In the wake of Census 2000, newspaper headlines have bombarded us with messages about the growing and pervasive racial and ethnic diversity across the United States. And nationwide, statistics not only confirm that minorities grew at 12 times the rate of whites, but that fewer than 7 in 10 Americans consider themselves to be white—or “non-Hispanic white only” in census terminology.*

Still, a careful examination of the current statistics flowing from the U.S. Census Bureau reveals that the nation’s minority groups, especially Hispanics and Asians, are heavily clustered in selected regions and markets. Rather than witnessing the formation of a homogeneous national melting pot, we are seeing the creation of numerous mini-melting pots—as contrast to the rest of America, which is much less diverse. Through intermarriage and the blending of cultures, each of these melting-pot metros will develop its own politics, tastes for consumer items, and demographic personalities. Commentators, marketers, and political analysts should understand and take into account these multiple melting pots as predictors of America’s changing racial/ethnic landscape.

Regional Differences

In a broad swath of the country the minority presence is still quite limited. As the map at left makes clear, America’s racial and ethnic patterns have taken on distinctly regional dimensions. Hispanics dominate large portions of counties in a span of states stretching from California to Texas. Blacks are strongly represented in select pockets in Oklahoma, the South, upper Midwest, and the West. Multiple minority groups, especially Hispanics and Native Americans, are heavily clustered in distinct regions stretching from California and the Southwestern U.S., through intermarriage and the blending of cultures, each of these melting-pot metros will develop its own politics, tastes for consumer items, and demographic personalities. Commentators, marketers, and political analysts should understand and take into account these multiple melting pots as predictors of America’s changing racial/ethnic landscape.

THE COUNTRY IS BECOMING MORE DIVERSE, BUT GROWTH OF ETHNIC POPULATIONS IS ONLY CONCENTRATED IN CERTAIN REGIONS.

by William H. Frey

* This story treats racial groups, whites, blacks, Asians, and Native Americans (including Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders), and Native Americans (including Native Alaskans) as non-Hispanic members of those races, and treats all Hispanics as a separate single category. Further, because the 2000 census allowed respondents to select one or more races, the 2000 data presented here treats those as those who selected only the white race, and treat all blacks, Asians, and Native Americans as those who selected one or more races. As a result, a small number of persons in the latter three groups are included more than once in the 2000 tallies.

** The country’s changing racial and ethnic people are not only concentrated in certain regions, but also in select pockets of urban areas in the Northeast and Midwest.
thanks to direct immigration and a spillover from California. Las Vegas and Atlanta are also relative newcomers, which more than doubled and tripled their Hispanic populations respectively.

The concentrated gains among Asians in areas with existing Asian populations are even more apparent than with Hispanics (see chart at top right of next page). The three Asian population juggernauts—New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco—account for 57 percent of all Asian gains in the U.S. in the ‘90s. The top six areas account for almost half. Metrots with fast-growing but smaller Asian populations include Dallas, which doubled its population, and Atlanta, where it tripled.

The New Ethnic Frontiers

There is some directed diffusion of Hispanics and Asians outward from these immigrant enclaves of entry. With rising employment opportunities in states such as Georgia, North Carolina, Nevada, Utah, and parts of the Midwest, new immigrant minorities have made pioneering moves to these areas, establishing new minority enclaves. In the forefront are metros that house a minimum of 50,000 members of the minority group. There, the white percentage is less than half of the national average and the Asian percentages are comparable to those in Los Angeles, New York, Miami, Chicago, Houston, Washington D.C., and other Southeastern states.

Two noteworthy additions to melting pot status were Orlando, Florida and Phoenix—Scottsdale, Tempe, and Phoenix. Las Vegas added significantly to its Hispanic and Asian populations, while Orlando saw increases for Hispanics and blacks. Despite large white gains in both areas, the white shares of their populations were declined dramatically (by 14 percent and 13 percent respectively) over the 1990s. Some of these metros have "majority minority" populations where the white percentage is less than half of their total population: 22 of the nation's 276 metros have majority minorities, and 12 of these have graduated to this status since 1990 (see below). The largest is Houston, which increased its Hispanic population by more than half a million over the decade, and its Asian and black populations by more than 100,000 each. Smaller metro areas in California and New Mexico achieved this status as a result of recent Hispanic gains.

Unoubtedly, the coming decade will see some additional "spilling-over" of the largest immigrant minorities' second and third generations as their children enter the middle class and a national labor market. Clearly, the U.S. is not a single melting pot—where each minority spreads and blends everywhere else, is creating locally unique racial demographic profiles within the nation that differ markedly from region to region.

While there was some dispersal of immigrant Asian and Hispanic groups during the 1990s, the greater tendency increase exceeded 1,000 persons over the decade. Yet their overall gains are heavily concentrated in the core counties of immigrant metro areas, and in the West and Southwestern U.S. Just 100 of these core counties accounted for more than 70 percent of all the nation’s Hispanic gains during the decade. The dispersion of Hispanics outward from these core areas, in terms of total numbers, is far less rapid than recent press accounts suggest.

nyoung people, and blacks. And although both categories accounted for 41 percent and 40 percent, respectively. These areas represent dominant primary or secondary destinations for two or more immigrant minority or minority groups. The list includes the country’s largest immigrant gateway metropolises, Los Angeles, New York, Miami, Chicago, Houston, Washington D.C., and other Southeastern states.

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