America's Diversity at the Beginning of the 21st Century : Reflections from Census 2000

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April 2, 2002

Introduction

Questions about who belongs to America have long been part of the nation's growth and struggle to absorb newcomers. The past two decades of historically high immigration levels have raised social, cultural and economic anxieties about a fractured America. The quantity of recent immigration, combined with the aftereffects of economic recession and a renewed uncertainty about immigrant newcomers since the September 2001 terrorist attacks by foreigners, may lead to a reconsideration of U.S. immigration and refugee policy. Public attitudes toward immigrants may turn toward wariness of immigrants, possibly eroding the openness to diversity that America has attained (Meissner, 2001).

While the U.S. has always regulated the quantity of immigrants admitted to the United States, it does little for immigrants once they arrive. The assumption is that the foreign-born will make their way with assistance from family and friends. However, adapting to an America that is diverse is challenging to both immigrant newcomers as well as established residents. Current trends raise concerns about shifting American national identity, and how an America that recognizes cultural

differences yet encourages social and political unity can be fostered. What are the obligations of those who come to the United States to become "more like us?" And how should those living in the country respond?

This paper examines the changes to racial and ethnic diversity in contemporary America, focusing on demographic sources of change, primarily immigration, interracial marriage and fertility. It also discusses the role of changing Census methodologies in the construction of the United States as a diverse society.

Background

The United States enters the twenty-first century looking very demographically different than when it crossed the threshold into the previous century. The earliest numbers released by the Census Bureau indeed showed that America in 2000 is more ethnically, racially, linguistically, and culturally diverse than ever before (Prewitt, 2001). Today's diversity is the result of three distinct trends. The first is America's continuing history of large-scale immigration and the legacies of slavery and conquest that have contributed to shaping a multicultural nation. The globalization of goods, finance and business promises to ensure that the United States will continue to receive a diverse flow of people. Current immigration policy that emphasizes family unification also guarantees the maintenance of immigration at high levels.

Family formation among immigrants after their arrival in the United States is the second part of the story of increasing race and ethnic diversity. Immigrants are likely to move as young adults, during the years in which they begin to start families; their children as well become a piece of the diverse American patchwork of race and ethnicity. Some immigrant groups, particularly those from Latin America, have higher fertility rates than native-born Americans, including native-born Latinos. The rise in interracial unions is also fueling demographic change as the number of children of such couples has grown in size over the past 30 years. The family can be a place where integration

occurs. By one estimate, (Goldstein, 1999) one-fifth of all adult Americans already have a close family member who is of another race than their own, and the rate is even higher for non-whites.

In addition to demographic forces, an important change is underway in how the U.S. Census Bureau collects data on race in the United States–the third trend. The 2000 Census allowed people for the first time to mark more than one race. Over time, this may better reflect the rise in those who identify as multiracial and arguably will transform the way the nation views its shifting diversity. In any event, it has the effect of reducing the number of people who identify with a single race, thus statistically shrinking the number of whites, blacks, and Asians. Eventually, the presentation of the nation's diversity as reflected in the multiracial option will influence how we think about ourselves. It may relieve some of the pressures of identity politics through a "multicultural nationalism" (Aleinikoff, 1998), at the same time perhaps creating new problems such as a resurgence of nativism. As the idea takes hold over the next generation, and is reflected back in official statistics, we may find America to be even more diverse than expected.

