

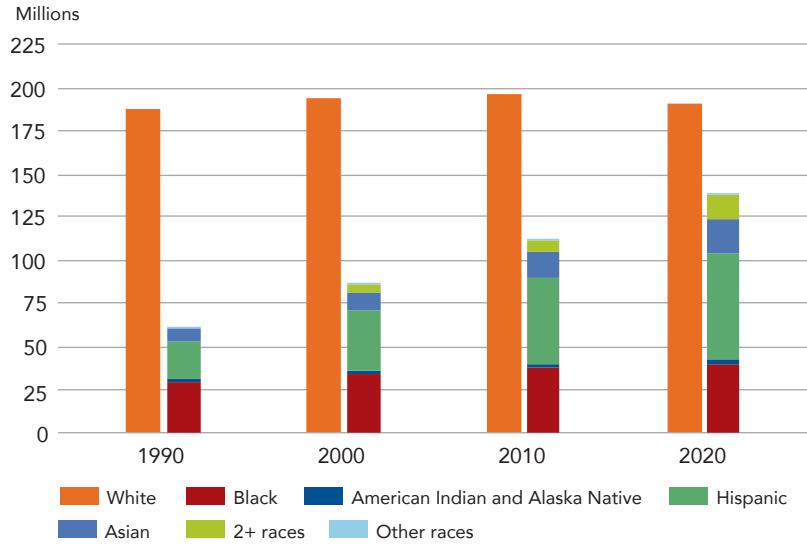


A Transformational Century for America's Diversity

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Now well into the twenty-first century, it has become clear that this will be a century wherein racial diversity transforms America. The 2020 census reported that more than half of all children under age 18 are people of color: Hispanic Americans, Black Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and other nonwhite groups including those who identify with two or more races.¹ The relative size of these groups has risen nationally over the past several decades (see Figure 1.1). And sometime after 2040, census projections show that, irrespective of future immigration levels, over half of the nation's population will identify with racial groups that are now termed "minorities." These demographic shifts in the first part of the century signal a transformation from the mostly white baby boom culture that dominated the nation during the last half of the twentieth century to the more globalized, multiracial country that the United States is becoming.

FIGURE 1.1

U.S. White and Minority Populations, 1990–2020

Source: 1990–2020 U.S. censuses.

These changes are not welcomed by all—even today. Certainly, in the past, the specter of the rise of nonwhite populations instilled fear among some Americans—fear of change, fear of losing privileged status, or fear of unwanted groups in their communities. These fears were especially evident during the decades following the Second World War, when immigration was low and phrases such as “invasion,” “blockbusting,” and “white flight” were commonly used in the context of Black-white segregation. Such fears are evident today as other racial minority groups have become more numerous. These fears were especially visible in recent presidential elections with public backlashes against immigration, claims of political correctness, and other reactions to the nation’s growing racial diversity.

Yet it is my continued belief that such fears will eventually be allayed. In many communities, a broad spectrum of racial groups is already

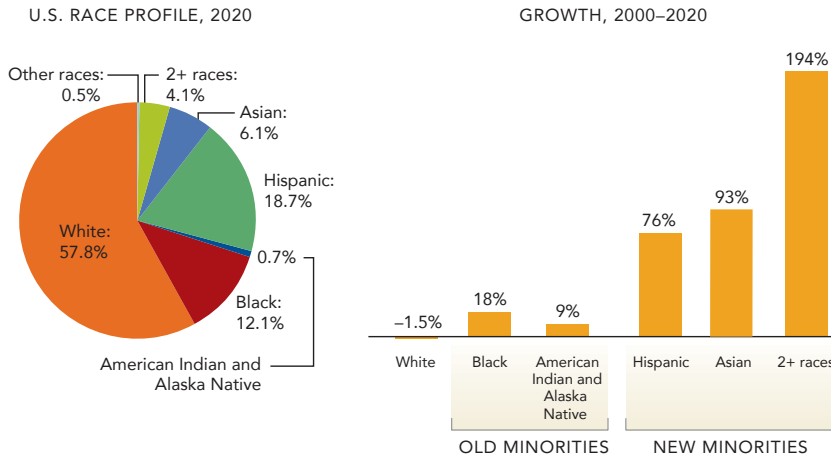
accepted by all, particularly among the highly diverse younger population. Moreover, as this book illustrates, a growing diverse, globally connected minority population will be absolutely necessary to infuse the aging American labor force with vitality and to sustain populations in many parts of the country that are facing population declines. Rather than being feared, America's new diversity—poised to reinvigorate the country at a time when other developed nations are facing advanced aging and population loss—can ultimately be celebrated.

