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## Census shows communities remain racially homogenous

By Robin Fields and Ray Herndon | Times Staff Writer  
Posted July 4, 2001, 9:51 PM EDT

From the moment segregation in America had a name, it has signified the separateness of blacks and whites.

But over the last decade, while blacks were making some progress in residential integration, Latinos and Asians became more isolated from other racial groups in the vast majority of the nation's large metropolitan areas, from Chicago's red-bricked grid to Phoenix's beige sprawl, a Los Angeles Times analysis of 2000 census data shows.

Although Latinos and Asians spread into new regions, the borders around their core neighborhoods stiffened, as newcomers displaced the remnants of other racial groups.

A Times analysis found that blacks remain the most segregated group in the nation's top 25 metropolitan areas; Latinos and Asians are beginning to close the gap.

In 21 of 25 population centers, Asians were more likely to live apart from other races in 2000 than in 1990, according to the dissimilarity index, which calculates how evenly ethnic groups are spread within communities. Latinos became more segregated in 19 of 25 areas.

Demographers and community leaders are struggling to classify these tightening knots of ethnic population, which share characteristics of both black ghettos and earlier immigrant enclaves, yet do not match the pattern of either.

Some observers find the trend troubling, proof that, "We're still a society that arranges itself around race," said Karen Narasaki, president of the National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium.

Others, however, say the new concentrations of Latinos and Asians are transitory and should not be viewed through the poisonous prism of segregation.

"These places, they don't have the rigidity or underpinnings of a true ghetto," said David

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How the census is accomplished

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- Size of Congress**  
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SOURCE: Census Bureau WRT

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Hayes-Bautista, director of the Center for Study of Latino Health and Culture at the University of California, Los Angeles. " 'Segregation' and 'isolation' have negative connotations. These are just points on the curve."

The words -- and the substance beneath them -- carry a heavy penalty. Segregated neighborhoods often are poorer and more dangerous, trapped in a cycle of bad schools, dilapidated housing and negligible job prospects.

Segregation no longer has the formal framework it had decades ago, when real estate agents and lenders discriminated legally and restrictive covenants carved out urban reservations for minorities.

Still, measured by segregation's standard yardstick -- dissimilarity -- Latinos and Asians live increasingly among themselves in the big cities that are home to more than half their overall number.

Demographers define places as at least moderately segregated if more than 50 percent of a group's population would have to move to achieve even distribution there.

Some 21 of the nation's 25 largest metros registered as moderately segregated or worse for blacks in 2000, down from 22 in 1990. Eleven meet this criteria for Latinos, up from six a decade earlier. Seven do so for Asians, an increase from five in 1990.

In the 1990s, Latinos exceeded blacks' concentration levels in Phoenix, matched them in San Diego and almost did so in Dallas. Their level of segregation jumped more than 10 percent in Atlanta, Seattle and Minneapolis.

The 2000 figures illustrate the obstinacy of ethnic divisions in older cities such as Boston and New York, where the Asian and Latinos communities were among the most isolated in 1990 and became more so by 2000.

Some of the more dramatic shifts, however, occurred in modern boomtowns with less entrenched geography, many of them surrounded by suburbs flush with new-economy wealth.

To some extent, the increased intensity of Asian and Latino enclaves is not surprising.

These populations grew far more swiftly than other groups in the last decade, fueled by immigration, family reunification and higher birth rates. Massive undercounting in 1990 also might be inflating census-to-census comparisons.

Immigrants typically have lower incomes and less education, which means fewer choices of where to live. Like the waves of Europeans who arrived 100 years before them, today's newcomers usually settle near friends and relatives, in areas where neighbors speak their language and where there are social service agencies and job networks.

It took 50 years for similar white ethnic communities to disperse in eastern cities and vestiges of them still remain, said John Logan, who studies segregation at the

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State University of New York at Albany's Lewis Mumford Center for Comparative Urban and Regional Research.

Some demographers fear, however, that Latino and Asian enclaves might prove more stubborn and less nurturing, both because of the ethnic component and because of their sheer size.

"That scale changes things," said Richard Sander, a law professor and director of UCLA's empirical research group. "With European immigrants, you had a number of smaller groups that over time became indistinguishable from other whites. With Latinos, there's less of a drive to assimilate and more desire to maintain a link to Latin culture."

While blacks' experience of segregation has been more monolithic, some analysts argue that diversity within the Latino and Asian communities is producing a two-tiered reality.

Latino and Asian professionals and longtime U.S. residents mingle easily with whites of their class, said John Kain, who studies segregation at the University of Texas at Dallas.

Those with rural backgrounds and little education, however, are becoming more isolated.

But Narasaki disagrees that the split runs entirely on class lines, pointing to a spurt of '90s "ethnoburbs" dominated by Asian professionals and small-business owners.

"It's not like you have lots of wealthy Asians living with wealthy whites," she said. "Clearly, there is still the phenomenon of whites not wanting to live with them. People want to explain the Latino and Asian experience as being about voluntary separation, but that sort of lets them off the hook."

Ultimately, some demographers suggest, more personal links might soften the boundaries of Latino and Asian enclaves. Both groups are far more likely to intermarry than are blacks.

"By the third generation, 57 percent of Latinos are marrying someone of a different ethnicity," said Harry Pachon, president of the Tomas Rivera Institute in Claremont, Calif. "Us is them and them is us."

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