

DEMOGRAPHER'S PAGE

Are Two Americas Emerging?

by William H. Frey

For much of the nation's history, national demographic trends were largely a result of trends in the white population. This is no longer the case. The 1990 Census confirmed that the U.S. is now one-fourth "minority" and that the non-Hispanic white population no longer unerringly reflects the nation's character. But there are two sides to this story: while changes in national-level trends increasingly reflect the statistical weight of minorities, there is a continuing geographic polarization between racial and ethnic minorities and the white "majority" population.

The initial results of the 1990 Census put the fast-changing U.S. minority group—comprised primarily of blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and Native Americans—further into the spotlight. Asians nearly doubled from 3.5 million to over 7 million and Hispanics grew from 14.6 to 22.4 million. The black increase was more modest, from 26.5 to 30.0 million. These changes accentuated geographic disparities between the minority population and non-Hispanic whites.

This article uses data from the 1980 and 1990 U.S. Censuses, analyzed at the University of Michigan Population Studies Center, to examine a decade of change in the distribution of minorities and non-Hispanic whites. (In the interest of brevity, "whites" as used in this article refers to non-Hispanic whites.)

These data show that the distribution of U.S. whites across geographic regions and metro areas is becoming increasingly dissimilar to that of faster-growing minorities. Specific minorities have always had a high degree of concentration: Cubans in Florida, Asians in California, Puerto Ricans in the New York area, blacks in the rural South and Northern cities, for example. But the

recent increase in the size of these populations, coupled with decidedly different white distribution patterns, has served to accentuate these trends.

Regional and Metro Disparities

Whites are in the majority in each region of the country, but the size of the majority and its influence on statistics differs from region to region. Whites make up 83 percent of the North (Northeast plus Midwest regions). But that majority shrinks to 72 percent in the South and 67 percent in the West. To draw another sharp contrast, Hispanics make up just under one in ten persons across the nation, but about one in five in the West.

Minority gains are most heavily concentrated in the rapidly growing West region and in large metropolitan areas (those with 1990 populations that exceed 1 million). In fact, minority populations in large metropolitan areas in the West grew by 59 percent—almost twice the national minority rate. Each of the nation's three large minority groups are contributing to this pattern. More than half of U.S. Asians (55 percent) are found in the West, 45 percent of Hispanics, but only 19 percent of whites live in the West. Blacks are more concentrated in the South (54 percent live in the South) and North (37 percent). As Table 1 shows, minority growth was more than seven times that of whites and helped drive up the national growth rate to 9.8 percent. Immigration contributed to the growth of the minority population in all parts of the country. Latin America and Asia each contributed about 42 percent of new (legal) immigrants to the U.S. during the 1980s. Almost half of recent immigrants said that they intended to settle in California, Texas or Florida.

The white population, on the other hand, is distributed much differently across regions and metropolitan areas, and growth rates for whites are much slower. Whites are more heavily concentrated in the North, in smaller

metros and in nonmetropolitan areas, and in suburban rings. The 1980s saw a modest shift of whites from the North toward the Sunbelt. That resulted largely from employment dislocations associated with various boom and bust areas. Sharply directed flows of elderly whites to selected retirement communities also occurred. Growth gains for U.S. whites were thus more modest and more evenly distributed across the South and West than minority gains.

In many ways, these 1980-1990 trends are not new, but are an outgrowth of patterns already apparent at the start of the decade. In 1980, the white population was disproportionately located in the slow-growth North, in small cities, and in nonmetropolitan areas.

Individual Metropolitan Areas

Metropolitan areas, where minorities tend to be concentrated, often show sharper change patterns than regions. Almost three-fourths of Asians (73 percent), 69 percent of Hispanics, and 58 percent of blacks live in large metros, while less than one-half of whites do (46 percent). This section looks at distribution and change patterns in 280 metropolitan areas in the United States and in the 39 metro areas with 1 million or more inhabitants.

Slow, dispersed change for whites. The white population increased in 191 metro areas, and declined in 89 areas. Five metros increased their white popu-

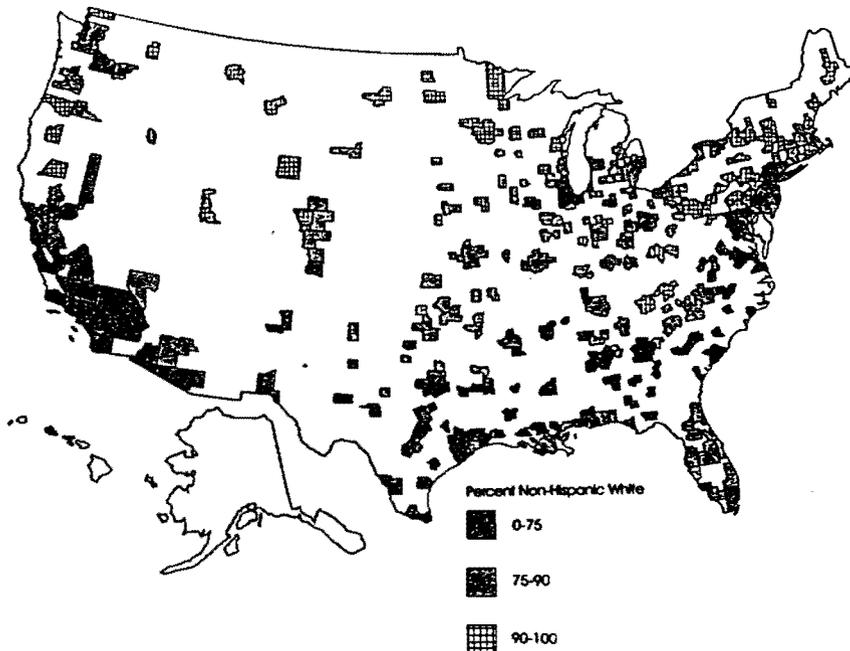
Table 1. Population Change by Region and Metropolitan Status, 1980-1990