The sweep of diversity that has taken hold this century is the theme of this book, which draws from my examination of U.S. censuses, census surveys, projections, and related sources. As a demographer who has followed U.S. population trends for decades, even I was surprised by the sheer scope of racial change that came to light when the data from the first decade of this century was released with the 2010 census. Now with the 2020 census and related survey data in hand, I am even more convinced that these shifts will continue and become generally accepted and embraced. If planned for properly, these demographic changes will allow the country to face the future with growth and vitality as it reinvents the classic American Melting Pot for a new era. In my experiences speaking publicly and answering press inquiries, I am well aware of the intensity of Americans' questions and thoughts about issues surrounding race. The purpose of this book is to interpret and expound on these transformational demographic shifts so that a general audience of readers can appreciate their force, promise, and challenges.

Key twenty-first-century changes that are already in place include:

—the rapid growth of “new minorities”: Hispanic, Asian, and increasingly multiracial populations. Between 2000 and 2020, Hispanic and Asian populations rose sharply, and the multiracial population nearly tripled (see Figure 1.2). New minorities have already become the major contributors to U.S. population gains. These new minorities—the products of recent immigration waves as well as the growing U.S.-born generations—contributed more than nine-tenths of the nation's population growth since 2000. That trend will accelerate in the future.

FIGURE 1.2

U.S. Racial Profile 2020 and 2000–2020 Population Growth

Source: 2000 and 2020 U.S. censuses.

—***the sharply diminished growth and rapid aging of America's white population.*** Due to low immigration, reduced fertility, and aging, the white population actually declined by 1.5 percent over this century's first two decades. This decline is projected to continue into the future and to remain most prominent among younger populations. At the same time, the existing white population will age rapidly as the remainder of the large baby boom generation and its immediate successor, Generation X, advance into seniorhood.

—***Black economic advances and migration reversals.*** Now, more than sixty years after the civil rights movement began, a growing segment of Black Americans has entered the middle class while simultaneously reversing historic population shifts. The longstanding Black Great Migration out of the South has now turned into a wholesale evacuation from the North—to largely prosperous southern locales and some western states. This century has also shown Black residents abandoning cities for the suburbs, and Black-white neighborhood segregation declining. Although many Black Americans still suffer the effects of inequality, along with uneven treatment by the criminal

justice system, and segregation is far from gone, the economic and residential environments have improved well beyond what most Black Americans experienced for much of the twentieth century.

—the shift toward a nation in which no racial group is the majority.

The shift toward “no majority” communities is already taking place as the constellation of racial minorities expands. In 2020, twenty-seven of the nation’s one hundred largest metropolitan areas were minority white, up from just fourteen in 2000. In two or three decades, there will be no racial majority in the country. This is hardly the America that large numbers of today’s older and middle-aged adults grew up with in their neighborhoods, workplaces, and civic lives. One implication of these shifts will be larger multiracial populations as multiracial marriages become far more commonplace.

The “diversity explosion” the country is experiencing this century will bring significant changes in the attitudes of individuals, the practices of institutions, and the nature of American politics. Racial change has never been easy, and more often than not it has been fraught with fear and conflict. Yet for most of the nation’s history, nonwhite racial groups have been a small minority. Partly because of that, Black Americans and other racial minorities were historically subjected to blatant discrimination, whether through Jim Crow laws, the Chinese Exclusion Act, or any of the many other measures that denied racial minorities access to jobs, education, housing, financial resources, and basic rights of civic participation.

What is becoming different this century is the sheer size of the minority population in the United States. Fortunately, from a demographic perspective the diversity explosion is occurring “just in time” as the aging, mostly white population has begun to decline, bringing with it needed manpower and brain power and taking up residence in otherwise stagnating city and suburban housing markets. Although the white population and its various ethnic components have long been considered the mainstream in the United States, that perception is now changing as more minority members assume positions of responsibility, exert more political clout, exercise their strength as consumers, and demonstrate their value in the labor force.

As they become integral to the nation's success, their presence and values will be embraced.

