrial organization.

As Ford's methods of production were paramount to his innovative sum, Silicon Valley's reinvention of the Fordist industrial process was in turn its own catalyst for an innovation revolution. The Valley's turn from Fordism was the key that opened the door to rapid technological creativity and corporate vanguard. Angel argues that the dense clusters of "innovative high-technology firms" revealed a shift in traditional manufacturing. This shift, he

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[33] By "corporate integration," I refer to the now mythic career from the mail room to the board room. As Ford and other legacy industry corporations remained centralized, a direct path of corporate participation existed. All workers were under a proverbial 'single roof.'
[34] Angel, "High-Technology Agglomeration and the Labor Market: The Case of Silicon Valley."
[35] Angel, "High-Technology Agglomeration and the Labor Market: The Case of Silicon Valley." Page 124

continues, presented itself to Bay Area economic leaders as a "potential solution to the industrialized and manufacturing job loss experience by older industrial regions."[36] Silicon Valley was building the post-Fordist landscape.

This landscape, as writes Saxenian, was shaped by the speed and atomization of production and labor. [37] Electronic instruments, computer systems, and silicon chips were a faster changing technology than any previously manufactured in America. Saxenian quotes Harold Edmondson, vice president of corporate manufacturing for Hewlett-Packard: "In the past, we had a ten-year lead in technology. We could put out a product that was not perfectly worked out, but by the time the competition had caught up, we'd have our product in shape. Today we still have competitive technology, but the margin for catch up is much shorter — often under a year."[38] The speed of production forced Silicon Valley to optimize its workforce for nimbleness, often through smaller workforces than their non-technology manufacturing counterparts. It also forced Silicon Valley companies to slim down firm responsibilities, outsourcing many non-vital portions of their business to contract workers and third-party groups. Firms invested and focused on what they did best — then outsourced the remainder of needs from the bountiful network of suppliers in the Bay Area and beyond. This was a change from the vertically integrated organization of older industrial regions — a change from the Fordist model. While vertically integrating all manufacturing might have worked for slower changing technologies — such as steel — the reliance on contract suppliers allowed high-technology manufacturers to innovate with speed.

[36] Angel, "High-Technology Agglomeration and the Labor Market: The Case of Silicon Valley." Page 124
[37] Saxenian, "The Origins and Dynamics of Production Networks in Silicon Valley."
[38] Saxenian, "The Origins and Dynamics of Production Networks in Silicon Valley." Page 149

"Subcontractors were used as surge capacity in times of boom demand, and suppliers were treated as subordinate producers of standard inputs," writes Saxenian.[39]

This decentralization of labor and supply chains kept production output high while employee population low. The dependency on out-sourcing had a dramatic impact on Silicon Valley firm's revenue-per-employee: Apple, for instance, brought in $369,593 per employee.[40] Silicon Graphics, a hardware producer, raised $230,000 per employee.[41] Compared to the revenue-per-employee of legacy industrial firms, the impact of out-sourcing was stark. General Motors, for instance, held a revenue-per-employee only in the $10,000s.[42] As attractive as these revenue-per-employee numbers were, they signaled a declarative shift in how Silicon Valley distributed its success. As employment grew in the Bay Area, much of it was not within these high-profit, high-technology manufacturing firms, but in contract and third party manufacturing. Silicon Valley's model of organization concentrated profits within an increasingly small percentage of the region's workforce. Additionally, Silicon Valley's aversion to collective bargaining further strained production workers. Many high-technology manufacturing firms had facilities in the north and central regions of the U.S. — regions with long traditions of unionization. Angel found that between semiconductor employees working for the same firm, the unionized workforces in the north and central regions of the U.S. enjoyed higher wages than those on the West Coast — regardless of the cost of living.[43]

Economic Fears in Industrial Transition

[39] Saxenian, "The Origins and Dynamics of Production Networks in Silicon Valley." Page 148
[40] Saxenian, "The Origins and Dynamics of Production Networks in Silicon Valley." Page 145
[41] Saxenian, "The Origins and Dynamics of Production Networks in Silicon Valley." Page 145
[42] Timothy J. Minchin, "'A Gallant Fight': The UAW and the 1970 General Motors Strike," *International Review of Social History* 68, no. 1 (2023): 41–73, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020859022000293.
[43] Angel, "High-Technology Agglomeration and the Labor Market: The Case of Silicon Valley."