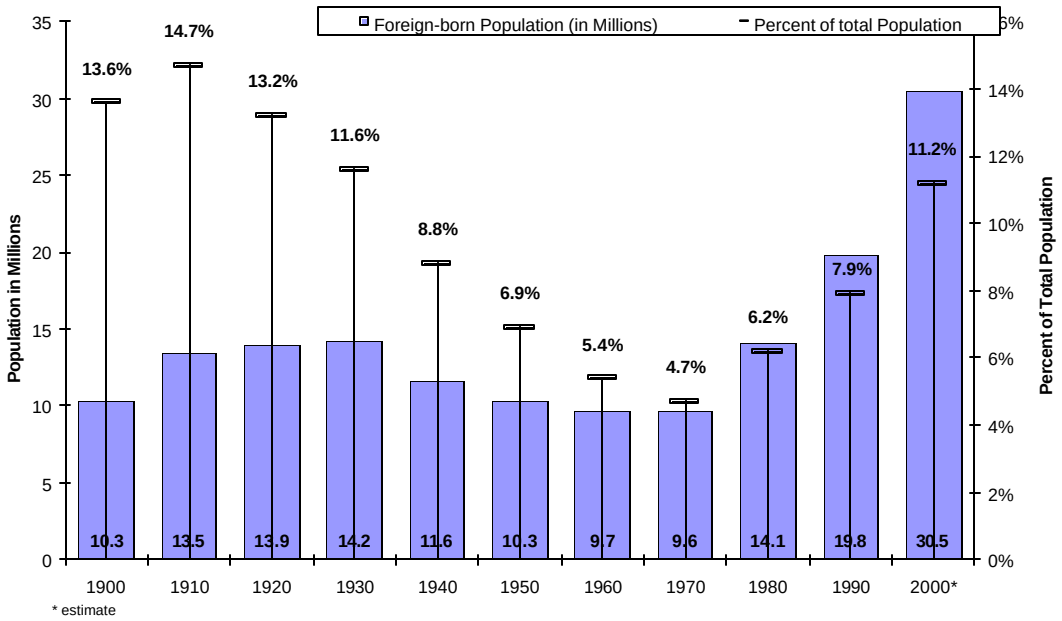
Immigration Trends

The prevalence of immigrant residents in the United States in 2000, though not as proportionally high as during the peak decades in the early 20th century, is numerically three times larger than the 10 million recorded in 1900 (Figure 1).

The foreign-born population steadily increased during the first three decades of the twentieth century before beginning a marked proportional and numerical downward turn in the late1930s after immigration stalled during the worldwide depression. More restrictive immigration policy during World War II kept legal immigration levels low through the next four decades. The 1965 Immigration Act repealed earlier national origin quotas, which opened up immigration from regions other than Europe. During the 1980s and 1990s immigration boomed; the immigrant population more than doubled from 14.1 million to 30.5 million in just twenty years.

As important as this growth is that the source countries have shifted from a European majority in the first three-quarters of the century to a predominance of immigrants from Latin

Figure 1: Foreign-Born Population and Percent of Total Population of the United States: 1900 - 2000



Source: Profile of the Foreign-Born Population in the United States: 1997, Current Population Reports, Special Studies P23-195, Figure
Census 2000 Supplementary Survey Summary Tables, Profile of Selected Social Characteristics: 2000, QT-02, U.S. Bureau of the Cer

America, the Caribbean, Asia and Africa in the last quarter. During the first 2 decades of the century, 85 percent of the 14.5 million immigrants admitted to the United States originated in Europe, largely Southern and Eastern Europe. This is a sharp contrast to the 14.9 million admitted in the last two decades, an equally large percentage of whom were from the countries of Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa (INS, 1998).

Both periods–the beginning and the end of the century–have been characterized by a broad restructuring of the nation's economy, from agriculture to industry in the early period and in the later period from manufacturing to services and information technology. Social conflict and competition today due to the shift in immigrant origins to countries with different ethnic

backgrounds, languages, religions and political traditions than the majority is not unlike the circumstances that unfolded in the earlier decades of the twentieth century (Riche, 2000). While it is tempting today to think earlier immigrants did little to broaden America's ethnic mix, many native-born Americans at the time certainly thought differently. To the contrary, many of them saw immigrants from Greece, Italy, and Poland as profoundly alien to America's cultural and political traditions as many of today's immigrants are viewed.

Shifting Classifications of Race and Ethnicity

Race and Hispanic origin data are collected in a limited fashion by the U.S. government and the categories have changed over time, largely reflecting changes in political power and representation. Almost every Census for the past 200 years has collected racial data differently than the one before it (Lee, 2001). The radical change this time around is that individuals may now mark more than one race, expanding the handful of categories to 63 possible combinations. The race categories offered in the 2000 Census were established by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) in 1997. They include six major categories: white, black or African American, American Indian and Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, and "some other race." The race question was asked of every person living in the United States; respondents reported the race or races they considered themselves to be (Grieco and Cassidy, 2001).