DIVERSITY IS EXPANDING ACROSS GENERATIONS AND GEOGRAPHY

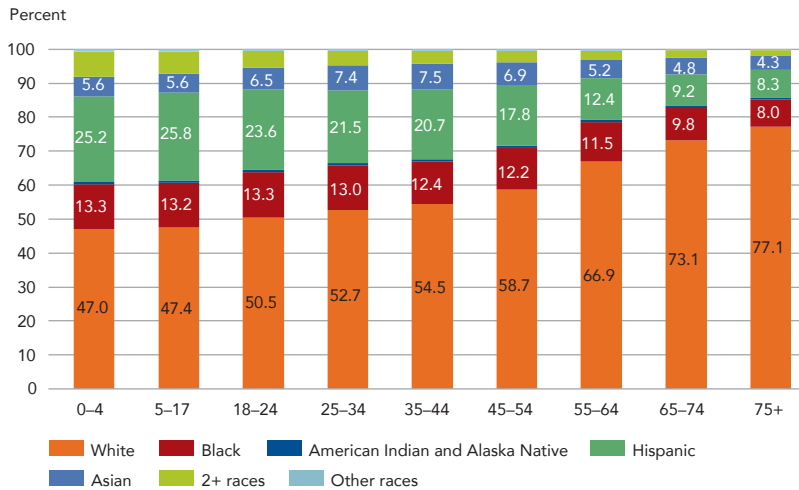
Change will not come without challenges. In fact, a big part of past and current clashes related to race have demographic roots because of how diversity spreads across the country—both generationally and geographically.

Diversity by Generation: Starting with Youth

The most fundamental aspect of the diversity explosion is its generational character. New minority growth is bubbling up the age structure, from young to old. Today, this growth is most visible among America's children and young adults—the postmillennial generation (see Figure 1.3). This has to do, in part, with the more youthful population of Hispanic Americans, the nation's largest minority group. Due to recent waves of Hispanic immigrants who were younger than the total population and to their somewhat higher fertility, Hispanic Americans are decidedly younger than the population at large. This relative youthfulness, with many adults in peak childbearing ages, ensures continued sizable contributions to births, irrespective of future immigration. Asian Americans, the second-largest new minority, also contribute to population gains among youth. In addition, the growing multiracial population, with a median age of just around 27 years, has the greatest potential for growth.

Nonetheless, the aging of the white population is a primary reason why dramatic racial change is beginning at younger ages. Since 2000, the number of white youth in the United States already has declined as more white individuals passed the age of 18 than were born or immigrated. The white decline is projected to continue not only among children but eventually among younger adults and then middle-aged adults, as smaller white generations follow larger ones.² Barring unanticipated increases in white immigration, the long-term scenario

FIGURE 1.3

Racial Profiles by Age, 2020

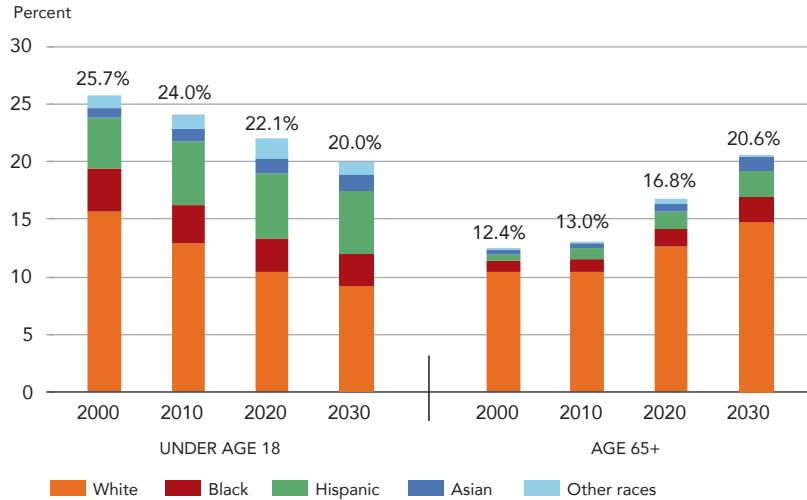
Source: 2020 U.S. census.

for white Americans is one of lower fertility and increased aging. This means that the younger population will lead the way toward the nation's diversity surge. This diversity is already ubiquitous in schools, on playgrounds, and in other civic arenas that young people inhabit. Diversity means that new minorities, including Hispanic and Asian children whose parents or grandparents came from different nations and speak different languages, will become classmates, dating partners, and lifelong friends with younger generations of established minorities and white Americans.

Yet this youth-driven diversity surge has also created a "cultural generation gap" between the diverse youth population and the growing, older, still predominantly white population. This gap is reflected in negative attitudes among many older white Americans toward immigration, new minority growth, and government programs that cater to the real economic and educational needs of America's younger, more diverse population. It has shown up in politics, among other places, as was evident in the demographic voting patterns in the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections won by Barack Obama, and in the

FIGURE 1.4

Children and Seniors, 2000–2030 Share of Total Populations Under Age 18 and Age 65+



Source: 2000–2020 U.S. censuses and 2030 Census Bureau projection, released November 2023.

reverse direction in the 2016 and 2024 elections won by Donald Trump. The gap is not a result of racist attitudes per se on the part of older white voters. It reflects the social distance between minority youth and an older population that does not feel a personal connection with young adults and children who are not “their” children and grandchildren.

