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Stirring Up the Melting Pot

By CONOR DOUGHERTY and MIRIAM JORDAN

The U.S. is rapidly becoming more diverse as the nation's minorities—driven largely by a surge in the Hispanic and Asian populations—move beyond traditional "gateway" cities into smaller cities and towns.

A new study to be released Friday shows that of the roughly 15,000 places in the country—defined as cities, towns, suburbs or rural areas that govern their own fiscal affairs—some 82.6% were majority white in 2010, down from 93.4% in 1980. Places where whites made up at least 90% of the population fell even more sharply, to 36% in 2010 from 65.8% in 1980.

The paper is part of the US 2010 Project at Brown University, a series of demographic research by academics around the country. It is one of a number of new studies showing that while big cities traditionally have been the nation's melting pots, today it is smaller cities and suburbs that are on the front lines of changing demographics and culture. Earlier this year researchers at the University of Minnesota Law School showed that in 2010, 44% of suburban residents live in a diverse community, defined as places that are 20% to 60% nonwhite. That was up from 38% in 2000.



Associated Press

Middle-school students between classes in Seattle, a city which a new report says has seen its population become much more diverse since 1980.

"It sort of alerts everyone to the fact that diversity is becoming a part of daily life throughout the country, not just something that is confined to immigrant gateways or large cities," said Barrett Lee, the US 2010 study's lead author and a sociology professor at Pennsylvania State University.

In fact, some metro areas—such as El Centro, Calif., and El Paso, Texas— are becoming less diverse because of rapid growth of the minority populations.

The US 2010 report scores the diversity of the nation's metro areas by how evenly a place's population is spread across five groups: Non-Hispanic whites, Hispanics of any race, African-Americans, Asians and an "other" category largely made up of Native Americans, Alaska Natives and people of two or more races.

A perfectly diverse place would have a population with exactly 20% of each category, and would score 100 on Mr. Lee's diversity scale. In 2010, the most diverse metropolitan area in the country, Vallejo, Calif. had a score of 89.3, with a population that was 41% white, 24% Hispanic, 15% Asian, 14% black, and 6% other.

Big economic centers remain very diverse. The San Francisco, Washington, New York, Houston and Los Angeles metropolitan areas were all among the nation's top 10 most diverse places. But while some sprawling metropolitan areas have diverse populations, in many cases their neighborhoods remain segregated.

Real Time Economics

Which U.S. Cities Are Most, Least Racially Diverse?

"In the Southwest and West, diversity seems to be translating into lower levels of segregation, but some of the most diverse areas on the East Coast and Midwest remain very highly segregated at the neighborhood level," said John Logan, a professor at Brown and director of the US 2010 project.

Some metropolitan areas that saw the biggest drops in their shares of white population due to rapid Hispanic growth between 2000 and 2010 were Napa, Calif.; Orlando, Fla. and Las Vegas.

The U.S. has long been growing more diverse and the Census Bureau projects whites will make up less than half of the nation's population in 2042. Last year, non-Hispanic whites accounted for less than half of newborn children for the first time in U.S. history.

For many, the term "diversity" conjures up the black/white race relations that characterized the civil rights era. But today's demographic changes are being driven by the booming Hispanic and Asian populations. Hispanics' ranks jumped 42% between 2000 and 2010 to 50.5 million, or 1 in 6 Americans, and they now constitute the biggest minority group in the country. Blacks grew a modest 11% to 37.7 million. Hispanics are growing fast not just because women have more children on average, but also because the population is younger, with more women in their prime childbearing years.

Las Vegas attracted Hispanics to work in the service sector as casinos expanded during the 1990s. Construction workers followed, to build housing for the city, which is now nearly one-third Hispanic. In addition to immigrants and Americans of Mexican and Central American origin, Las Vegas is home to the country's third-largest Cuban population and boasts a large Puerto Rican contingent.

Since the 90s, thousands of Hispanic immigrants have flocked eastward, changing the demographic face of cities and towns in the South and Midwest. In Iowa, the Hispanic student population in pre-kindergarten through 12th grades in public schools rose to 9% of statewide enrollment in 2011-12 from 4% in 2000-01, according to the state's department of education.

They have left behind traditional settlement areas such as California and Texas to put down roots in places such as Sioux City, a prosperous locale of 144,000 in northwestern Iowa. In this corn belt city, Hispanics have found jobs in meat-processing plants, farms and dairies.

Sioux City is home to many Hispanic-owned businesses, including bakeries, restaurants and clothing shops. The children of immigrants who came for blue-collar jobs are entering the ranks of professionals working at banks, colleges and other white-collar jobs, says Norma de

Changing Places

New research shows a surge in the 'diversity index' of many cities and towns. The index weighs how evenly a place's population is spread across five groups, below. A perfectly diverse place would have a population with 20% of each group, and score 100 on the index.

White Black Hispanic Asian Other

Top five metropolitan areas with the greatest change in diversity index from 1980 to 2010

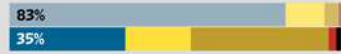
2010 diversity index

Fayetteville, Ark.



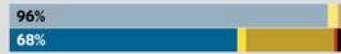
Among 366 metro areas, lowest (12.87) highest (89.33)
49.58

Miami



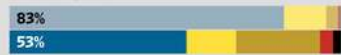
74.91

Dalton, Ga.



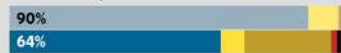
50.38

Orlando, Fla.



73.87

Gainesville, Ga.



59.51

Note: Data for white, black, Asian and other are non-Hispanic
See a full ranking of U.S. metro areas at WSJ.com/Economy
Source: US 2010 Project, Brown University

The Wall Street Journal

La O, a member of the Siouxland Unidad Latina, a local Hispanic organization. Norma Azpeitia, a 34-year-old college recruiter, said her father came to Sioux City from California in the late '90s. After securing stable employment at a pork plant, he sent for his family; Within two years, they bought a home. All five Azpeitia children graduated from a local high school and attended college. "We wanted to pursue a higher education and move beyond meat-processing work," Ms. Azpeitia said.

The number of Asians in the U.S. quadrupled between 1980 and 2010 to about 18 million, or 6% of the total population. They have increased diversity in cities such as Bellevue, Wash., a high-tech hub near Seattle. Much of the Asian influx has occurred since the '90s, when technology companies such as Microsoft Corp., based in nearby Redmond, sought workers. Asians now account for about 30% of Bellevue's 128,000 people.

The newcomers have become part of the fabric of the city. Indians have helped raise millions of dollars for a performing-arts center and attracted Indian dignitaries to forge trade ties. A statue of Mahatma Gandhi stands outside the Bellevue library.

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