

BY WILLIAM H. FREY

### A century and a half after the gold rush brought the first flood of Americans seeking the good life in California, the giant sucking sound heard from Maine to Kansas to Oklahoma has finally been silenced.

According to newly released Census figures, three-quarters of a million Americans more left the Golden State in the second half of the 1990s than arrived. While California's population is not shrinking – foreign immigrants continue to pour in – this turnaround marks a sea change in its demographic allure.

The almost universal popularity of California as “America's destination” was evident as late as the 1960s, when it gained more migrants than it lost to 41 other states. The trend continued through the 1970s and 1980s, with large flows from the Northeast and Midwest. But in the 1995-2000 period, California lost more migrants than it gained to 39 states.

Nevada and Arizona proved most attractive. Other Western states, including Oregon, Washington, Colorado and Utah, also gained substantially from California's outflow, as did Southeast magnets including Georgia, Florida and North Carolina.

The early evidence suggested this was a “white flight” phenomenon – a variant of

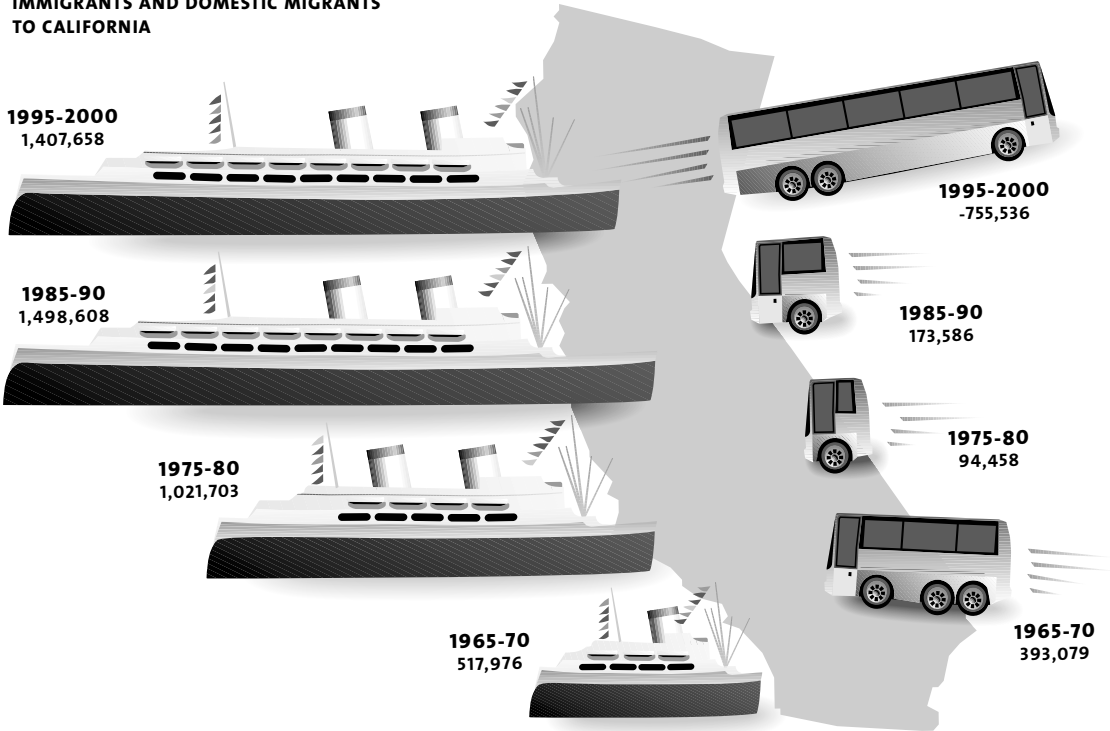


the early 1950s flight to the suburbs. But California's 1990s out-migration proved to be more heavily Hispanic than white. Blacks and Asians also turn up on the loss side of the ledger.

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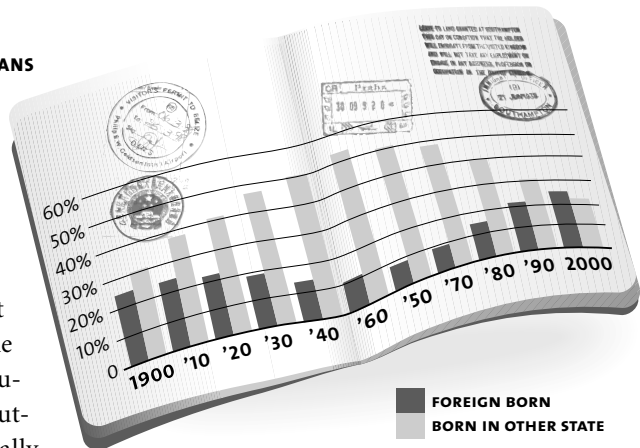
## CHARTICLE