The future well-being of seniors and the nation as a whole depends on the ability of today’s youth to succeed in tomorrow’s labor force. This younger population will play a central role in contributing to the nation’s economy and to the retirement and medical care programs that directly benefit the older population. The financial solvency of those programs will be particularly challenging because the mostly white senior population will continue to swell as it absorbs the rest of the large baby boom generation (see Figure 1.4). Attitudinal changes are beginning to occur, as the long-held views of America’s older population, who grew up in a highly segregated, low immigration, post-Second World War America, slowly adapt to these inevitable generational shifts.

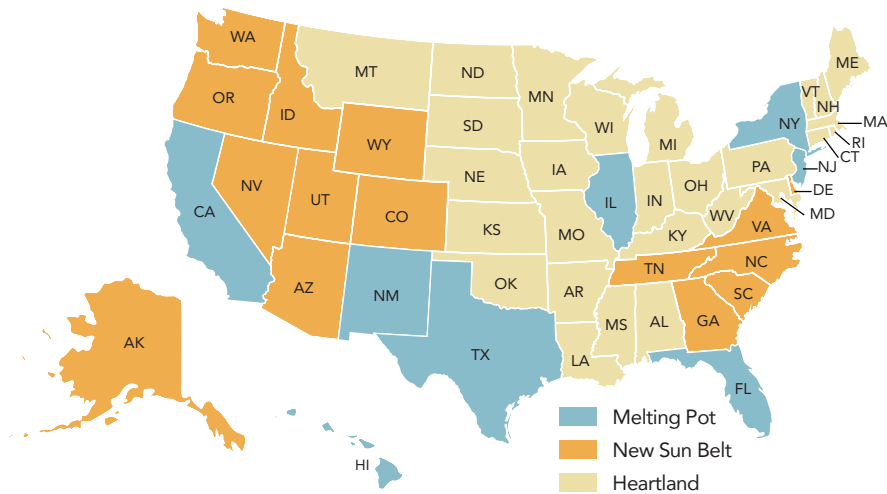
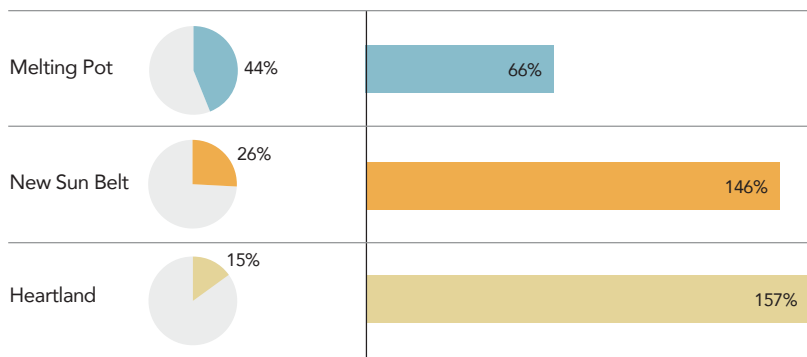
Diversity Dispersal "From the Melting Pot Out"

As the diversity surge spreads from younger to older generations, a parallel geographic spread of new minorities is occurring from traditional Melting Pot regions to the rest of the country. This trend is distinct from those in the last part of the twentieth century, when Hispanic and Asian growth was heavily concentrated in large immigrant gateways like New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, Miami, and Houston. Those largely immigrant minorities clustered inside the traditional gateways within communities of the same race and language, where they could rely on friendship and family connections for social and economic support. At the same time, most mainstream domestic migrants, primarily white Americans, were relocating to the economically ascendant interior West and Southeast—portions of the country that might be termed the New Sun Belt (shown in Figure 1.5). Being more footloose than the new minorities, these migrants followed growing employment opportunities in places such as Phoenix and Atlanta.

Those separate migration flows—to Melting Pot areas by new immigrant minorities and to New Sun Belt areas by mostly white domestic migrants—seemed to portend a regional demographic balkanization.³ The scenario painted was one in which the Melting Pot regions would remain racially distinct from other growing parts of the country in much the same way that cities once were racially distinct from their growing suburbs. Such a division would have extremely adverse implications for racial integration nationally, not to mention for politics. Adding further support to that prediction was the fact that white migrants were relocating away from the major immigrant magnets, suggesting a flight from diversity, even though the move had more to do with the availability of jobs in the New Sun Belt and high housing costs in large coastal areas.⁴

Fortunately, the predicted balkanization proved temporary. By the early 2000s, new minorities began to follow the broad-based migration flows to the New Sun Belt for many of the same reasons as white domestic migrants. Hispanic and Asian migrants dispersed not only to New Sun Belt states but also to the Heartland region of the country—defined here as slow-growing portions of the nation's interior and New

FIGURE 1.5

New Minorities in the Melting Pot, New Sun Belt, and Heartland RegionsNEW MINORITY SHARE OF
POPULATION, 2020NEW MINORITY GROWTH,
2000–2020

Source: 2000 and 2020 U.S. censuses.

