

Multiple Melting Pots

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The latest census projections tell us that in 2059, the nation will become a “majority minority,” with the combined populations of Hispanics, blacks, Asians, and other races making up more than half the population. Seizing upon these statistics, politicians and prominent social commentators have reminded us that America has always been a melting pot.

For over two centuries, we have successively incorporated new groups—Germans, Irish, Italians, Greeks, Poles, Russians, and others—to create a single American stew, albeit with a largely Anglo base. President Clinton has repeatedly drawn on these national projections and melting pot imagery to advance the vision of “One America”—a call to arms toward a fuller incorporation of our newest ethnic groups from Latin America and Asia, as well as African Americans.

There is superficial evidence that the classic melting pot model continues to work. Today one can find Mexican and Latin American workers in manufacturing plants, construction sites, restaurants, and hotels in parts of the country that have never before witnessed a local Hispanic presence. Thai restaurants and Korean-owned grocery stores are ubiquitous. And the nation’s popular culture has embraced the newest ethnic majorities: Witness the popularity of sports figures such as Sammy Sosa and Tiger Woods, or entertainers like Ricky Martin and Jennifer Lopez.

Yet these national images belie an important demographic reality that calls the old “single melting pot” model into question. It is that the new ethnic minorities—Hispanics and Asians—continue to concentrate overwhelmingly in specific states and metropolitan areas rather than

spilling out into America’s heartland.

At the same time, many Anglos and soon-retiring baby boomers will be locating in mostly whiter parts of the country. African Americans, in a reversal of historic migration patterns, are relocating to the South. In short, America is forming broad regions that will differ distinctly in their race-ethnic combinations, creating new demographic divisions. The single melting pot of the last century is being transformed into a nation of “multiple melting pots.”

To demonstrate the fallacy of applying nationwide projections to specific regions, consider the Census Bureau’s 2030 scenario, which shows that one out of four Americans will be either Hispanic or Asian, with whites constituting less than 60 percent of the national population. On the eve of the 2000 census, 25 individual metropolitan areas already exhibit a diversity that conforms to the 2030 national demographic profile. These include large metro areas like Los Angeles, San Francisco, Miami, Houston, and San Diego as well as many smaller metropolitan areas in California,

New Mexico, and several on the Mexican-Texas border. At the same time, more than half (148) of the country's 271 metropolitan areas are at least 80 percent white. They are located in the Northeast, Midwest, and Rocky Mountain states as well as much of the South—where blacks rather than the new immigrant minorities constitute the primary nonwhite group.

These more diverse metropolitan areas are located in the emerging melting pot regions of the country, which, recent trends suggest, will differ sharply from the mostly white and white/black heartland regions. This represents a new demographic divide that is likely to be just as significant as now-familiar divides: city versus suburb, or urban versus rural. In the twenty-first century, immigrants will be introduced to American life in a series of multiple melting pots—each with its own race and ethnic personality. Despite national images, heartland region residents will experience much less of this new diversity firsthand.

Immigrant and domestic migrant magnets

The divide between melting pot region and heartland region is occurring largely because immigrant flows—arriving at about one million per year—continue to concentrate in a handful of gateway metropolitan areas and states. This phenomenon has



■ *A champion son of an immigrant: Tiger Woods holds up the trophy won at the PGA championship in 1999. His mother is from Thailand.*

origins with a change in our immigration laws, which in 1965 opened the process to all countries, eventually favoring Latin American and Asian immigrants.

The law also adopted strong family reunification provisions as the primary criterion for admitting immigrants. Family reunification immigration tends to occur in chains that link family mem-

bers and friends to common destinations. This is especially the case for immigrants from south of our border and Asia, who seek social and economic support in communities with conationals who share their language and culture.

The concentration toward distinct destinations is strongest for undocumented aliens and others who arrive with few skills.

Major Flow Started in 1965

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These immigrants are most dependant on kinship ties for assistance in gaining entry to informal job networks, which are more likely to exist in gateway areas. Compared to those of the native population, immigrants' skill levels tend to be bimodal: both more Ph.Ds and more high school dropouts. The latter group tends to dominate overall immigrant flows.