Quietly, both private and public sectors were growing increasingly concerned of one threat to the success of high-technology manufacturing. In the late 1970s, both ABAG and SCCMG slowly began discussing the risk high-technology manufacturing had on the costs of living and business in the Bay Area. Industrial growth was predicated on cheap industrial labor, which was becoming scarcer as the Bay Area got more expensive.

The lack of affordable housing might cause businesses to move out of the state, SCCMG warned in the 1979 report. "Among the major reasons for the projected expansion outside California were lack of sufficient workers in all categories and the high cost of housing," its authors write.[44] They assert that the realization of predicted economic growth in the region was reliant on the "availability of sufficient skilled and unskilled labor," the "improvement to the area's transportation capability," and the "availability of sufficient housing."[45]

Four days after SCCMG published this 1979 economic forecast, the San Jose Mercury Times' editorial board critiqued the group as being overly bullish while providing little solution for the impending affordability problem. "It's possible to look at the new survey and extrapolate a growth rate that would give us between 1.1 million and 1.4 million jobs in Santa Clara County by 1990," the editorial writes. "That won't happen, of course. If we got close to those figures, our housing supply and transportation system would be so overwhelmed that employers would change their plans and expand somewhere else rather than here…It's time that all of us realize that the day has passed when industrial growth could be considered a simple, unmitigated good

[44] Santa Clara County Manufacturing Group Jobs/Housing Task Force et al., *Report on Estimates of Job Growth and Building Expansion of Sixty Santa Clara County Companies 1979-1985 / Prepared by the Jobs/Housing Task Force of the Santa Clara County Manufacturing Group.* (publisher not identified, 1979). Page 1
[45] Santa Clara County Manufacturing Group Jobs/Housing Task Force et al., *Report on Estimates of Job Growth and Building Expansion of Sixty Santa Clara County Companies 1979-1985 / Prepared by the Jobs/Housing Task Force of the Santa Clara County Manufacturing Group.* (publisher not identified, 1979). Page 2

for Santa Clara County."[46] The concern about growth was real. If true, SCCMG's forecast would see jobs increase faster than housing stock, accelerating regional unaffordability and expanding the employment-to-housing imbalance. "We're adding jobs a great deal faster than we're adding housing," the editorial finishes. "Industry also has a role in redressing that imbalance, and the new job growth survey shows why."[47] SCCMG's forecast lived in a distant future, one where low-skilled industrial labor might eventually prove hard to find locally. From the private sector perspective, the danger of a housing shortage reflected a metric of success — prices would rise not as a consequence, but as a symptom of promised economic prosperity in high technology.

The public sector voiced stronger fears. In their 1979 report *San Francisco Bay Area Economic Profile,* ABAG noted that between the years 1950 to 1965, the population of Santa Clara County had spiked from 291,000 to 883,000, "largely in response to labor needs of high-technology manufacturing industries."[48] The report continues: "The rapid expansion of the industry has put severe pressure on the housing market. Housing development has failed to keep pace with industry-related growth demands, and this has caused many firms to look for new locations, particularly in areas with low-wage labor."[49]

This trend, they report, was harbinger of more than population growth and a looming housing shortage. Rather than SCCMG's fears of eventual growth outside the state, ABAG acknowledged that tech might not be immune to the offshoring crisis of America's industrial Midwest. "Since the actual manufacturing phase of the high-technology industry is very labor intensive, it has become profitable to move assembly operations as far away as Asia, since savings in labor costs

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[46] San Jose Mercury News Editorial Board, "Employment Growth: How Much Is Too Much?," *San Jose Mercury Times* (San Jose, Calif), July 1979.
[47] San Jose Mercury News Editorial Board, "Employment Growth: How Much Is Too Much?"
[48] Association of Bay Area Governments, *San Francisco Bay Area Economic Profile*. Page 34
[49] Association of Bay Area Governments, *San Francisco Bay Area Economic Profile*. Page 34

so far outweigh the additional transportation costs. In 1963, Fairchild was the first U.S. electronics corporation to set up a factory in Hong Kong, and others have followed with locations in Korea, Singapore, and Indonesia."[50] The fear of tech offshoring was a novel one.[51] Up until this point, the arrival and transition of the Bay Area's industrial base into high-technology manufacturing was seen as sure bet. Up until this point, the arrival of high-technology manufacturing was seen as the natural evolution of American industry. To many within ABAG, a hidden catch was beginning to reveal itself amidst the flurry of tech-hype. As the high-technology manufacturing industry grew in the Bay Area, it raised the cost of living, dimming the possibility of future growth.