England—in response to jobs in low- and high-skilled industries. Like white and Black Americans, they wished to escape higher costs of living in many immigrant gateways, and in the process, they began to form new same-race communities away from the Melting Pot areas.⁵

Yet as they disperse to new destinations, Hispanic, Asian, and other new minority residents are not always welcomed with open arms.

Although they are filling important niches in the economy by taking jobs in construction, services, and software engineering and are, especially in the Heartland, providing a much-needed increase in population, they are also standing on the front lines of racial integration. White backlash is common in places where the cultural generation gap is most evident and where the growth of young new minorities is most rapid. Still, this ongoing dispersal of new minorities can lead to a softening of the rigid racial and political divisions that I feared would develop as separated migration patterns were taking shape in the 1980s and 1990s. The integration and assimilation of new minorities across the country will occur unevenly, but the pattern is showing no sign of letting up.

RACIAL CATEGORIES IN THE UNITED STATES

It is probably fair to say that there is no definitive classification of race in the United States. Racial categories are neither completely biologically nor scientifically determined. They have a history of being constructed in ways that play into national politics and stereotypes, and they are constantly in need of revision.⁶ That said, the categories used in the recent U.S. census and by other government agencies maintain important social and legal distinctions and reflect pride in the cultural identities of the groups represented. For this reason, this book uses a racial classification that is broadly, though not completely, consistent with that used in the 2020 U.S. census, in which Americans self-reported their race.

The racial classification used here differs from census and federal guidelines that treat Hispanic origin as an item separate from race—that is, that ask census respondents separate questions about their Hispanic origin and their race.⁷ Instead, this book treats Hispanic origin as a racial category. As a result, other racial categories—including white, Black, Asian, and American Indian or Alaska Native and two or more races—pertain to non-Hispanic members of those groups. This approach permits establishing a set of mutually exclusive racial categories in which Hispanic origin is one of the categories.⁸ It is also

broadly consistent with common use of race labels in national surveys, media reporting, and everyday parlance, wherein, in standard usage, “white” or “Anglo” refers to non-Hispanic white.

In focusing on Hispanic Americans in Chapter 4 and Asian Americans in Chapter 5, I discuss the origins of these groups in more detail (distinguishing, for example, between Mexican and Cuban or Asian Indians and Chinese). In some parts of the book, due to data restrictions, alterations to these definitions are made and noted.⁹ In response to the growth of the multiracial population in the United States, an important innovation was introduced in the 2000 and subsequent censuses that permits respondents to identify with two or more races. The coding for this item was altered in 2020 in ways that increase the members of this category for some groups. This is discussed more fully in Chapter 10.¹⁰

There will, no doubt, be other alterations as well. Although the country is far from having achieved “post-racial” status as a society, it is safe to predict that racial classifications will be modified in the future as multiracial marriages and populations proliferate and the nation’s diversity surge continues. For the present, I believe that the classification used here, consistent with common everyday usage, is appropriate for the task at hand.

A ROADMAP OF THE CHAPTERS THAT FOLLOW

The precedent-setting racial changes now underway in the United States this century are affecting the demographics of racial groups themselves and the places where their members choose to live. Together, these changes are impacting many aspects of the nation’s demographic fabric, ranging from the future of neighborhood segregation to presidential politics. Yet these shifts are occurring in the context of a varied national landscape, moving at different speeds in different places. Furthermore, the shifts are emanating from starting points that are different for new minorities, as well as Black, and white Americans.

The intent of this book is to provide a nuanced view of these shifts by highlighting new trends that stood out based on my examination of U.S. decennial censuses, surveys, and related sources. They support the view that the nation is in the midst of a transformational shift in its racial demographic makeup. The story begins in Chapter 2 and continues in Chapter 3, outlining the broad parameters of change—generational and spatial—that the nation is experiencing as new minority growth is spreading across the country.

