

America's Racial and Ethnic Minorities

by Kelvin M. Pollard and William P. O'Hare

Racial and ethnic minorities make up one-fourth of Americans.

Immigration and fertility are creating growth and diversity among U.S. minorities.

Many minorities still lag behind non-Hispanic whites on measures of success.

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by Kelvin M. Pollard and William P. O'Hare

The 20th century has witnessed the transformation of the United States from a predominantly white population rooted in Western culture to a society with a rich array of racial and ethnic minorities. As the century began, the U.S. population was 87 percent white. The nonwhite minority was composed primarily of black Americans living in the rural South. At the century's end, non-Hispanic whites account for less than 75 percent of the U.S. population. The minority population is comprised of nearly as many Hispanics as blacks, surging numbers of Asians, and a small but growing American Indian population. By the middle of the 21st century, non-Hispanic whites will make up a slim and fading majority of Americans. Hispanics will be nearly one-fourth of the U.S. population. Blacks, Asians, and American Indians together will make up close to one-fourth of the population. "Minority" is likely to have a very different meaning in the 21st century.

America's ethnic landscape also includes a rapidly growing Arab population, a sizeable Jewish population, and other ethnic groups. But in the 1990s, the term "minority" usually refers to four major racial and ethnic groups: African Americans, American Indians and Alaska Natives, Asians and Pacific Islanders, and Hispanics.

This transformation of America's racial and ethnic profile is most visible in certain states and communities.

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The 21st century will bring more racial and ethnic diversity to the U.S. population. No single racial or ethnic group will account for a majority of Americans after 2050.

The four minority groups make up at least one-half of the residents in Honolulu, Los Angeles, Miami, San Antonio, and several other metropolitan areas. Within 25 years, California, Hawaii, New Mexico, and Texas will be "minority majority" states in which minorities will be more than one-half the population. But many parts of the country have little racial or ethnic diversity. Minorities make up less than 5 percent of the populations of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and West Virginia, for example.

The nation's changing demographic profile has important economic and social implications. Immigration

Explanation of terms

Minorities include African Americans, Hispanics, Asians and Pacific Islanders, and American Indians, Aleuts, and Eskimos. The terms black and African American are used interchangeably in this report, as are the terms Hispanic and Latino. Except where indicated, the term Asian refers to Asians and Pacific Islanders, and American Indian refers to American Indians, Aleuts, and Eskimos. Alaska Native refers to Aleuts and Eskimos. The term white refers to non-Hispanic whites except where otherwise specified. Likewise, the terms African American, Asian, and American Indian exclude Hispanics unless stated otherwise.

is transforming the U.S. Asian and Hispanic populations. Hispanics from Guatemala, El Salvador, Ecuador, and other Central and South American countries have created communities alongside well-established Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban communities. The U.S. Asian population was predominately Japanese, Filipino, and Chinese just two decades ago. At the century's end, Asian Americans with roots in India, Vietnam, or Korea outnumber Japanese Americans.

Minorities have also become more diverse socioeconomically. The number of minorities in the highest income brackets has more than doubled since 1980, for example, yet minorities still account for a disproportionate share of the poor. More minority politicians are being elected to public office, but minorities are more likely than non-Hispanic whites to serve time in prison. More minorities are earning graduate and professional degrees, yet a disproportionately large percentage never finish high school.

The growth of the African American, Hispanic, Asian, and American Indian populations is profoundly changing the racial and ethnic makeup of the country's schools, workplaces, and neighborhoods, and it is creating a new multiracial and multicultural heritage in the United States. Many businesses target their products to specific minorities because they recognize that minorities are an expanding market. Aspects of black, Hispanic, Asian, and American Indian culture—including art, food, music, and styles of dress—are being adopted throughout American society.

Americans are divided in their beliefs about the long-term effects of the growing diversity. Some see the rapid growth of minorities as a key to the revitalization of America and a logical continuation of the “melting-pot” tradition. Others see the rapid increase in racial and ethnic minorities as an unwelcome departure from America's European heritage. Discussions on this topic sometimes become heated because the increase in the minority populations is closely linked to important policy issues relating to immigration, affirmative action, welfare, and education reform.