By the mid-1980s, this fear was beginning to materialize. The shiny bright future anticipated in the late 1970s was dimming. Having proselytized the Bay Area's transition to high-technology manufacturing mere years earlier, ABAG and SCCMG began to reflect on the early impacts of this industrial transition. This time however, there was daylight between public and private sectors. As ABAG and SCCMG retreated to their conferences and planning meetings, they returned with a diverse set of reflections on the early stages of high-technology manufacturing. By the mid-1980s, high-technology manufacturing facilities began to shutter, many fleeing for cheaper markets abroad. Between lagging home construction, slow national economy, and

[50] Association of Bay Area Governments, *San Francisco Bay Area Economic Profile*. Page 34

[51] This line, buried as a passing remark at the end of subsection 5.4.3, "Access To Labor Supply," was filed under a broader section on the growth and future of high-technology manufacturing in the Bay Area. This was the first mention of the risk of tech offshoring I found in my entire semester of research. The briefness of the mention, paired with the context of its mention within the broader discussion of high-technology manufacturing, says one of two things: first, it was not a concern economic leaders seriously contended with. Or second, to the tech zealots, the offshoring of tech did not seem possible.

ballooning cost of living, the prospect of continued economic growth in the Bay Area was increasingly in question.

Many of the promising firms of the late 1970s were beginning to seek cheaper labor markets. Atari, the video game maker who had made a 'no-layoff pledge,' would abruptly announce the layoffs of 1700 workers in its home videogame and home computer manufacturing divisions.[52] Victor Technologies, a South Bay electronics manufacturer, would lay 2200 workers later that year.[53] Seagate, a hardware company, announced the layoffs of 700 workers at their Scotts Valley production facility the following year. This accelerated labor force fears that the boom of high-technology manufacturing in the late 1970s was ready to pop. "Last week's layoff of more than 700 workers at Scotts Valley's Seagate Technologies may signal the end of the local high-tech boom, according to local officials and businesspeople," wrote *Good Times*, a Santa Cruz County newspaper. "The firings, which Seagate initiated to expand its manufacturing facilities overseas where labor and materials are cheaper, followed the layoffs of 2,200 workers during the past year at Victor Technologies, also of Scotts Valley."[54]

SCCMG maintained moderate optimism, assuring themselves that economic conditions were solid but experiencing growing pains. The SCCMG surveyed Silicon Valley firms and released another predictive report in 1983.

> Survey results reflect a preference and intent amongst established local companies to continue adding employees in Santa Clara County. This preference appears to remain surprisingly strong in the face of very high cost of housing and worsening commute

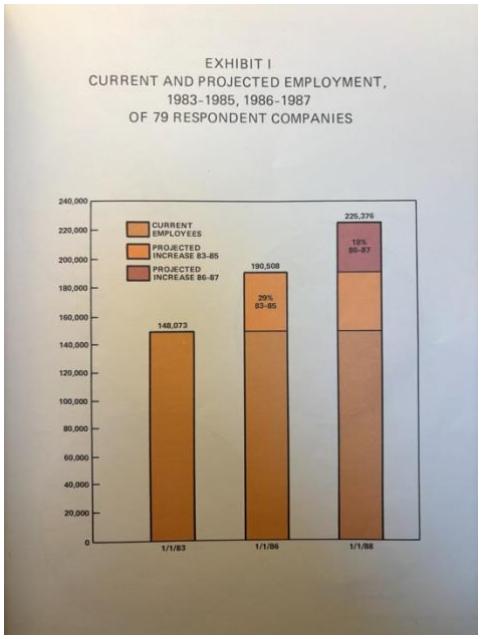
[52] "Workers Who Were Laid off by Atari Inc. When... - UPI Archives," UPI, accessed March 30, 2026, https://www.upi.com/Archives/1983/08/15/Workers-who-were-laid-off-by-Atari-Inc-when/6784429768000/.
[53] Joan Raymond, "Major Layoffs at Victor Technologies," *Santa Cruz Sentinel* (Santa Cruz), August 16, 1983.
[54] "End of the High-Tech Boom," News, *Good Times* (Santa Cruz), July 26, 1984.