The largest immigrant magnet metropolitan areas for the 1990-98 period were led by New York and Los Angeles, each receiving over one million immigrants during this eight-year period. San Francisco, Miami, and Chicago each gained over 300,000, and five others (Washington, D.C., Houston, Dallas, San Diego, and Boston) together received fewer immigrants than either New York or Los Angeles alone.

While these 10 gateway

areas represent the dominant immigrant destinations, they house only about 30 percent of the total U.S. population. Further, 8 of the 10 areas (Dallas and Houston excepted) actually lost domestic migrants to other parts of the United States while they were attracting most of the immigrants. Here again, New York and Los Angeles lead—losing more than a million and a half domestic migrants each.

During the 1990s, domestic migration was mainly to non-gateway metropolitan areas such as Atlanta, Las Vegas, and Phoenix. The fastest growing labor markets during this period tended to be located in the Southeast and non-California West. In fact, large gateway areas were conspicuously unattractive to domestic migrants, with the exception of Dallas, which appears on both magnet lists.

In short, the emergence of melting pot regions as distinct from a broader American heartland is being fueled by continued renewal of new immigrant minorities in traditional gateway metropolitan areas of California, the Southwest, southern Florida, the eastern seaboard, and Chicago. This serves to globalize these economies, especially in large "world cities" like New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. At the same time, many young college graduates, middle-class suburbanites, and retirees are heading to noncoastal New West and New South growth magnets. The suburbs and small towns they settle in are filling in the continually growing stretches of America's heartland.

New ethnic minority clusters

Hispanics and Asians are umbrella terms covering an array of national and ethnic groups: Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Salvadorans, Mexicans, among the former; Chinese, Koreans, Japanese, Filipinos, Indians, among the latter. Yet, even with these two broad categories, one finds a high concentration of Hispanic and Asian groups within a few gateway metropolitan areas. Just as important is the fact that the areas housing the most Hispanics and Asians also tend to receive the greatest absolute *gains* in their populations.

A good example is Los Ange-



■ *A family of Ethiopian immigrants: A new wave of immigrants has been added to America's ethnic mix in the 1990s.*

MOSIE SHAI / CORBIS

les, which houses fully one-fifth of the U.S. Hispanic population and also ranks first in total gains—receiving 16 percent of all additional U.S. Hispanics during the 1990s. This increase comes largely from Mexican and other Latin American immigrants but also from the high fertility of nonimmigrant Hispanics. The 10 areas with the largest Hispanic populations are also the 10 biggest gainers, attracting 52 percent of U.S. Hispanics during the 1990–98 period. These same areas house fully 58 percent of the nation's Hispanic population. This growth includes Cubans in Miami; Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, and other Caribbean Hispanics in New

York; and Mexicans in Chicago. The others on the list lie in close proximity to Mexico and continue to build on already large Latin American populations.

The growth of the Asian population is also highly concentrated in a few metropolitan areas. Together, the greater New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco metros garnered 39 percent of Asian population gains over 1990–98. These three areas house 42 percent of all resident Asians in the United States. The Chinese are a major immigrant group in New York; Filipinos have significant presence in Los Angeles; and both groups are well represented in San Francisco. Among the other

Asian-gaining metros are Washington, D.C., Seattle, Houston, and Dallas—areas that recently increased the magnitudes of their Asian gains. Still, the combined 10 areas represent 60 percent of Asian U.S. growth in the 1990s and house 61 percent of the nation's total Asian population.

Blacks return to the South

For much of the previous century, the great migration of blacks from the South to northern and western industrial centers represented a major deconcentration of America's largest minority group. While this

showed signs of reversing in 1970s, patterns of the last 10 years suggest a trend toward a new reconsolidation of African Americans in the South. The 1990s is the first decade in which the South gained more blacks than it lost in each of the three other census regions: Northeast, Midwest, and West. The movement is made of up middle-class blacks drawn to the booming New South economies; lower-skilled, formerly blue-collar workers turned away by manufacturing restructuring; and African American retirees, who are more likely to relocate in southern communities than those in the West.