In addition to the race question, the 100 percent "short form" Census questionnaire also asked respondents if they were Spanish, Hispanic or Latino. The federal government differentiates between the race categories mentioned above and what is referred to as Hispanic or Latino ethnicity. Therefore individuals choose a race category or categories in addition to marking whether they consider themselves to be Hispanic or not in a separate question. The label Hispanic arose in the United States in the 1970s as a singular administrative label to address Spanish-speaking people of Latin American descent living in the United States (del Pinal and Singer, 1997). The Census Bureau

adopted it in time for the 1980 Census, however before that and since then other labels have been used, including Latino, which the Census now uses interchangeably with Hispanic (Grieco and Cassidy, 2001). In 2000, 42 percent of Latinos disregarded the racial labels offered and marked "some other race" on their Census form. In fact, most respondents who reported "some other race" are Hispanic (Grieco and Cassidy, 2001).

Likewise other immigrants come to this country with an identity that may not have any relationship to federal standards of racial classification which can be quite broad. For example, "Asian" refers to people having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent. It includes people who indicated their race or races as Asian Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Japanese, Vietnamese or "other Asian," or who wrote in entries such as Burmese, Hmong, Pakistani, or Thai (Grieco and Cassidy, 2001). However, most Asians identify more with their fellow countrymen than with the broad geographical categorization of "Asian" used by the federal government (Riche, 2000).

Given the rigidity of the race categories, and the fluidity of racial and ethnic self-identification, it is not surprising that many people are resistant to Census classifications. In the 1990 Census, half a million people rebelled against instructions to mark only one race and put down two or more instead (Wallman, Evinger and Schechter, 2000). This signifier of change and dissatisfaction contributed to the Census Bureau's methodological shift in allowing for multiple racial responses in 2000. The simple fact is that many people--in particular those moving to the United States as adult immigrants and the offspring of interracial marriages--do not see themselves as fitting into one of a handful of racial categories.

While there is widespread agreement that race and ethnicity is and should be socially and individually defined, why does the federal government maintain the collection of such data? A large part of the reason is that race continues to play a role in the equality of opportunity that exists in

many spheres of American society. Major differences in economic, employment, social, and health trends by race exist and the government's interest in collecting race data aids in documenting these trends. Laws, policies and programs that are designed to prevent racial discrimination such as the Civil Rights Act and hate crimes laws, necessarily need these data (Lee, 2001).

Multiracial America

How has the United States population changed its racial structure in the past 30 years due to the demographic trends highlighted above? Table 1 shows the changes to the nation's racial composition by comparing three race categories: whites, blacks, and a third category that combines all others into one group. (For the years 1970-1990, "other" refers to all persons who identified as something other than white or black, i.e. Asian, American Indian and 'other race'; in 2000 it is similar, but also includes all that marked more than one race as well. Inconsistencies across decades prevent the inclusion of a comparative group of Hispanics.)

Table 1 illustrates the tremendous increase in the nonwhite/nonblack diversity in the thirty year period shown: nationally, the white population has declined from 87.4 percent to 75.1 percent. Over the same period, the "other" population rose from a 1970 figure of 1.4 percent to 12.5 percent in 2000. The black population, as a proportion of the national total, grew slightly by less than 2 percent between 1970 and 2000.

A more significant story is the tenfold increase in children identified as neither black nor white, portending a more diverse future. Children are one and a half times more likely than adults to be identified as neither black nor white in 2000, reflecting the growth in offspring from racial intermarriage and the higher birth rates of immigrants. Children were also much more likely to be identified as multiracial (to have more than one box checked, most likely by their parent) in the 2000 Census; about 4 percent as compared with 2 percent of adults (Kent et al., 2001). As these children

Table 1. U.S. Population by Race and Age, 1970-2000

	1970	1980	1990	2000	Difference Between 1970-2000
Total					
White	87.4	83.2	80.3	75.1	-12.3
Black	11.1	11.7	12.0	12.3	1.2
Other[c]	1.4	5.2	7.6	12.5	11.1
Children[a]					
White	84.8	78.6	75.1	68.6	-16.2
Black	13.7	14.7	15.0	15.1	1.4
Other[c]	1.5	6.7	9.9	16.3	14.8
Adults[b]					
White	88.9	84.9	82.2	77.4	-11.5
Black	9.8	10.5	11.0	11.4	1.6
Other[c]	1.4	4.5	6.8	11.2	9.9

Source: Census of Population 1980, Characteristics of the Population, Vol. 1, Ch. B, Part 1.; Census of Population and Housing, 1990: Summary Tape File 3 on CD-ROM; Census 2000 Summary File 1.

