

IMMIGRANTS IN, NATIVE

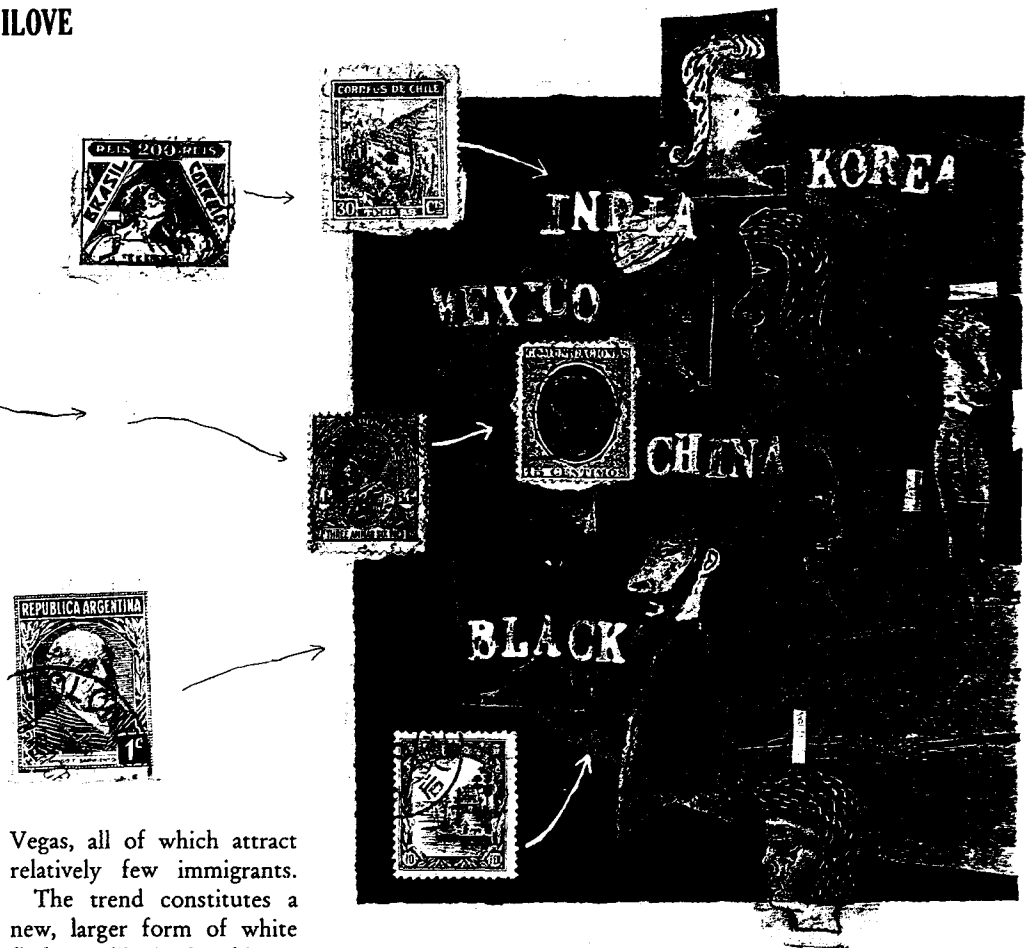
BY WILLIAM H. FREY AND JONATHAN TILOVE

THREE YEARS AGO, MARILYN YAROSKO moved to Las Vegas; she was feeling out of place in her native Southern California. The Asian population in her hometown of Torrance, just south of Los Angeles, had doubled to 22 percent in the 1980's. The pastor and most of the parishioners at her Roman Catholic church were now Vietnamese. Most of her fellow nurses at Charter Suburban Hospital, she says, were Filipino, super-hardworking and, she thinks, a bit cliquish. Yarosko, whose parents were Canadian and paternal grandparents were from the Ukraine, is not a xenophobe. She is not bitter or looking for someone to blame. "We took it from the Indians: who are we to complain?" she says. But, she acknowledges, "I began to feel like an outsider."

