

Racial and ethnic diversity spreads across the country

Increasing racial and ethnic diversity has long been apparent at the national level and in our nation's largest metropolitan gateways. Since 1980 over nine-tenths of all cities, suburbs and small towns have become more diverse. And rural communities are following the lead of their urban counterparts, according to a U.S. 2010 policy brief.

"What really stands out is the near-universal nature of the trend toward greater racial and ethnic diversity at the local level," said Barry Lee, professor of sociology and demography, Penn State, and co-author of the brief.

Another significant finding is the decline in white-dominant places, where whites make up 90 percent or more of the population. Three decades ago these places represented two-thirds of the total. Today, they are down to only one-third of the total. In their stead are a growing number of communities where minorities are a significant share of the population and often where no group is a majority.

Despite the general upward trend in diversity, dramatic contrasts are still apparent between communities. At the high end of the diversity scale, places such as Oakland and Jersey City now have roughly equal proportions of white, black, Hispanic and Asian residents. At the low end, the most homogeneous communities tend to remain all white or all Hispanic.



A unique feature of this study is that it included micropolitan areas where the largest community has a population under 50,000, as well as rural areas.

"We feel that studying these areas is important because they form the core of small-town America," said Lee. "One of the surprises is that even small towns now have to adapt to newcomers who are from different backgrounds than their longtime residents."

The full report may be downloaded at <http://www.s4.brown.edu/us2010/Data/Report/report08292012.pdf>

Other Penn State researchers on the study were John Iceland, professor of sociology and demography, and Gregory Sharp, recent Ph.D. graduate, sociology and demography.

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