Region	Percentage Change		
	White	Minority	Total
North*	-1.0	+22.2	+2.3
South	+9.5	+24.5	+13.4
West	+11.0	+53.4	+22.3
All U.S.	+4.4	+30.9	+9.8
Metro status			
Large metro	+3.8	+37.0	+12.1
Other metro	+7.1	+27.5	+10.8
Nonmetro	+2.4	+12.9	+3.9
All U.S.	+4.4	+30.9	+9.8

*Includes both the Northeast and Midwest Census Bureau regions. "Whites" = non-Hispanic whites.

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Metro Areas with Fewest Whites, 1990



lation by more than 300,000 (Dallas-Fort Worth, Atlanta, Phoenix, Tampa-St. Petersburg, and Seattle). The increase exceeded 200,000 in 12 areas and 100,000 in 26 areas. Among the gainers are retirement and recreation centers (including six cities in Florida, Phoenix, and Las Vegas), large regional centers (Seattle, Minneapolis, and Denver), as well as Washington, D.C., Baltimore, Charlotte, Norfolk, Raleigh-Durham, and Austin. Some of these are also high-tech magnets. Significantly, several white gainers had heavily white populations to begin with (Minneapolis, Salt Lake City, and Portland, Oreg.). And, only three of the 26 large white gainers are California metros (San Diego, Los Angeles, Sacramento—all with white increases of 200,000 or more).

In terms of rates of white growth, cities in Florida (Naples, Fort Pierce, Ocala, Fort Meyers) led, along with Las Vegas—all increasing by more than half. Five more metros (four from Florida plus Austin, Texas) increased their white population by more than 40 percent.

Of the metros that experienced declines in their white populations, 31 lost

more than 10,000. Five large Frostbelt metros lost more than 100,000. Of these five metros, New York had the biggest decline (-856,000), followed by Chicago (-190,000), Pittsburgh (-182,000), Detroit (-173,000), and Cleveland (-107,000). Six other large metros (Miami, Buffalo, New Orleans, Milwaukee, Boston, and Rochester) also lost white population. Most of the smaller areas where the white population declined were located in the Rustbelt and "Oilpatch" regions, midwest farming areas, and western mining areas. Still, 32 of the 89 metros that lost whites, gained in population overall as a result of minority growth. These included the larger metros, New York, Chicago, Miami, Milwaukee, Boston and Rochester.

Concentrated minority gains. While all but eight of the 280 metro areas studied showed some increase in their minority populations, the bulk of the gains were concentrated in nine large metropolitan areas. Characteristically, these were metros that either had large minority populations, served as ports of entry, or were traditional destination areas for blacks. The Los Angeles metro area, which is home to 12 percent of the

nation's total minority population, garnered 20 percent of the nation's minority population growth in the 1980s—a gain of 2.8 million minority residents. Los Angeles, plus New York, San Francisco, Miami, Houston, and Dallas-Fort Worth, all with large initial minority populations, account for 46 percent of national minority growth. Three additional metro areas (Washington, D.C., San Diego, and Chicago) each increased their minority populations by more than 300,000 over the 1980s.

Even more dramatic rates of minority growth occurred, but rates can be misleading, since high rates can result from relatively small changes in numbers on a small base. For example, Wausau, Wisconsin experienced a 247 percent growth rate in its minority population during the 1980s; however, this represented a gain of only 2,472 people. In contrast, Chicago's minority growth of 14 percent during the decade represented an addition of 318,986 people.

