

BY WILLIAM H. FREY

While Barack Obama's election was a signal event for many reasons, the fact that Americans chose someone of mixed race isn't quite as startling as it first appears. New Census data show that 7.7 percent of marriages in 2007 were of mixed race – nearly twice as many as in 1990. The ongoing infusion of immigrants combined with more tolerant public attitudes have taken us a long way since 1967, when the Supreme Court finally barred race-based restrictions on marriage.

Almost half of all marriages crossing racial lines involve an Hispanic spouse. Indeed, one in three marriages involving Hispanics are with non-Hispanic spouses. Asians are marrying outside their race in roughly the same proportion.

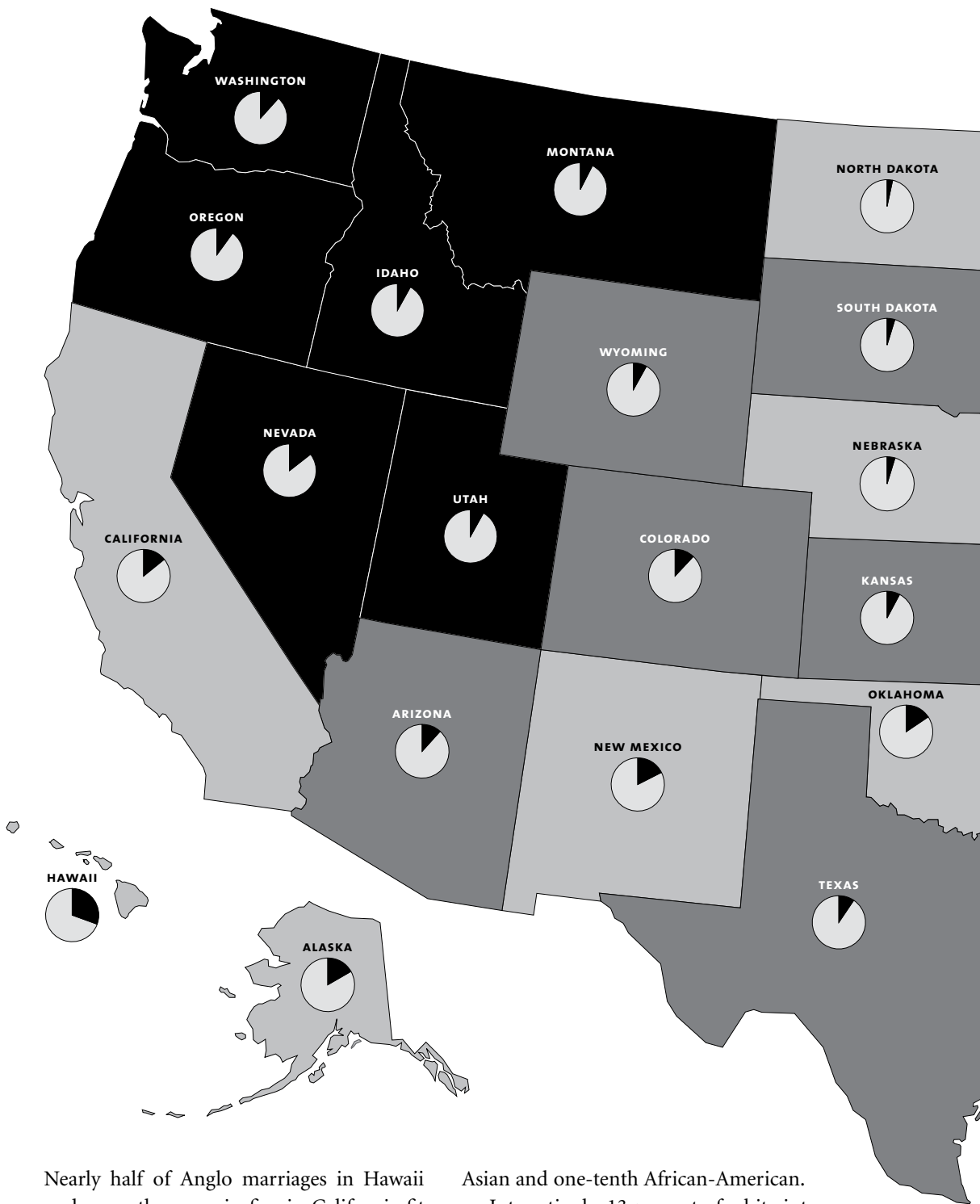
African-Americans, for their part, are less likely to marry across races – only one in six do. Yet, following the overall trend, African-American interracial marriages have more than doubled since 1990.

Variance across states is striking. Hawaii, where three in 10 marriages are interracial, leads; New Mexico and other intermountain West states follow. At the other end of the spectrum: Mississippi, along with Vermont and Maine – two states with very small minority populations. Note, however, that many of the states with a low incidence of intermarriage are now experiencing surges, suggesting that intermarriage is leaping regional barriers.



