

The New Suburbanization

By William Frey

“Moving to the suburbs” used to imply a local move to a more bucolic and safe middle-class neighborhood. It meant jumping from New York City to Long Island, or from downtown L.A. to the San Fernando Valley. The 2000 census, however, showed a new kind of *national* “suburbanization,” as large numbers of

they’re doing so has peaked. After the 1990 census, California, Texas, and Florida earned 14 new Congressional seats; following the 2000 census they gained only five. Moreover, the new residents that California, Texas, and Florida are attracting are of a very different type than the middle-class, native-born families and retirees heading to the 13 states of our “new suburbia.”

The broadly suburb-like character of these 13 states is attracting whites and blacks who want to leave the pricey, con-

U.S. population growth has shifted, for the first time in generations, toward smaller communities, non-urban areas, and less densely populated states.

middle-class people chose to escape to whole new states.

While Americans are moving less than they used to (see Joel Kotkin’s story opening this collection), there are still millions of household relocations in this country. And people who do move now tend to go to very specific places. In particular, there are 13 fast-growing states that might be called America’s Suburbs. They are Arizona, Colorado, Utah, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, Washington, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, Virginia, and Delaware. Located primarily in the Southeast and West, their collective population grew by 24 percent over the 1990s (versus 13 percent for the nation as a whole). And, most critically, these particular states grew mostly through the migration of successful native-born whites and blacks from other states. Domestic migrants outnumbered foreign-born immigrants by five to one in these states during the 1990s. Fully 79 percent of our nation’s white population growth took place in these 13 states.



The new suburbanites who relocated ranged from young Gen-Xers just forming families to the well-off newly retired. Married couples with children are declining nationally, but they are growing in this area. (Nevada’s 25 percent jump in the number of such traditional families led the nation.)

The old fast-growing sunbelt destinations of California, Texas, and Florida are conspicuously *not* part of the “new suburbia.” Because they contain some of the nation’s largest urban immigrant gateways, those three states are still growing, but the rate at which

gested, commuting metropolises of California and the Northeast for more peaceful, conservative, family-friendly and senior-friendly communities. The fastest growth within the new suburbia is occurring in non-urban areas and small cities. In their exodus from more cosmopolitan, liberal urban areas on the coasts, the participants in this new suburban flight are sharpening the differences—cultural, political, and demographic—between various U.S. states and regions.

This new regionally based definition of Suburban America points to the increasing separation of its residents from Melting Pot America. While it is true that the country is becoming more racially and ethnically mixed, the diversity is not spread evenly across the nation. The six states that received the most immigrants during the ’90s (California, New York, Texas, Florida, Illinois, and New Jersey) plus three other states that, for their own historical reasons, have large ethnic minorities (New Mexico, Hawaii, and Alaska) are home to 74 percent of the nation’s combined Hispanic and Asian populations, 70 percent of the U.S. foreign-born population, and 76 percent of all Americans who speak Spanish at home.

While these nine “melting pot” states are growing (at about half the rate of the “new suburban” states), their growth is dominated by immigrant minorities. As a group, these states have shown a *loss* of white residents over the 1990s, and they now house only 37 percent of the nation’s native-born population. During the 1990s, the greater Los Angeles region lost over 800,000 whites; the greater New York area lost over 600,000. Similar losses of whites were observed in metro areas like Miami, Chicago, and San Diego. These white losses reflect mostly young people, married couples, parents, and new retirees heading to the 13 new suburban states—where they seem to be seeking new lives rooted in more old-fashioned values.

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