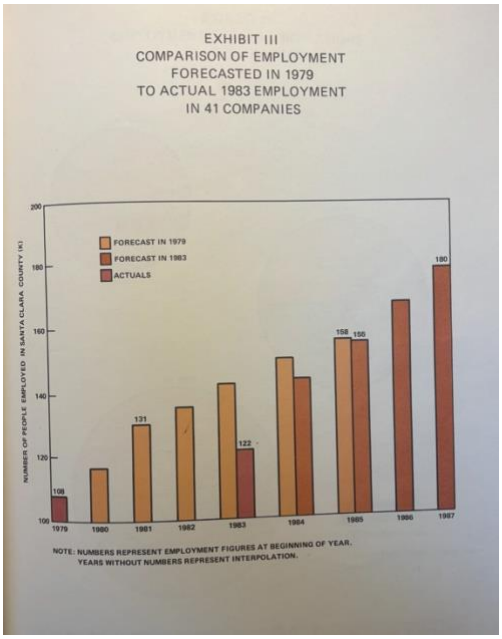
conditions. According to the Manufacturing Group High Tech Sites Committee, reasons for the preference include:

- The unparalleled concentration of a technical workforce in the 'Silicon Valley.'
- The preeminent positions of local and higher education institutions in research and in providing a qualified workforce.
- The continuing attractiveness of the Santa Clara Valley as a place to live and work.[55]

The 1983 SCCMG report continued to detail upcoming economic fertility. The survey predicted a continued job growth, as seen in Exhibit I below. SCCMG wrote: "the total jobs of respondent companies in Santa Clara County will increase from 148,073 in 1983 to 225,376 in 1987, a 52% projected increase over the next five years."[56] Similarly, SCCMG negated the so-far unmet job growth expectations from 1979 to 1983, as seen in Exhibit III. In 1979, as high-tech hopes were high, SCCMG expected that the growing high-technology manufacturing industry would create over 140,000 jobs in the high-tech firms they surveyed, which included Hewlett-Packard, Intel, IBM, Syntex Corporation, and National Semiconductor. By 1983, job growth amongst the surveyed firms had missed that projection by nearly 20 percent. SCCMG understood the low growth numbers in 1983 to reflect premature forecasting in 1979, not incorrect forecasting. The forecasted-to-real employment gap would close by 1985, the result of an anticipated boom in jobs, the 1983 report expected.

[55] Santa Clara County Manufacturing Group, *Job Creation in Silicon Valley, 1983-1987: Survey Results from 79 Major Companies* (The Group, 1983). Page 2
[56] Santa Clara County Manufacturing Group, *Job Creation in Silicon Valley, 1983-1987*. Page 3





Source: *Job Creation in Silicon Valley, 1983 – 1987: Survey From 79 Major Companies*[57] [58]

While SCCMG acknowledged the rising cost of living and lack of available housing, these concerns had little impact on immediate expectations for regional growth. The 1983 report recognized the trend of business relocation, writing that "sustaining this trend are the familiar ones of housing, transportation and availability of a qualified, competitively compensated labor."[59]

However, SCCMG projected that Silicon Valley firms wouldn't need to consider expanding regionally anytime soon, as the accessibility of the networks and workforce in the Bay Area continued to outweigh the rising costs of doing business. At a certain point, Silicon Valley would outgrow the Bay Area, but within predictable timeframes. "At that point, negative factors such as housing and transportation will influence location decisions more than they have currently

[57] Santa Clara County Manufacturing Group, *Job Creation in Silicon Valley, 1983-1987*. Page 10
[58] Santa Clara County Manufacturing Group, *Job Creation in Silicon Valley, 1983-1987*. Page 12
[59] Santa Clara County Manufacturing Group, *Job Creation in Silicon Valley, 1983-1987*. Page 2

because corporate growth and hiring plans will necessitate major, new, long-term facility investments," wrote the report.[60]

In Oakland, an economist at the Association of Bay Area Government was busy sounding different alarms. Raymond Brady, the manager of ABAG's Information and Analysis Group, was observing the Bay Area heading in a different direction. Brady noticed a regional hyper dependence on an industry yet to prove its reliability. As the Bay Area weathered the slow national economy, Brady grew concerned that increased mono-industrialization in high-tech exposed the region to the economic turbulence of a single industry. Making a reference to offshoring in the Rust Belt, Brady dubbed this risk 'Detroit Syndrome.' By 1985, Brady began worrying that tech's economic downturn, be it temporary or not, could bring long-term harm to the region's economy. Brady made the case for his findings through a series of three letters presented to an ABAG conference held at the Claremont Hotel in Berkeley on October 18th, 1985.[61]

> There are costs, as well as benefits, associated with concentrating employment in a select number of industries. The 'Detroit Syndrome' can become a real possibility. Given a highly competitive market for the products of 'high tech' industries, cost considerations and the constant need for new technology are major factors affecting the survival of industry. A primary reason for the present recession in the computer and electronics industries in Silicon Valley is an overly optimistic attitude about growth and market share.[62]