[a] Children defined as 0-17
[b] Adults defined as 18 and older
[c] For 1970, 1980 and 1990, "Other" refers to individuals who marked any race other than black or white, which included American Indian, Eskimo or Aleut, Asian and Pacific Islander, and some other race. In 2000, "Other" refers to American Indian and Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian and some other race. In addition, the 2000 Census allowed individuals to mark more than once race. Those individuals are included in the "Other" category.

become adults, the United States is likely to see an even larger upsurge in multiracial identity as it becomes more socially acceptable and as the larger cohort of multiracial children have their own children who may then choose to identify multiracially.

Furthermore, the “diversity divide” is evident in metropolitan areas with fast growing immigrant populations. Minorities already are more than one-half the population under age 18 in Arizona, California, Hawaii, New Mexico and Texas (Kent, et al. 2001). This is also discernible in

certain counties across the country, in some cases a result of an influx of immigrants to urban areas, in other cases due to nonmetropolitan concentrations of blacks, Latinos or Indian populations on reservations (Kent, et al., 2001).

Table 2. Total Population by Race and Hispanic Origin, 2000

	Population	Percent of Total
Total Population	281,421,906	100.0
White	211,460,626	75.1
Black	34,658,190	12.3
American Indian and Alaska Native	2,475,956	0.9
Asian	10,242,998	3.6
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	398,835	0.1
Some Other Race	15,359,073	5.5
Two Or More Races	6,826,228	2.4
Hispanic	35,305,818	12.5

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 1

How does the United States population look when the Census no longer requires people to pick only one race? Table 2 shows the overwhelming majority of people in 2000 chose only one race (97.6 percent). Of those that chose only one race, 75 percent identified as white, 12.3 percent as black, and 3.6 percent as Asian. American Indians and Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians and Other Pacific Islanders, were both less than 1 percent of the total population. Those who gave their response as something other than those listed above were only 5.5 percent of the population. The overwhelming majority of this group, were Hispanic/Latino, however because Hispanic is not a race option in the current taxonomy, they chose to be identified as "some other race" (Grieco and Cassidy, 2001). Table 2 also shows that Hispanics and African Americans comprise nearly the same proportion of the population for the first time.

However, nearly 7 million people (2.4 percent of the entire population) identified with more than one race (see Table 3). The vast majority chose exactly two races, the most common combination being white and some other race. The four largest groupings, excluding any combination using "some other race" are: white and American Indian and Alaska Native, white and Asian, white and black, black and American Indian and Alaska Native.

Table 3: Population of Two or More Races, Selected Combinations for the United States, 2000

	Population	Percent of Total
Two or More Races	6,826,288	100.0
Two Races	6,368,075	93.3
White & Some Other	2,206,251	32.3
White & American Indian and Alaska Native	1,082,683	15.9
White & Asian	868,395	12.7
White & Black or African American	784,764	11.5
Black & American Indian and Alaska Native	182,494	2.7
All Other Combinations	1,243,488	18.2
Three Races	410,285	6.0
Four Races	38,408	0.6
Five Races	8,637	0.1
Six Races	823	--

-- less than 0.1 percent

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. "Overview of Race and Hispanic Origin." Census 2000 Brief, March 20001.

These four combinations accounted for 43 percent of the population that chose more than one race or 1 percent of the total U.S. population. In March 2000, the OMB established guidelines (prior to the April 2000 Census collection) that identified these four specific combinations of two races (as well as any other multiple race combinations that comprise more than 1 percent of the

population) for the aggregation and allocation of race categories for use in civil rights monitoring and enforcement.

Immigration's Uneven Impact on Diversity

The demography of America's racial and ethnic future is partially in play now. It is unlikely that U.S. immigration policy will change to significantly reduce admissions, therefore future population growth will be dominated by immigrant additions. Regardless, as the younger, more diverse population already residing in the United States ages and is replaced by the next generation, diversity will continue to rise.

