

## **Despite census totals, O.C. neighborhoods not always diverse**

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Somebody forgot to tell the "Real Housewives" producers: The real Orange County looks nothing like its all-white reality show image.

New census numbers released last week show that no racial or ethnic group dominates the county. Whites, Hispanics, Asians and blacks all are minorities here.

But a deeper look at the numbers reveals a twist: Most of us live with people who look very much like ourselves. But slowly, the neighborhoods are beginning to diversify.)

While Orange County as a whole is diverse – 44 percent white, 34 percent Hispanic, 18 percent Asian – most of its neighborhoods are not. Whites tend to live in white-majority neighborhoods, Hispanics in Hispanic-majority neighborhoods.

Asian residents are the exception: Fewer than 15 percent of the county's Asians live in Asian-majority census tracts.

The pattern of whites living with whites and Hispanics living with Hispanics has not changed significantly in the past decade, despite the exit of more than 100,000 whites and the arrival of nearly 300,000 Hispanics and Asians.

To be sure, the diverse Orange County portrayed in the census summary does exist in some neighborhoods.

Take the intersection of Beach Boulevard and Lincoln Avenue in Anaheim near the Buena Park city limits. A half-century ago this was the suburban frontier. Today it is the most diverse place in Orange County.

Surrounding this point are several tracts, each close to a third white, a third Hispanic, a third Asian.

Shawna Walker, 40, lives on a quiet cul-de-sac not far away. Her neighborhood was almost entirely white when she moved in 13 years ago. Now?

She ticks down the houses on her street: "Asian, white, Indian, Mexican, Nigerian, white ...."

"So yeah, I guess we are" diverse, she says. "But you don't think about it. They're just your neighbors."

Antonio Gonzalez, 55, has learned from the Indian family next door that cows are considered sacred in their culture. He has learned from the Filipino family down the block that they throw great parties with whole roasted pork.

He's 55 years old and came from Mexico in 1974. He works construction these days. He spent a recent weekend helping the white family across the street paint a room.

"We have the opportunity to share our beliefs and thoughts," Gonzalez said. "For me, it's great. ... It's really neat. It's really nice."

The church on Dale Avenue, in the center of Orange County's most-diverse tract, has three signs out front: "Christian Reformed Church." "Iglesia Cristiana Reformada." "Korean Christian Reformed Church."

Children from the three congregations worship together, and church potlucks bring together an international menu of good food. The church has begun to offer English classes as its Latin American congregation grew quickly in recent years, and the sounds of Spanish have joined English in the hymn book.

The diversity of the church mirrors the diversity that pastor Joel Van Soelen sees in the neighborhood around it.

"It's beautiful," he said. "It's good to see the nations represented. Nations becoming neighbors."

But a few miles down Interstate 5, in central Santa Ana, you'll find something very different – the county's most monolithic neighborhoods, a dozen tracts where almost everyone is Hispanic.

Those tracts encompass some of Santa Ana's most crowded apartment blocks as well as working-class suburban streets lined with modest homes and grassy front yards.

Many residents are newly arrived from Mexico and find some familiar comfort there. Others have lived in the neighborhood for years and consider it their permanent home.

David Benavides lives near one of the most-segregated tracts in Orange County, and represents it on Santa Ana's city council. He said it's an "interesting statistic" to pinpoint the least-diverse tract, but added, "I don't know, frankly, that there's a whole lot more to draw from it than that."

"It might feel comfortable to the families that live there; the majority of neighbors might be similar in background," he said. "But at the same time, there's much to be learned from people of other cultures, other backgrounds."

John Logan, a demographer at Brown University, sees two trends at work in the nation and in Orange County.

Upwardly mobile Asians and Hispanics are buying or renting in formerly all-white neighborhoods. A decade or so later, if the pattern holds, he predicted, black residents will follow.

At the same time, however, minority neighborhoods such as the Santa Ana barrio remain stubbornly minority.

"Those (minority-dominated) census tracts are extremely resistant to change," Logan said. "Whites rarely move into those places.

"Minority neighborhoods tend not to break up," Logan added. "And until they do, you won't desegregate the metropolis."

The Register analyzed neighborhoods using the Diversity Index, a statistical tool that measures the likelihood that two people picked at random will belong to different racial or ethnic groups.

The Diversity Index ranges from a high of 72 in a few Anaheim and Buena Park neighborhoods to a low of 5 in the Santa Ana barrio. The median is 54, meaning that in a typical Orange County neighborhood there is a better than even chance that two random residents will belong to different ethnic groups.

In 2000, the median Diversity Index was 48 – an indication that neighborhoods have become more diverse over the past decade.

Behind that small change are signs of a deeper transformation. In 2000, two of every three white residents lived in tracts that were at least 60 percent white. Today, 54 percent do. In 2000, three of every four white residents lived in white-majority tracts. Today 70 percent do.

The county's Hispanics have been slower to integrate. The percentage of Hispanics living in tracts that were at least 60 percent Hispanic barely budged from 2000 to 2010, dipping from 43.4 percent to 42.8 percent. The proportion living in Hispanic majority tracts dropped from 55.2 percent to 53.5 percent.

The county's Asian population has been integrated for decades.

During the past 10 years, however, they've begun to form significant clusters outside Little Saigon. Their numbers nearly doubled in Irvine and also grew significantly in Fullerton, Brea and Buena Park.

Orange County Asians are reflecting a national pattern, Brown's Logan said.

"Asians are less segregated from whites than Hispanics are," Logan said.