Few Americans have a good grasp of how large the different minority groups are. A 1997 survey by the Gallup organization found that just 8 percent of Americans knew that African Americans make up between 10 percent and 15 percent of the U.S. population; more than half (54 percent) thought that blacks make up at least 30 percent of the total population. In a 1990 Gallup poll, respondents estimated that Hispanics made up about 20 percent of the U.S. population, yet Hispanics accounted for just 9 percent of population in 1990.¹

Opinion polls also show that many white Americans believe that racial discrimination no longer impedes the advancement of minorities. Yet numerous studies document continued discrimination against racial and ethnic minorities in employment, housing, criminal arrests and prosecutions, and many other sectors of society.²

Although the transition to a multi-ethnic America is moving at a rapid pace, it is occurring remarkably smoothly. But occasionally tensions build and erupt into serious confrontations. In the 1990s, Americans have witnessed racial riots in Los Angeles, the burning of African American churches in the South, and the murders of a Filipino postal worker in California and of a black man in Texas.

Hate crimes against minorities, especially African Americans, reportedly increased in the 1990s.³ Yet such con-

frontations are rare and involve far fewer people than the violence among racial and ethnic groups in many other countries. Hate crimes and blatant racism directed against immigrants have been widely reported in Western Europe in recent decades as these countries received an influx of economic migrants and political refugees.⁴ During the last decade of the century, ethnic and religious differences have led to massacres of ethnic Tutsis by Hutus in Rwanda; full-scale war involving Serb, Bosnian, Albanian, and other ethnic groups in the Balkans; and violence against ethnic Chinese in Indonesia.

To the rest of the world, the United States is a grand and daring experiment. No other country has so successfully blended so many people of different races and cultures. At a time when racial and ethnic rivalries are promoting violence around the globe, how Americans handle their transition to a multiracial society has implications that extend far beyond U.S. borders.

If the United States can avoid a violent clash of cultures, the country can benefit from its growing diversity. A multicultural, multiethnic America has a competitive advantage in the global economy. The United States is geographically positioned to serve the growing Latin American market to its south, its traditional European market to its east, and the burgeoning Asian market to its west. America's increasingly multicultural population can enhance its ability to prosper in the new global marketplace. With ties to all the regions of the world, America's racial and ethnic minorities can help American businesses understand the needs and preferences of people in other countries.

This *Population Bulletin* offers readers a chance to see how America's racial and ethnic groups compare with one another across a host of demographic dimensions. As Americans reassess their view of the nation and its future, they will no doubt express contradictory views and arrive at different positions on public

policy issues. Resolving those differences will be easier if Americans understand the current demographic reality of U.S. minority populations.

A History of Disadvantage

Many scholars maintain that the frictions that plague contemporary race relations are probably no worse than those that divided European immigrant groups 100 years ago.⁵ Clashes between Germans, Irish, Italians, Poles, and other groups during the 19th and early 20th centuries often were intense and violent. Members of specific immigrant groups suffered discrimination in employment, housing, and other areas. But most European immigrants and their descendants eventually achieved full participation in U.S. society.

This was not the case for the groups most Americans now think of as "minorities." African Americans, Native Americans, Hispanics, and Asians all have experienced institutionalized or state-sanctioned discrimination as well as social prejudice and oppression. Many were involuntary Americans—they were brought as slaves or they became Americans when their home territory was transferred to the United States through war settlements, purchase, or political agreements.

The legal oppression of African Americans has been the most blatant and well documented. The ancestors of most African Americans were brought to the United States as slaves. After slavery was abolished in 1865, blacks could own land and vote, and some held public office. But their social position deteriorated when post-Civil War Reconstruction ended and the Southern states began to pass "Jim Crow" laws, which required the segregation of blacks from whites in schools, public transportation, restaurants, and other public places. Whites justified these laws with the theory that intimate social contact between

blacks and whites would harm both races. In addition, covenants and business practices maintained racial segregation by, for example, renting or selling property to blacks only in certain neighborhoods, or refusing to serve blacks who entered white restaurants. Before 1965, discriminatory voter-registration laws prevented all but 7 percent of African Americans in Mississippi from registering to vote. As recently as the 1960s, some school districts maintained separate schools for black and white students.⁶

American Indians also have a long history of social and legal oppression by European settlers and the U.S. government. As many as 7 million indigenous people lived in North America when the Europeans arrived. Yet disease, warfare, and in some cases, genocide, reduced the Indian population to less than 250,000 by 1890. In the first half of the 19th century, the U.S. government imposed treaties that forced Indians in the South and the Ohio River Valley from their homelands. These forced migrations accelerated after President Andrew Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act of 1830. Many tribes were compelled to live on marginal land that was reserved for them by the U.S. government and where they had little chance of prospering.⁷

American Indians have occupied a unique legal status as members of self-governing, independent tribes. Despite this special status, many members of these independent nations live in poverty and encounter overt discrimination. American Indians became U.S. citizens only after passage of the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924, which later was amended to include Alaska Natives.⁸

Most Hispanic groups have met with discrimination by governments controlled by non-Hispanic whites. U.S. Hispanics often are erroneously assumed to be illegal residents and a massive drain on public services.

