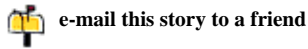


WEDNESDAY, MARCH 14, 2001



e-mail this story to a friend

USA

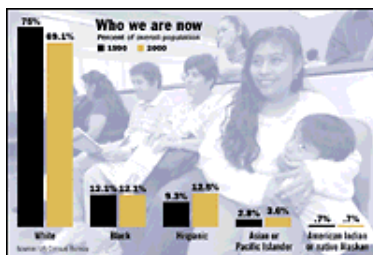
Ethnic diversity grows, but not integration

New census figures show greater diversity, but communities are no more integrated.

By **Laurent Belsie** (belsiel@csp.com)
Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

ST. LOUIS

The United States is becoming steadily more ethnically diverse. But it's also as segregated as ever.



[Click here for the bigger picture.](#)

America's urban neighborhoods remain largely dominated by one group or another. Even recent moves by minorities into the suburbs have failed to breach the color barrier. At least, that's the preliminary conclusion based on new figures coming out of Census 2000.

"We're not more integrated - that's the bottom line," says John Logan, director of the Lewis Mumford Center for Comparative Urban and Regional Research. The center, at the University at Albany in New York, has conducted a study based on the handful of state figures released so far by the US Census Bureau.

If the results hold up across the country, the implications could prove enormous. At a minimum, they suggest that four decades of efforts to integrate communities have largely failed. While other research suggests that racial attitudes with regard to housing have lessened, actual settlement patterns remain rooted in the past. Children of the early 21st century will likely grow up isolated from people of other ethnic groups - much as the children of the early 20th century did.

These findings have been obscured somewhat by other Census numbers indicating America's rapid diversification. For example, the nation's Hispanic population grew a surprising 58 percent from 1990 to 2000. That means Hispanics now rival blacks as the nation's largest minority.

Other fast-growing groups: Asians, whose totals are up by at least 48 percent, and American Indians, up at least 26 percent (though these groups still represent relatively small shares of the US population - roughly 4 percent and 1 percent, respectively).

"The nation is much more diverse in the year 2000 than it was in 1990," says Jorge del Pinal, chief of special population statistics for the Bureau. "And that diversity is much more complex than we've ever measured before."

monitortalk

Do you wish your neighborhood had more ethnic diversity?

Take a quick poll.

Racial overlap

The complexity comes from two factors. First, the census doesn't consider Hispanics a racial group (since they're differentiated by language). So the census puts Spanish-speaking blacks both in the "black" category and the "Hispanic" category. This overlap makes exact comparisons difficult. Should all Hispanics be compared to all blacks or just non-Hispanic blacks?

MORE FROM THE MONITOR

*Editorial:
Race in
America: *QUÉ
PASA?*

Further complicating matters, Census 2000 for the first time allowed Americans to put themselves in more than one racial category. Some 98 percent chose only one race. But the slight overlap again makes comparisons difficult. For example, the number of people who only consider themselves native Hawaiians or Pacific Islanders grew 9 percent during the 1990s. But the number of people who claimed that category as well as some other racial classification rose some 140 percent during the same period.

Demographers will have to sift through this statistical stew to reach clear conclusions. Yet despite this evidence of America's increasing ethnic variety, the view from neighborhoods remains stubbornly segregated.

Take greater Jersey City, N.J., a community of some 610,000 people hemmed in between Newark and New York City. As a whole, the city and its suburbs have become more diverse over the past decade, mirroring national trends. Its Asian population has nearly doubled. Hispanics now represent its largest racial grouping, while non-Hispanic blacks have held their own and non-Hispanic whites have seen their numbers dwindle.

But at the neighborhood level, integration remains a distant dream. Using a "dissimilarity index," which compares the distribution of racial groups over neighborhoods, researchers at the Mumford Center found that it stood at 69 percent for whites and blacks last year. (Any reading over 60 is considered very segregated.) The number had barely moved from the 72 percent recorded in 1990.

Segregation remains less of a problem for Jersey City's whites and Hispanics - as well as its whites and Asians (48 percent for both pairings). But it actually increased over the decade. That increase doesn't necessarily suggest more prejudice, researchers say. Housing segregation often rises when rapidly expanding immigrant groups move into an area. Researchers found similar trends in Milwaukee and New Orleans.

monitortalk

Is your neighborhood growing more integrated?

Join the discussion.

There is some evidence such barriers are breaking down among minorities themselves.

In Norfolk, Va., for example, the dissimilarity indexes have fallen anywhere from 4 to 10.5 percentage points when comparing any two of the Hispanic, black, and Asian groupings. But for whites and these groupings, the ratings have barely budged in a decade.

Color lines by neighborhood

In fact, in cities like New York and Chicago, they don't appear to have changed for whites and blacks since the 1920s - when blacks began immigrating from the South in large numbers. "You might have thought the black civil-rights movement or the rise of the black middle class or changing racial attitudes surely by now would have made a difference," says Professor Logan. But "the color line is still very

strong."

The housing data don't necessarily mean racial attitudes are hardening, says Tom Smith, director of the general social survey of the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago. When the survey asked nonblacks in 1990 if they would object to living in a half-black neighborhood, 47 percent of respondents said yes. By 2000, that share had dropped to 32 percent, he says. And Hispanics and Asians saw even larger drops in housing prejudice.

But buying a home "depends on a lot of practical considerations," Mr. Smith adds. So for reasons of economics, comfort, school and family considerations - and sometimes because of race - Americans continue to live by and large among people who look much like themselves.

■ For further information:

- [Census Bureau](#)
- [Historical United States Census Data Browser](#)

Please Note: The Monitor does not endorse the sites behind these links. We offer them for your additional research.

[Home](#) | [Archive](#) | [Subscriptions](#) | [Get Free E-mail Update](#) | [Send Editor E-mail](#) | [Monitor Talk](#) | [Today's Paper](#) | [@csmonitor.com](#) | [About Us/Help](#) | [Feedback](#)

. Copyright 2001 The Christian Science Monitor. All rights reserved.