During the 1990s, Atlanta, Washington, D.C., and Houston led all U.S. metropolitan areas in black gains. Other southern areas that have attracted large numbers of blacks are Dallas, Miami, Orlando, Raleigh-Durham, Charlotte, Jacksonville, and Tampa. New York, Chicago, Detroit, and Philadelphia have registered significant black gains, but these accrue mostly from the births to existing large black populations. Trends show these areas continue to lose black migrants, while the South is projected to gain them.

The black return to the South is made possible by the growing black middle-class population of baby boomers and Gen-Xers as well as the soon-to-be retired boomer population looking to relocate. Perhaps even more important are the increasingly strong and probably enduring "pulls" of the South for

African Americans: an improved racial climate, a growing economy, an existing black middle class for newcomers to network with, and long-standing ties with relatives and friends.

In contrast to the new ethnic minorities and African Americans, whites are far less prone to reside in the nation's largest metropolises. When they do, they prefer the suburbs. The greatest gaining metro areas for whites are in the Rocky Mountain West and the nonimmigrant portions of the Southeast. With the exception of Dallas (ranked third), the biggest white gainers of the 1990s are Atlanta, Phoenix, Las Vegas, Denver, Seattle, Portland, and Minneapolis-St. Paul. Moreover the three biggest immigrant magnets sustained significant white losses during the 1990-98 period: New York (-560,000), Los Angeles (-444,000), and San Francisco (-141,000).

For whites, the traditional *Leave it to Beaver* suburb may still be the dream, but they are no longer finding it in the congested suburbs of the big coastal metropolises. Instead they are locating down the coast from the Northeast to the Carolinas, Georgia, Tennessee, and Florida; and eastward from California to Nevada, Oregon, Arizona, and Colorado. The large baby-boom cohorts who made these moves during their working lives will tend to "age in place" in these nonmelting pot regions. The aging of these whiter heartland regions will continue to contrast strongly with the

younger immigrant presence in the melting pot gateways.

Race and space revisited

Usually the topic of "race and space" refers to segregation at the neighborhood level or the division between minority-dominated cities and largely white suburbs. But the new migration dynamics discussed here suggest broader regional divisions. One of these regions we denote as a melting pot region, encompassing each of the individual "multiple melting pot" metro areas.

Taking into account some anticipated spilling over of the new minorities into Nevada and Arizona, along with their greater representation in all of Florida, this region will encompass 10 states, including a band from California eastward through Texas in addition to Hawaii, Florida, New Jersey, New York, and Illinois. These states will have strong representation of the new ethnic minorities, Hispanics and/or Asians, and a less than national representation of whites.

Fortunately, the demographic transformation in melting pot regions will start with the young, who are most predisposed to change. Fast-forwarding 25 years to get a view of California's age-ethnic profile, one finds whites just hanging on to a majority of the state's elderly population. By then, the working-age population will be dominated by Hispanics and Asians, and only



■ *A change in direction:* Before 1960, most people coming to the United States were from Europe, as are these Hungarian refugees.

one out of four children will be white.

Under this scenario, working-aged residents will be more willing to devote government resources to the needs of children than to the largely Anglo elderly population. The scenario will be quite different for communities in the mostly white regions of the country. There, greater emphasis will be given to preserving the solvency of the Social Security system and to middle-class tax breaks, rather than to issues like education or affirmative action.

Both political parties have already begun to deal with this new regional dimension: Witness

the fast turnaround in California from the Pete Wilson, Proposition 187 days to the current scenario, where every major politician is obliged to memorize at least a few phrases in Spanish. In the next 10 years, more Hispanic and Asian politicians will become major players on the regional if not national stage.

It is no longer a question of whether these emerging demographic divisions are good or bad for America. They represent the process of assimilation of new immigrant groups into a complex industrialized society with global connections that recognizes the value of both cultural diversity

and economic incorporation. Because we are a nation of immigrants and are also increasingly interdependent with our closest neighbors to the south and west, the multiple melting pot model now taking shape is inevitable. It will allow us to tie together the richest traditions of our past with the economic necessities of our future. ■

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