Mexican Americans in southwestern states lost property and political rights as Anglo Americans began to move into the region in the 1800s. As

late as the 1940s, local ordinances in some Texas cities blocked Mexican Americans from owning land or voting. Mexican Americans had to attend segregated public schools in many jurisdictions before 1950.⁹

There were relatively few Puerto Ricans on the U.S. mainland until World War II, when they began moving to New York and other large cities of the Northeast. They encountered widespread discrimination in education and employment and sometimes incurred the resentment of blacks and other minorities who saw them as competitors for jobs.

The Cuban American community was established by mostly white, well-educated professionals who fled the Communist government of Fidel Castro in the 1960s. But later Cuban immigrants were generally poorer and less educated, and thus met considerable resentment and discrimination from Americans.¹⁰

Most U.S. Asians come from recent immigrant families, but many can trace their family's American history back more than 150 years. Much of this period was marked by legal and social discrimination against Asians. Legislation enacted in 1790 excluded Asians and other nonwhites from gaining U.S. citizenship by limiting citizenship to "free white" residents. This racial requirement for citizenship formed the basis for excluding nonwhites from many activities and rights. Because most Asians were foreign-born and were not citizens, some states could legally keep Asians from owning land or businesses, attending school with white students, or living in white neighborhoods.¹¹ Asian immigrants were not eligible for U.S. citizenship until 1952.

The 1879 California Constitution barred the hiring of Chinese workers and the federal Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 halted the entry of most Chinese immigrants until 1943. The 1907 Gentleman's Agreement and a 1917 law restricted immigration from Japan and a "barred zone" known as the Asia-Pacific Triangle. During World War II, Americans of Japanese

ancestry were interned in camps by an executive order signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Today's minority groups all have suffered—and to some extent continue to suffer—economic, political, and social disadvantages because of their racial or ethnic identity. Some analysts believe that the racial and ethnic minorities of contemporary America will follow the path of European immigrant groups; they will eventually assimilate into the wider society and lose their minority status.¹² Other analysts point out that African Americans and American Indians have not been assimilated after 200 years in the United States. These groups still face discrimination and remain at the lowest rungs of society. Some analysts also caution that social and economic conditions are so different now that today's minorities have more limited opportunities for social mobility than did the European American groups 100 years ago.¹³

Minority Status

How minorities are defined in statistics collected and published by government agencies is driven by political considerations, laws, and regulations. Minority scholar Juanita Tamayo Lott explains that “minority group status did not derive from a specific race or ethnicity per se, but on the treatment of race and ethnicity to confer a privileged, disadvantaged, or equitable status and to gauge representation and underrepresentation.”¹⁴

In 1977, the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) directed federal agencies to collect data on whites and four racial and ethnic minorities—African Americans, Hispanics, Asians and Pacific Islanders, and American Indians (including Alaska Natives). The OMB directive standardized statistics on race and ethnicity, which provided data needed to monitor the effectiveness of civil rights legislation in protecting minority groups from racial or ethnic discrimination.¹⁵ In 1997, a new OMB directive recommended that people

be allowed to identify with more than one race, but with only one ethnic group (that is, people may identify as Hispanic or non-Hispanic, but not both). OMB also recommended that federal agencies report statistics for Asians separately from those for Pacific Islanders by Jan. 1, 2003.

The minority group categories are not mutually exclusive because Hispanic origin is considered an ethnic identity rather than a race (see Box 1, page 8). These overlapping race and ethnicity definitions affect national figures only slightly, but they can skew statistics from areas with large Hispanic populations. In New Mexico, for example, where Hispanics are two-fifths of the population, the 1990 census showed that 16 percent of whites in the state (including white Hispanics) were poor. The percentage of whites in poverty dropped to 11 percent when Hispanics were excluded because Hispanics have a much higher poverty rate. [In this *Bulletin*, data are given separately for non-Hispanics in each racial category (white, African American, Asian/Pacific Islander, and American Indian) where available.]

The Hispanic and Asian and Pacific Islander categories pose additional difficulties for analysts because the people in these groups are so heterogeneous. Anyone with ancestral ties to Spain and the Spanish-speaking countries of Latin America can identify as Hispanic. Hispanic Americans include, for example, persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, and Salvadoran descent—people who have different cultural backgrounds and different social and economic characteristics. Likewise, many Asian Americans have little in common except for ties to the same world region. They include people from locations as disparate as India, Manchuria, and Samoa. They follow different religions, speak different languages, and even use different alphabets. Some Asian ethnic groups were adversaries in their homelands.