Shifting Upward and Outward

The spread of diversity from the bottom to the top of the nation's age structure, discussed in Chapter 2, focuses first on the nation's youth. One might say that the experience with children in the first years of the twenty-first century was the tip of the iceberg, foreshadowing what is in store for the rest of the population as these children are aging into adulthood. In light of the absolute decline in the nation's white child population since 2000, the current overall decline in the nation's child population is softened due to the growth of Hispanic, Asian, and multiracial children. In fact, over the 2010–2020 decade, the entire youth population has declined in twenty-three U.S. states—mostly in those that did not attract enough new minorities to counter declines in their white populations. In some states, child populations grew substantially—largely because of new minorities. Texas, for example, gained nearly 1.4 million children from 2000 to 2020, where minorities, overcoming white declines, accounted for all of that gain.

These shifts underscore the importance that new minorities will play in future U.S. growth. But they also call attention to the need to improve access to formal education and job training for minority children and, for some, to English-language training. This is especially needed among Hispanic children, who will contribute mightily to workforce gains as more white baby boomers and Gen Xers retire and who continue to lag behind other groups in access to higher education.

Yet improving educational opportunities may be politically difficult given the cultural generation gap between the increasingly diverse

child population and a largely older white population. Far into the future, Hispanic working-age adults will have a much higher “youth dependency burden” than working-age white adults, for whom senior dependency will continue to rise. Therefore government spending on education and other youth-related programs will be more popular among Hispanic and other minority voters than among white voters who will be more concerned with government programs for seniors. Elaborating on this tension, Chapter 2 outlines the ways in which differences between these generations in attributes and attitudes may affect their views of change and their choices of political candidates. At least for now, the generation gaps are widest in the Southwest.

Chapter 3 discusses the nation’s evolving racial geography, highlighting key aspects of new minority dispersal in the context of other racial settlements across the country. This dispersal is largely directed from the Melting Pot states to rapidly growing New Sun Belt states, a phenomenon that did not come into its own in large part until the early twenty-first century. Along with the dispersal, there will continue to be a softening of the divide that formerly existed between the more diverse and less diverse regions of the country.

The New Sun Belt region is becoming transformed by Hispanic, Asian, and multiracial populations that are turning southern and interior western communities into evolving Melting Pots. Many of these areas are gaining new minorities and Black Americans more rapidly than white Americans. In metropolitan Las Vegas, for example, the white portion of the population decreased from 60 percent in 2000 to 39 percent in 2020. The rapid growth of Hispanic and Asian populations is changing state and metropolitan consumer markets and politics and, in some cases, bringing confrontation with longtime residents. At the same time, new minorities are also dispersing to slowly growing areas in the Heartland—areas that are losing white and Black populations at the same time. Overall, the vast majority of the nation’s 3,100 counties and its more than 380 metropolitan areas became less white between 2000 and 2020, as minority white areas continued to spread across the New Sun Belt and beyond.

Hispanic, Asian, Black, and White Americans

The nation's four largest racial groups—Hispanic, Asian, Black, and white Americans—are discussed in Chapters 4 through 7, respectively. The demographic profiles currently evident for each group arise from their distinct histories and settlement patterns. Still those historical patterns have been changing—more dramatically for Hispanic and Asian residents, but also for Black and white residents—in ways that are setting the stage for their future integration, especially in the New Sun Belt.

Chapter 4 examines the continuing dispersal of the nation's Hispanic population. Although classed here as a new minority, the Hispanic population (before they were given that name) has a long history in the United States, given its extensive border and involvement with Mexico. The newness of this group stems from the rapid growth in recent decades of not just the Mexican American population but all residents of Hispanic origin, including immigrants and their descendants from many other Latin American countries. Each of these groups begins from somewhat different “starting point” settlements in the United States, and their latest dispersal patterns have shifted each group to new destinations of all sizes—located largely in New Sun Belt states but also in most other parts of the country. This broad spread was noticeable from 2010 to 2020, in the 140 areas considered to be new Hispanic destinations.

Overall, Hispanic Americans are younger, are more likely to live in family households and have less formal education than the total population. That raises the question of how well recently arrived residents in new Hispanic destinations will fit in with a largely white or white-Black resident population. Yet the continued broad outward spread of a mix of several Hispanic groups will infuse the younger populations in these and other areas with a new energy and vitality that will repay investments in their futures.

The U.S. Asian population is the topic of Chapter 5. The population of Asian Americans—the second-largest new minority group—will continue to grow, especially if future immigration policy places greater emphasis on attracting highly skilled individuals. Although some Asian groups, such as the Chinese, Japanese, and Filipinos, have a long-

standing presence in the United States, the very rapid growth of Asian Americans—spurred by the provisions of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act—is more recent and involves people from a broad array of Asian-origin countries. These Asian immigrants and their children tend to have a better education and more favorable economic attributes than other minorities or white Americans due, in part, to selective immigration from their countries of origin.