The view is quite different from the side of the white majority. In 2007, 8.5 percent of whites going to the altar were joined by minority partners – less than one-third the rate of Hispanics. But these national figures belie the high rate of interracial marriage among whites in America's “melting pot” states.

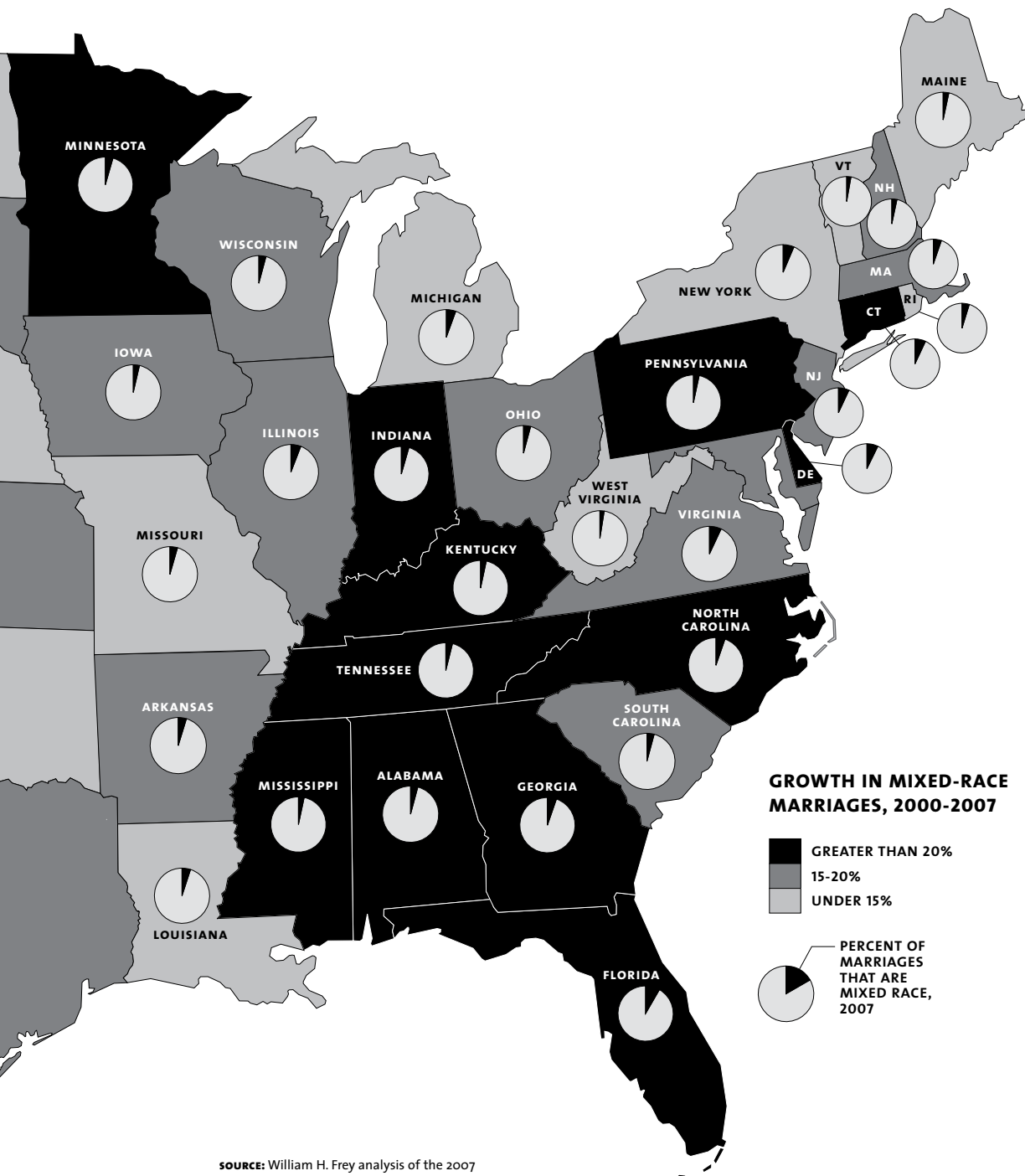
BILL FREY is a senior fellow in demography at the Milken Institute and senior fellow in metropolitan policy at the Brookings Institution in Washington.



Nearly half of Anglo marriages in Hawaii and more than one in five in California fit the category. When whites do intermarry, half of their partners are Hispanic, one-fifth

Asian and one-tenth African-American.

Interestingly, 13 percent of white interracial partners are themselves of mixed race. Perhaps this is the wave of the future. **M**



SOURCE: William H. Frey analysis of the 2007 American Community Survey, and 2000 and 1990 U.S. Decennial Censuses