Another technical problem in comparing statistics on minorities is relat-

Today's minorities all have suffered disadvantages because of their race or ethnicity.

ed to the relatively small number of Asians and Pacific Islanders and American Indians and Alaska Natives. Many socioeconomic and demograph-

ic measures are not available for such small population groups. Survey-based measures for these groups often are considered too unreliable to report in

Box 1

What Are Race and Ethnicity?

Race and ethnicity are defined by society, not by science. A racial group is often defined according to such physical characteristics as hair type, facial features, and skin color. Ethnicity usually refers to social and linguistic background and often to physical appearance. Categories of race and ethnicity vary from one society to another, and they change over time within the same society.

The shifting labels and definitions used in the U.S. census reflect the growing diversity of the population and changing political and social climate. The first population census in 1790 asked enumerators to classify free residents as white or “other” (a category that included American Indians living in white communities, free African Americans, Asians, or other nonwhites). Slaves were counted separately. By 1860, the census requested that residents be classified as white, black, or mulatto (see table). American Indian and Chinese were added as separate categories in 1870.

The enthusiasm for scientific methods toward the end of the 19th century helped promote the idea that people could be classified according to distinct biological and physical characteristics, which was reflected in attempts to establish valid mixed-race categories.¹ In the 1890 census, census-takers were instructed to distinguish the color of household members as white, black, octoroon (one-eighth black), quadroon (one-quarter black), mulatto (one-half black), or as Chinese, Japanese, or American Indian. Separate census forms for American Indian areas in the 1800s recorded the “blood quantum” of individuals listed—that is, their percentage of white, black, and American Indian blood.

In the 20th century, the categories have expanded and the terms have shifted. The census changed from a

house-to-house enumeration to mass mailings and self-administration. Residents, not census enumerators, reported their race. By 1970, the mulatto category was long gone. The accepted term for Americans of African descent had changed from black to colored to Negro and back to black. Four Asian groups (Chinese, Filipinos, Japanese, and Koreans) and Hawaiians were listed separately.

The 1970 census was the first to collect data on Hispanic origin. Hispanics were increasing in numbers and political strength in the 1960s, and Hispanic leaders wanted demographic data to combat discrimination. But Hispanics (people with an origin in a Spanish-speaking country) could be of African, American Indian, Asian, European, or another origin as well. The category clearly crossed established racial lines and was classified as an ethnic group, not a race.

Race and ethnicity appear to be intertwined in the public’s consciousness, however. Many Hispanics do not check “white” on the census form because they do not identify with the non-Hispanic white population. But they do not consider themselves to be black, Asian, or American Indian either. In the 1990 census, more than 40 percent of Hispanics identified their race as “other.”² The Census Bureau generally counts these Hispanics as white, based on surveys in which about 96 percent of Hispanics identified as white, 3 percent as black, and 1 percent as Asian or American Indian.

The confusion about racial and ethnic classifications may become more acute after 2000, when people will be allowed, for the first time, to select more than one race. A simple table of census results by race and ethnicity could contain 126 cells to account for all the combinations of groups, although most cells would be

statistical publications because the measures are calculated from a small number of respondents. Even with administrative data, the relatively

small numbers of births, deaths, marriages, and other such “events” among these groups make rates unreliable.

empty in many geographic areas.³ Government statistical agencies have not yet decided on a standard format for tabulating combinations of racial and ethnic groups. They may eventually report the most common mixed-race groups—such as white-Asian or black-white—but we are entering new territory in the classification of U.S. racial and ethnic groups.

While opinion polls show that many Americans think that the government should stop collecting statistics on race, these statistics serve a number of purposes. The need for data on racial and ethnic groups expanded in response to civil rights laws of the 1960s that prohibit discrimination by race or ethnicity. Also, businesses use such data to target products and advertising, scientists

use them in many kinds of research, and lawyers use them for evidence. Race and ethnic categories are no more exact today than they were when the first census was taken, but they reflect contemporary American society and they continue to serve important functions in U.S. society.