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[60] Santa Clara County Manufacturing Group, *Job Creation in Silicon Valley, 1983-1987*. Page 2
[61] Roland De Wolk, "The Bay Area's Narrowing Economic Base," *The Tribune* (Oakland, Calif), October 6, 1985.
[62] Raymond J. Brady, *Perspectives on a Region's Growth: Maintaining the San Francisco Bay Area Economy*, with Association of Bay Area Governments, Working Paper #1 (Association of Bay Area Governments, 1985). Page 3

Brady was concerned that this inter-county economic reliance on a struggling high-technology industry would have broader consequences than just in Santa Clara County. He continues:

> Given that in 1982 electronics, instruments and non- electrical machinery accounted for 48% of all manufacturing activity in the Bay Area, major economic disruptions in these select industries could affect other areas of the regional economy. For example, business service in San Mateo and San Francisco might see a decline with a fall off in growth in the 'high tech' sectors. Retail trade in most counties would be affected by a slowdown in the demand for computers. And the financial sector in San Francisco might be affected by a decline in the demand for capital because these industries may put off capacity expansion plans. The Bay Area has clearly benefited from the concentration of these fast growing industries through a higher overall growth rate. A diversified economy, however, is more likely to be better insulated from a recession in any one or group of industries. The liability of diversification is slower economic growth, since rapid growth in manufacturing is only occurring in the 'high tech' industries.[63]

Brady's forewarning found the words to embody widespread fears. 'Detroit Syndrome' imagined a region decaying in the ruins of former glory, an economic slip with no clear floor. Amidst heavy layoffs, this rang true to a working-class perspective. This warning did not fall on deaf ears. Brady's 'Detroit Syndrome' made headlines. "People are starting to ask: Did we stake too much of our future on this?... As the layoffs continue, they are taking an increasingly human toll,"[64] *The New York Times* wrote. The *Argus-Courier* wrote: "Silicon Valley workers won't be singing Auld Lang Syne for 1985 this New Year's Eve. A dirge might be more appropriate. Ten

[63] Brady, *Perspectives on a Region's Growth*. Page 3
[64] Robert Lindsey, "HIGH-TECHNOLOGY LAYOFFS SPUR FEAR IN CALIFORNIA," sec. 1, *The New York Times*, November 10, 1985.

thousand electronics employees lost their jobs and thousands of others took pay cuts in the Mother Lode of high tech."[65] *The Oakland Tribune* reported that "overemphasis on high technology is eroding the Bay Area's economic base, making it dangerously vulnerable to unpredictable market forces."[66]

Detroit Syndrome in the Bay Area, in Brady's telling of it, was a social deterioration as well as an economic one. As many were laid off, those lucky enough to be employed weren't faring much better. The rising cost of living negated the incremental gains to Bay Area working class salaries. "By removing inflation from the per capita income increase, the competitive position of the Bay Area worsens," Brady writes. "During the twenty year period (1962 - 1982), real per capita income in the region increased 32.5%. In the United States, it increased 44.9% in real terms. Why the difference? A partial explanation for this difference can be found in the relative cost of living in the Bay Area and the United States."[67] As the Bay Area's industrial base began centering on high-technology manufacturing, the great profits generated at the top dried up economic opportunity at the bottom. While wages in the Bay Area saw net growth, the cost of living, including the cost of housing, increased beyond that. This particularly hurt the region's working class — those who hadn't been laid off. This portion of the workforce was where SCCMG's 1979 and 1983 job creation surveys predicted growth. Increasingly, this portion of the workforce was low paid and low skilled. "If trends continue over the ten year period 1980 - 1990," Brady writes, "ABAG estimates 50% of the job growth will occur in those service and trade occupations in which more than 80% of employees will be earning at the mean or below

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[65] Steve Wilstein, "1985: A Year To Forget In Slumping Silicon Valley," *Argus-Courier* (Petaluma, California), December 27, 1985.
[66] De Wolk, "The Bay Area's Narrowing Economic Base."
[67] Raymond J. Brady, *Economic Growth and Wealth: Looking at the San Francisco Bay Area*, with Association of Bay Area Governments, Working Paper / Association of Bay Area Governments, Center for Analysis and Information Services ; #2 (Association of Bay Area Governments, 1985). Page 2

income for the occupation. Put another way, for 100 employees, 80 will be earning the average income or below for the occupation, with 20 earning above average incomes for the occupation."[68] In Brady's understanding, the Bay Area socio-economic structure was bifurcating — while a majority swath of residents were facing economic decline, a fraction were consolidating wealth. By 1985, Census and Bureau of Labor Statistic data reflected that conclusion; economic growth by household income revealed strongest job growth being at the opposite ends of the earnings spectrum.[69]