Yet America's diversity is not evenly distributed across the country. One of the most striking trends in residential patterns is that post-WWII settlement had been concentrated for so long in just a few states–California, New York, Florida, Texas, Illinois and New Jersey– and within those states, a small number of metropolitan areas. Just as striking is the growth during the last two decades in nontraditional immigrant settlement areas that has taken hold: settlement in "new immigrant states" was double the pace of the six contemporary "traditional states" (Fix, Zimmermannn and Passel, 2001).

Likewise, the metropolitan areas that have drawn immigrants in very high numbers have changed over the century from Northeastern and Midwestern cities like Philadelphia, Buffalo and St. Louis to Southern and Western metropolises such as Los Angeles, Miami and Houston. And where immigrants settle within newer metropolitan areas is increasingly suburban. In some places, like Atlanta and Washington, DC, the recent and rapid growth of the immigrant population is almost entirely evident outside the central city. The 2000 Census reveals that in the last decade, race and ethnic diversity in suburban areas rose considerably (due to growth of both the native- and foreign-born); non-whites increased from 19 percent to 27 percent across all suburban areas (Frey, 2001).

Living with Diversity

It remains to be seen how well contemporary American society will meet the challenges and opportunities that increased social diversity presents. The tensions of a multicultural society that is in constant flux are understandably complicated: immigrants bring with them valuable and varied attributes that enhance and improve America yet they enter an America that has a multifaceted identity and they may not be sure of their place. Future flashpoints of conflict may arise in areas of new immigrant settlement which have little infrastructure to absorb new immigrants. The social, cultural and fiscal impact on schools, neighborhoods, and other institutions are of concern at the local level.

The federal government does not have a dedicated settlement or integration policy and only limited expenditures for immigrant-related programs other than those for refugees. For the most part, federal funding for immigrant integration programs has been created in an ad hoc manner and has been only modestly funded. Through programs such as the Refugee Resettlement Program and the Adult Education/ESL program, the federal government spent a combined 1.6 billion in FY 1999, a small amount given current levels of immigration and the fact that much of this funding is for refugees who comprise approximately 10 percent of the foreign born (Fix, Zimmermann and Passel, 2001).

Instead, many immigrants, in addition to their kin, largely rely on local programs and organizations that are funded from a number of sources, including private foundations, state and local governments. Some organizations have developed around target issues, such as the 1986 legalization program, or in response to a hard-hitting problem within immigrant communities such as the 1996 welfare reform. Others may have been stimulated by federal funding from programs such as the Emergency Immigrant Education Program or the Refugee Resettlement Program.

Regardless of how community based organizations are initiated or maintained, it is their responsiveness that offers up examples of how "on the ground" programs can make a difference for community members. Immigrant led organizations often are the point of first contact for new arrivals. For many newcomers these organizations remain as anchor institutions for families that may need assistance in a variety of spheres. Community organizations can serve as bridges between formal establishments, such as schools or hospitals, and immigrant newcomers who may have limited English language proficiency or little experience in dealing with U.S. bureaucracies.

The models of existing organizations and programs–both government sponsored and private– can guide new areas of immigrant settlement in setting up programs and responding to issues before they become problems. For example, in several localities community organizations have organized and sponsored formal employment centers in response to conflict between informal immigrant labor pools and area residents. As new regions are increasingly experiencing the influx of immigrant newcomers, especially those with limited English ability, they might rise to the occasion proactively to assist immigrants and thereby improve their life chances as well as the well-being of the region. Forward thinking policy and funding is needed to ensure that newcomers get the assistance they need and that the established community is fiscally and socially equipped to participate in the process.

At the top of the list should be investment in English language training. Finding new ways to increase English instruction for immigrants, for example, such as those funded by private firms in industries where immigrants cluster (such as construction), might be modeled and replicated across local areas. For immigrants, learning English fosters independence, it offers access to societal inclusion, it strengthens the pathway to citizenship (both formal and substantive) and it is reinforces all of these issues within families, especially important for those with school age children. This may

go a long way toward strengthening social relations and exchanges and in ultimately unifying the nation.

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