### WEST COAST ELLIS ISLAND IMMIGRANTS AND DOMESTIC MIGRANTS TO CALIFORNIA



### GLOBAL GOLD RUSH MORE NON-NATIVE CALIFORNIANS ARE FOREIGN-BORN

A better label for this movement is “flight of the struggling middle class.” Adults with a high school education or less showed the highest out-migration rates; California actually gained college graduates. The state remains a land of promise for well-heeled professionals. But for others, opportunities seemed brighter in lower cost, less congested



states in the rest of the West or in the East.

Yet, while California ranked second (to New York) in losing migrants to other states, it ranked first in gaining migrants from

**EASY COME, EASY GO  
GREATEST GAINS AND LOSSES  
IN MIGRATION , 1995-2000**



abroad. For every American who left California in the last half of the 1990s, two foreigners arrived. And the children of immigrants are adding to the state's fertility levels, imply-

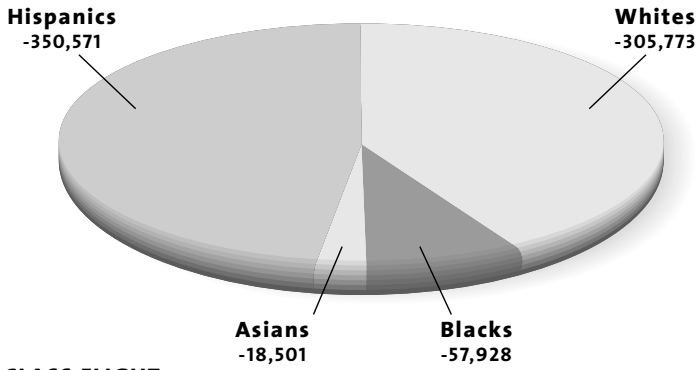
ing that the ethnic trend has considerable inertia.

The 2000 Census shows that, for the first time, more Californians were born in

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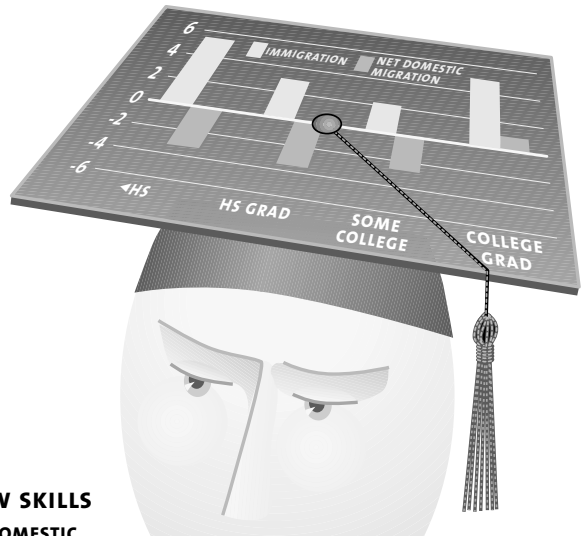
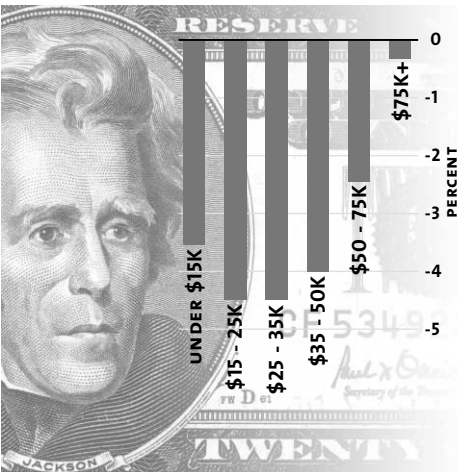
**NOT JUST WHITE FLIGHT...**

**DOMESTIC NET OUT-MIGRATION FROM CALIFORNIA BY RACE, 1995-2000**



**...BUT MIDDLE CLASS FLIGHT**

**DOMESTIC NET OUT-MIGRATION FROM CALIFORNIA**



**HIGH SKILLS, LOW SKILLS**  
**IMMIGRATION AND DOMESTIC**  
**MIGRATION RATES BY EDUCATION, 1995-2000**

a foreign country than in other US states. This contrasts markedly with the post-World War II decades, when more than half of California's population was born in other parts of

America. Now that share has dropped to less than a quarter, while more than a quarter are foreign-born. California remains a land of opportunity, but for very different groups. **M**