Growth rate comparisons obscure the concentrated nature of minority growth. Minority growth rates exceed those for non-Hispanic whites in 258 of the 280 metro areas. Yet, in only 136 metros do minorities account for most of the numeric growth. All but 22 metro

1990 Distribution Across Metros

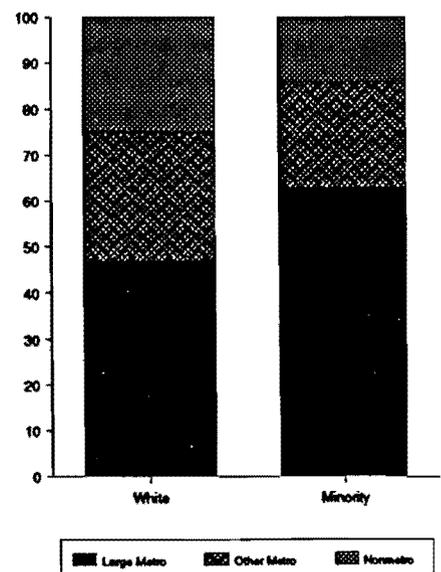


Table 2. Large Metros with Highest Percentages of Minorities

Rank	Metro Area	1990 Percent Minority	Change Since 1980
1.	San Antonio MSA	55.7	+2.8
2.	Miami CMSA	52.2	+13.2
3.	Los Angeles CMSA	50.2	+11.1
4.	Houston CMSA	42.1	+7.3
5.	New Orleans MSA	40.7	+3.1
6.	San Francisco CMSA	38.8	+8.3
7.	Washington, D.C. MSA	37.3	+4.4
8.	New York CMSA	37.0	+6.9
9.	San Diego MSA	34.6	+8.5
10.	Chicago CMSA	33.3	+3.5
11.	Norfolk MSA	33.3	+1.8
12.	Dallas-Ft. Worth CMSA	30.3	+6.1
13.	Atlanta MSA	29.8	+3.5
14.	Baltimore MSA	29.0	+1.3
15.	Sacramento MSA	26.8	+5.9

Note: MSA=Metropolitan Statistical Area; CMSA=Consolidated Metropolitan Statistical Area.

areas increased their minority share over the 1980s, but only 30 metros increased their shares by as much as 5 percent—most of these are located in the South and West.

Because of the concentrated nature of minority growth, minority composition varies widely across U.S. cities. Indeed 10 metro areas have "minority majorities" (where the "minority" population exceeds one-half). These include 5 small and moderate-sized Texas cities near the Mexican border, plus Honolulu, Las Cruces, San Antonio, Miami, and Los Angeles. An additional 69 metro areas with minority shares exceeding one-fourth are located largely in the Southeast, Southwest, and Pacific Coast States, along with a few large metros in the North and Eastern Seaboard.

But the vast majority (201) of the nation's metros house minority shares below 25 percent. In 97 of these the majority population share exceeds 90 percent. These majority-dominant metros are located primarily in the Northeast—west of the Eastern Seaboard, Midwest, and the Upper Mountain and Pacific Divisions. The four largest of these are Minneapolis-St. Paul, Providence, Pittsburgh, and Salt Lake City.

The Future

Looking to the future, should we expect to see the the United States majority and minority populations further differentiate themselves? The answer depends on whether or not cur-

rent trends intensify. If present trends moderate, minorities would become more dispersed both across and within metro areas and regions. This could occur with greater assimilation of ex-

isting minorities and more emphasis on "skills" over "family" criteria for admitting immigrants to the country.

If current trends continue or intensify, we would see increasing disparity in distribution patterns between minority and white populations. Regional differences in age composition and income levels would sharpen.

At the extreme, two American residential norms would emerge both viable, but quite different in culture and style: the first, aging, largely white nonmetropolitan and small metropolitan communities in the Midwest; the second, young, vibrant, multicultural metro areas in the South and West. Such divisions exist only in embryo at this point. But even today's patterns have implications for regional political preferences, social services needed, and attitudes about major social issues, ranging from multilingual education to federal assistance to homeless and poverty populations.

Natural Increase: The Beat Goes On

World population continues to grow at an unprecedented pace. In 1991 alone, about 93 million human beings were added to the globe. While experts differ on how foreboding such numbers are, most people are simply unaware of the magnitude of the increase.

Here is a vivid way to convey the pace of world population growth for introductory population classes or presentations to organizations. First, procure a metronome—preferably one that is electronic and has a volume control. University music departments will often let you borrow one. At the beginning of the presentation, set the metronome to about 176 beats per minute (about 3 per second) and turn it on. You can ask the group to think about what each tick represents. (Frequently, someone will mistakenly guess that each tick is a birth.) Then, you can show some data on the board (see box; numbers from *PT*, July/August 1991).

World population (mid-1990)	5,383,886,000
Population growth rate	+ 1.7%
Total annual increase	92,543,000
Total daily increase	253,542
Total hourly increase	10,564
Total increase per minute	176

Each tick represents neither a birth, nor a death, but a net addition birth that is not compensated for by a death.

Some groups find it particularly arresting to think that this ticking is continuous—occurring when they are eating, studying, and sleeping.

As an extension to this exercise you can show that most of this growth, about 164 beats per minute, is accounted for by population growth in developing countries (you can then set the metronome accordingly). The developed world is growing at about 12 ticks per minute—a setting that is not on most metronomes. You can also ask whether they think the ticking is getting faster or slower. The revelation that the pace is increasing, despite the slow decline in the world population growth rate, can lead to a discussion of exponential growth and population momentum.

—Leif Jensen

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