Each Asian American group began from a distinct settlement area, generally on the East or West Coast and in large metropolitan areas, and no one group dominates the Asian American population. Now, almost all Asian American groups are beginning to spread to new Asian destinations with Asian Indians, the most highly educated group, leading the way. “Fitting in” for Asian Americans will not be immediate, given their relatively recent immigrant status and their continued flow into the country. They will, nonetheless, be a needed presence in the U.S. labor force and communities, facilitating links to an increasingly globalized economy.

The changing demography of America's Black population is discussed in Chapter 6. Hardly a new minority, America's Black population constituted its largest racial minority until 2000, and for most of the nation's history, it was the Black population that people most associated with “minority” status. Yet, after centuries of blatant discrimination, the 1960s civil rights legislation planted the seeds for a growing Black middle class, which has now developed, even as another segment of the Black population continues to be weighed down by poverty. The chapter focuses on an important signal of the Black population's changing status—a reversal of its decades-long Great Migration out of the South to a nearly wholesale evacuation of former destinations in the North and West. The southward shift of the Black population is broad-based but it is most prominent among the young, the well-educated, and retirees. The greatest growth surges are occurring in economically prosperous areas of the South, especially in Atlanta, and all signs point to a continuation of the trend and some spreading out into the West. Therefore, although there has been a surge of new minorities to the South, Black Americans are reinforcing the South's traditional image as a heavily Black-white region—but a more prosperous region than it was in the distant past.

Often neglected in discussions of the nation's change are the emerging changes in its white population. This is the topic of Chapter 7. White Americans, who largely occupy the nation's mainstream and who fare better on economic measures than most minorities, are now declining in absolute size according to the 2020 U.S. census. That means that regional shifts in the white population across the country amount to what is essentially a zero-sum game. For some areas to gain white migrants, others have to lose them—with little natural increase or white foreign immigration to make up the difference.

Among the 3,100 U.S. counties, more than half showed declines in white population from 2000 to 2020. Many of these are small, aging, mostly white counties in the Heartland. There are also declines in the white population in industrial Heartland metropolitan areas such as Detroit, Pittsburgh, and Cleveland. Yet some of the largest declines in the white population are in Melting Pot metropolitan centers such as New York and Los Angeles, whose gains are coming entirely from minorities.

White migrants are going mostly to the same New Sun Belt states that are also attracting Hispanic, Asian, and (in the South) Black populations. Better employment opportunities and lower costs of living are drawing white migrants to the interior west and Southeast. The difference for white migration is in the destinations within those states—mostly smaller and exurban areas rather than large cities and suburbs and even those white gains have become smaller than in the past. I have called this the “new white flight.” It is not racially motivated, but it continues to create a soft separation between white and minority residents, which will eventually be diffused as minority groups continue to disperse.

Race and the Remaking of America

The diversity explosion that is transforming the United States this century is changing long-held stereotypes about who can live where, who can marry whom, and who can be elected to public office. Chapters 8 through 11 show how several previous “truths” were already being remade in the early 2000s and in recent presidential elections.

The shorthand description of urban America as “chocolate cities and vanilla suburbs” still remains in the consciousness of many people,

at least those of a certain age. Chapter 8 emphatically puts that stereotype to rest by showing that white-only flight to the suburbs is a thing of the past. In fact, more than a third of the nation's large metropolitan suburbs showed a loss of white residents in this century's first two decades. Hispanic Americans are now the biggest drivers of growth of the nation's metropolitan population in both cities and suburbs. Today, it is racial minorities, in their quest for the suburban dream, who are generating new growth and vitality in the suburbs, just as immigrant groups did in the cities in an earlier era. The newest and most notable trend is the accelerated "Black flight" to the suburbs. In 2010, for the first time, more Black metropolitan residents lived in the suburbs than in the cities of the biggest U.S. metropolitan regions—joining Hispanic, Asian, and white Americans in having that distinction. And in the 2010–2020 decade, Black city population declined in more than half of the nation's major metropolitan areas. Going forward, suburbs will continue to become a microcosm of a more diverse America, as new generations of suburbanites grow up in communities that bear scant resemblance to suburbia's twentieth-century white middle-class image.

If there is one word that conjures up the extreme discrimination and isolation that Black Americans in particular have endured for decades, it is the word *segregation*. Yet as Chapter 9 reveals, the trends are pointing decidedly away from the highly ghettoized existence that separated Black from white Americans for much of the twentieth century. A number of forces—the emergence of a Black middle class, Black migration to the suburbs and to growing New Sun Belt areas, and integration with new minorities who serve as buffers between racially segregated areas—are leading to pervasive reductions in Black-white segregation. Black segregation is still high in many places, particularly in slowly growing northern cities, but the trend toward greater Black-white integration seems poised to continue.