"Now, one could argue that in comparison to the expected job additions, plant closures are not a serious problem in the region…(and) only the result of industries seeking more cost-effective or competitive environments, and the phenomenon of plant closure is a long term problem," writes Brady, indirectly referencing SCCMG's conclusions in their 1983 *Job Creation in Silicon Valley* report:[70] "These employment trends flow from what's happening to American industries," the SCCMG wrote. "The Bureau of Labor Statistics expects a modest increase in manufacturing employment in the eighties in line with the over economic growth. Industries generating relatively low wage levels in the national economy will supply nearly half of all new jobs."[71] True or not, the anticipated growth in employment and economic expansion in high-technology manufacturing was nuanced. It was accelerating on a downhill trajectory — wedging the splintering income divide wider, lowering economic fortune with each additional employment. The ground was fertile for more growth. But the cost of growth was increasingly controversial.

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[68] Brady, *Economic Growth and Wealth*. Page 2
[69] Raymond J. Brady, *Economic Competitiveness of the San Francisco Bay Area*, with Association of Bay Area Governments and Patricia R. Perry, Working Paper / Association of Bay Area Governments, Center for Analysis and Information Services ; #3 (Association of Bay Area Governments, 1985).
[70] Brady, *Economic Competitiveness of the San Francisco Bay Area*. Page 8
[71] Santa Clara County Manufacturing Group, *Job Creation in Silicon Valley, 1983-1987*. Page 5

"What is an adequate level of growth? Who controls it? Who benefits and who loses?" Brady asks in one of the letters.[72]

This growth was increasingly concentrated upwards, write Pellow and Park in *Silicon Valley of Dreams*. "The electronics industry is often associated with outrageous fortunes and seemingly contagious wealth creation…unfortunately, this wealth is being siphoned upward; hundreds of thousands of production workers and residents are struggling to stay out of poverty," Pellow and Park write.[73] By the mid-1990s, the average ratio of Silicon Valley executive compensation to Silicon Valley production worker compensation would grow from 42:1 to 220:1. Meanwhile, the proportion of jobs that paid less than enough to support a family of four was growing, representing 55 percent of regional jobs by 1998.[74] This wasn't the return of the Fordist industrial base. This wasn't the communitarian economic future imagined in the 1970s. It wasn't widespread prosperity. But for many, it was. The growth of Silicon Valley was the story of growth and loss in the Bay Area.

As the old adage "rising tides lift all boats" goes, so went the expectations for the Bay Area in the 1980s. The phrase was popularized by John F. Kennedy and used as a reference to collectivity in economic growth.[75] At the time, Kennedy's post-war economy was growing unilaterally. Collective growth, unified under a strong economy, made that aphorism possible. By the late 1970s, as Kennedy's post-war economy had declined, economic leaders were looking for the next great tide — applying Kennedy's philosophy of as goes one, as goes all. That tide wasn't

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[72] Brady, *Economic Growth and Wealth*. Page 1
[73] Pellow, *The Silicon Valley of Dreams*. Page 87
[74] Chris; Dean Amy B. Benner, *Growing Together or Drifting Apart? : Working Families and Business in the New Economy - A Status Report on Social and Economic Well-Being in Silicon Valley*, The Economic Policy Institute (Working Partnerships USA, n.d.).
[75] Brent Cebul, "Rising Tides," in *Illusions of Progress*, Business, Poverty, and Liberalism in the American Century (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2023), https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2svjzr2.6.

to come. As America deindustrialized, the highly anticipated replacement of legacy manufacturing with high-technology manufacturing was not economic salvation. For many, the growth of Silicon Valley has ushered in an era of immense promise and prosperity. For others, it marked an era of economic insecurity. This bifurcation was the Great Divergence, a national phenomenon of widening economic inequality. It was "high tech with homelessness," as economist Philip Cooke writes. [76] It was the inversion of prosperity, the growth with loss, the wealth with poverty. It was mansions and tents, an eviction epidemic, an exponential cost of living. It was the new Bay Area.

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[76] Philip Cooke, "Economic Globalisation and Its Future Challenges for Regional Development," *International Journal of Technology Management* 26, no. 2/3/4 (2003): 401, https://doi.org/10.1504/IJTM.2003.003389. Page 413

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