"For every white person who leaves," she says of Los Angeles, "a foreigner takes their place."

Her remark is not merely an anecdotal insight. A new analysis of the 1990 United States Census discloses that some of America's largest metropolitan areas are experiencing something statistically very close to Yarosko's observation: For every immigrant who arrives, a white person leaves. Look collectively at the New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Houston and Boston metropolitan areas — 5 of the top 11 immigration destinations. In the last half of the 80's, for every 10 immigrants who arrived, 9 residents left for points elsewhere. And most of those leaving were non-Hispanic whites. Of the top immigrant destinations, only metropolitan San Diego was attracting more whites from the rest of the nation than it was losing. The places that whites were bound for were metro areas like Tampa-St. Petersburg, Seattle, Phoenix, Atlanta and Las

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Vegas, all of which attract relatively few immigrants.

The trend constitutes a new, larger form of white flight. Unlike in the old version, whites this time are not just fleeing the cities for the suburbs. They are leaving entire metropolitan areas and states — whole regions — for whiter destinations. And new census estimates indicate that this pattern of flight from big immigration destinations has become even more pronounced in the 90's.

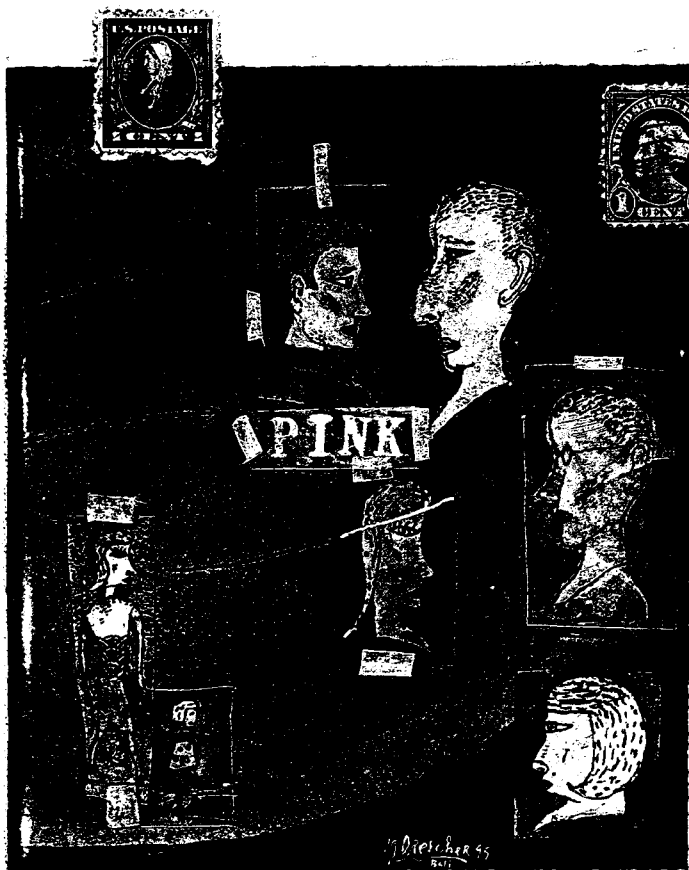
This combination of concentrated minority immigration and distinctly white dispersal is reshaping America more and more into two nations. One is the rapidly changing, intensely diverse America represented by the coastal ports of entry from San Francisco to Houston in the West, and Boston to Washington plus Miami in the East, along with the premier Middle Western destination of Chicago.

The second is the rest of the country, experiencing this new diversity in modest numbers or not at all. In other words, the old image of immigrant assimilation is being supplanted by a new one — Balkanization.

The force behind all this change is a decade of greater immigration, and greater minority immigration, than any in American history. According to the Urban Institute, a research organization in Washington, some 10 million legal and illegal immigrants entered the country in the 80's, exceeding the previous high of 9 million recorded in the first decade of the century. The relative rate of immigration is obviously much lower now; the population is also now three times as large.