The levels of Hispanic and Asian segregation remain decidedly lower than that of Black segregation. Both groups are more likely than Black residents to live among white residents and other minorities, and both are more likely to reside closer to white residents in new destination areas as they disperse across the country. In short, the

racial segregation paradigm of this century appears to suggest a greater residential integration of the races.

Just as long-held stereotypes about where racial groups can live are disappearing, so are those about whom they can marry. Again the twenty-first century is ushering in notable changes. Chapter 10 examines this century's rise in multiracial marriages and their likely impact on populations classed as multiracial. Marriages between racial groups were nearly nonexistent as recently as 1970, and multiracial populations were not recorded in federal statistics until 2000. The rise of new minorities has changed that fact dramatically. In 2020, more than one in five new marriages were multiracial, including almost half involving Hispanic or Asian individuals. Although most prevalent in Melting Pot states, they are growing rapidly in the New Sun Belt and even in some Heartland states.

Perhaps more noteworthy is the rise in Black-white interracial marriages—marriages that would have been illegal in sixteen states as late as 1967. Today, Black-white marriages are not only accepted but common—comprising more than one in seven marriages involving Black spouses. Just as important is the rising number, increasingly evident in the South, of persons who identify as both Black and white, and of multiracial individuals more generally. Together, these trends of rising multiracial marriages and personal identity foreshadow a continued blurring of racial divisions at the household and personal levels that would have been unimaginable in the decades prior to the twenty-first century.

The political impacts of the nation's new diversity surge were evident in the five presidential elections between 2008 and 2024. They showed up most vividly with the 2008 election of the first Black president of the United States and his 2012 reelection. As discussed in Chapter 11, the political heft of minorities—both new and old—was responsible for the election and reelection of Democrat Barack Obama. The minority vote was especially crucial for Democrats in 2012, when the Republican candidate, Mitt Romney, lost despite garnering a historically high voting margin among white voters. Obama also benefited from the dispersion of Hispanic and Asian Americans to all parts of the Sun Belt, as well as a renewed Black migration to the

South—together helping to turn former Republican-voting states to the Democrats and ensuring his Electoral College wins.

In these elections, a cultural generation gap emerged in voting interests between the increasingly diverse younger generation, which tends to vote Democratic, and the mostly white senior generation, which tends to vote Republican. This was on display in the 2016 election when older Republican baby boomer Donald Trump defeated Democrat Hillary Clinton in the Electoral College, if not in the popular vote. Just as Obama was successful in amplifying the enthusiasm of younger more diverse voters in his victories, Trump drew strength from the support of older, white, working-class voters who felt disconnected from a changing America. It was these voters, in particular, that helped him win several northern industrial states that have previously voted Democratic—leading to a *geographic* cultural generation gap between these states, with older populations, and several Sun Belt battleground states that voted for Clinton.

The cultural generation gap continued in the next two elections—the 2020 election when Democrat Joe Biden beat Donald Trump as younger and minority voters once again contributed to the Democratic win, and older voters again favored Trump at a time when COVID-19 and Black Lives Matter were important issues; and in the 2024 election when Trump beat Democratic opponent Kamala Harris with mostly white, older voters. While Trump gained more minority and younger voters than he did in previous elections, Democrat Harris still got more votes than Trump among young people and minorities.

The cultural generation gap, which was evident in each of the last five presidential elections, is not likely to disappear. Still, as the largest segments of the Republican base—older white voters—begin to decline in size and as younger and more middle-aged voters become more racially diverse, Republican candidates will need to reach out even further to address their issues. Of course, the 2024 election showed that Democrats cannot completely rely on the base that helped them win three of the last five presidential elections. In essence, it is in both parties' interests to make efforts to close the current cross-party cultural generation gap in their policies and messaging in order to stay relevant in light of the nation's changing racial demographics.

Chapter 12, the final chapter of the book, reflects on both the short- and long-term impacts of the new racial demographic tides, pointing to areas where the nation might be proactive in shaping their effects to its advantage, despite recent political divisions. The continued gains and acceptance of what I have termed “new minorities” can allow them along with other racial groups to become an integral part of twenty-first-century mainstream America. This is not the first time that the United States has had to incorporate new peoples into society. Almost always, doing so has made the country richer, more vibrant, and more economically successful. In many ways, the recent growth of new minorities is a gift to a nation that would otherwise be facing the specter of an aging, slowly growing, and eventually declining population.