WHITES OUT

Ten big metropolitan areas are seeing a new kind of white flight, out of the melting pot and into another America.



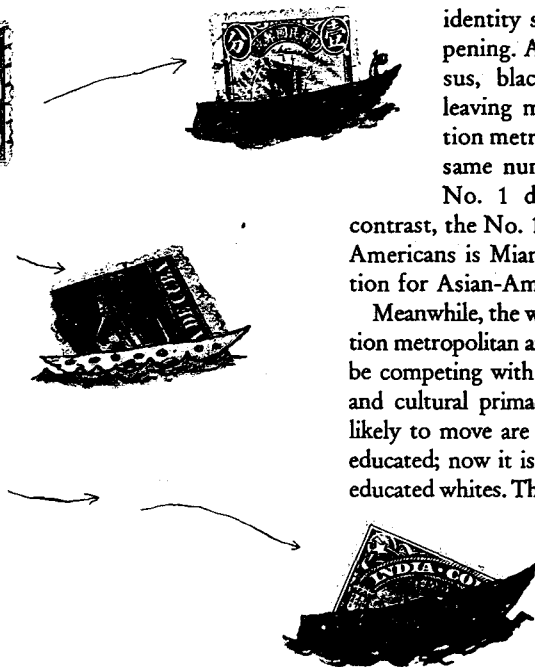
Nevertheless, today's geographic concentration of immigrants is much higher. More than three-quarters of immigrants in the 1980's settled in just six states, and more than half of those immigrants were in just eight metropolitan areas.

Moreover, unlike past eras of immigration, this new wave is more than 80 percent Latin American and Asian. Most immigrants arrive to discover that they are officially classified as members of a racial group — usually Hispanic or Asian. Legally and culturally, they are all defined as minorities — just as blacks have been, even though most blacks originally came to America as slaves. In California, this pattern has altered the dynamics of affirma-

tion in ways that go unrecognized in the currently raging debate on the subject. Because of immigration, in the 30-odd years since the dawn of affirmative action, blacks have

gone from more than two-thirds to less than half of America's minority population. Nationally, black workers, and especially the black middle class, are disproportionately concentrated in government jobs. But with substantial numbers of new immigrants arriving, blacks in these port-of-entry cities find themselves increasingly overrepresented in government jobs vis-à-vis their shrinking percentage of the minority population. The result: The new minorities' affirmative-action claims for fairness can't help but come at the expense of blacks.

Ultimately, this interplay of immigration and affirmative action encourages Americans to identify themselves by race and ancestry, and when necessary, move to where that



identity serves them best. It's happening. According to the 1990 census, blacks, like whites, are also leaving most of the high-immigration metropolitan areas, if not in the same numbers as whites, and their No. 1 destination is Atlanta. By contrast, the No. 1 destination for Hispanic-Americans is Miami, and the No. 1 destination for Asian-Americans is Los Angeles.

Meanwhile, the whites leaving high-immigration metropolitan areas are those most likely to be competing with immigrants for jobs, space and cultural primacy. Classically, those most likely to move are the most affluent and best educated; now it is the less affluent, less well-educated whites. They are not the ones who can

afford to hire immigrants to mind their kids, trim their hedges and make their hotel beds. They are the whites whose neighborhoods and public school classrooms are visibly changing, and the ones most likely to be economically displaced by immigrants who pour in no matter how lousy the local economy may be. What they leave behind is a society more racially stratified, with affluent whites on top in their gated communities and private schools, and minorities at the bottom, competing with one another for jobs, turf and power.

Those who leave are not just switching neighborhoods. Consider California. It will be less than half white within a decade because of a massive influx of minority immigrants and a disproportionately white exodus, mostly to neighboring states, which are among the whitest in the nation. In Las Vegas, most of Marilyn Yarosko's neighbors and co-workers are white. Gone is any sense of identity or community Yarosko had with those she left behind. For now, when someone like Yarosko flees Los Angeles for Las Vegas, she is not just leaving one state for another, she is leaving one America for another. ■