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Race and Ethnic Categories in Selected Decennial Censuses

Census	1860	1890 ¹	1900	1970	2000 ²
Race	White	White	White	White	White
	Black	Black	Black (Negro descent)	Negro or Black	Black, African Amer., or Negro
	Mulatto	Mulatto			
		Quadroon			
		Octoroon			
	Chinese	Chinese	Chinese	Chinese	Chinese
	Japanese	Japanese	Japanese	Japanese	Japanese
	Indian	Indian	Indian (American)	Amer. Indian or Alaska Native	Amer. Indian or Alaska Native
			Filipino	Filipino	Filipino
			Hawaiian	Native Hawaiian	Native Hawaiian
			Korean	Korean	Korean
				Asian Indian	Asian Indian
				Vietnamese	Vietnamese
				Guamanian or Chamorro	Guamanian or Chamorro
				Samoan	Samoan
				Other Asian	Other Asian
				Other Pacific Islander	Other Pacific Islander
			Other	Some other race	Some other race
Hispanic Ethnicity				Mexican	Mexican, Mexican Amer., or Chicano
				Puerto Rican	Puerto Rican
				Central/So. American	
				Cuban	Cuban
				Other Spanish	Other Spanish/Hispanic/Latino
				[None of these]	Not Spanish/Hispanic/Latino

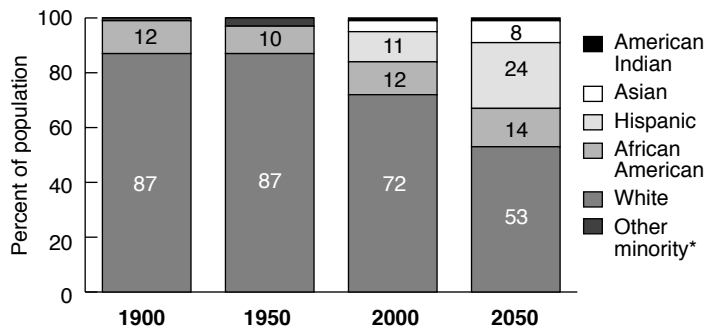
¹ In 1890, mulatto was defined as a person who was three-eighths to five-eighths black. A quadroon was one-quarter black and a octoroon one-eighth black.

² Categories printed in the 2000 Census Dress Rehearsal questionnaire.

Note: Prior to the 1970 census, enumerators wrote in the race of individuals using the designated categories. In subsequent censuses, respondents or enumerators filled in circles next to the categories with which the respondent identified. Also beginning with the 1970 census, persons choosing American Indian, other Asian, other race, or (for the Hispanic question), other Hispanic categories, were asked to write in a specific tribe or group. Hispanic ethnicity was asked of a sample of Americans in 1970 and of all Americans beginning with the 1980 census.

Figure 1

U.S. Population by Race and Ethnicity, 1900 to 2050



*American Indians, Asians, and Hispanics combined. These three groups combined made up less than 3 percent of the population in 1900 and 1950.

Note: Hispanics are excluded from American Indian, Asian, African American, and white categories. Hispanics may be of any race.

Source: Jeffrey S. Passel and Barry Edmonston, "Immigration and Recent Trends in Immigration to the United States" (1992): Table 3; and U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Reports* P25-1130 (1996): Tables I and J.

Size and Growth of Minority Groups

The combined population of the four minority groups was estimated at 74.9 million in 1998. If all these Americans lived in an independent country, it would be the 15th largest in the world—more populous than Great Britain, France, Italy, or Spain.

For most of this century, the minority population was overwhelmingly African American, and it represented a relatively stable share of the total U.S. population. Between 1900 and 1950, the minority share remained at about 13 percent (see Figure 1). The number of minorities surged from just under 10 million to nearly 21 million in the first half of the century. But the non-Hispanic white population grew just as rapidly because of high birth rates and immigration from Europe, which kept the minority share about the same.

Between 1950 and 1998, the minority population more than tripled in size as waves of immigration from non-European countries, higher birth rates among minorities, and a relatively young age structure accelerated the minority growth rates. The non-Hispanic white population grew slowly

after 1970 as birth rates fell and immigration from Europe dwindled. Between 1980 and 1998, the minority population increased 63 percent, compared with an 8 percent growth of the non-Hispanic white population. Minorities now comprise one-fourth of the U.S. population.

Asians and Pacific Islanders had the fastest rate of growth during the 1980s and 1990s. The number of non-Hispanic Asians grew 179 percent over the period, and reached 9.9 million. Nearly as many Asians as blacks were added to the population (see Table 1). Hispanics had the greatest numerical increase. Between 1980 and 1998, 15.6 million Hispanics (and just 14.8 million non-Hispanic whites) were added to the U.S. population.

The American Indian and Alaskan Native population has shown a remarkable increase since the 1960s—it grew 255 percent between 1960 and 1990. The increase reflects a tendency among Americans of partial American Indian ancestry to reclaim their American Indian heritage. Improvements in census coverage, immigration, high birth rates, and reductions in mortality can explain just part of that growth—the remainder occurred because people who previously had identified as white, black, or another race switched their racial identity to American Indian.¹⁶ Nearly 570,000 people were added to the American Indian population between 1980 and 1998—an increase of 40 percent.

The African American population is growing more slowly than other minority populations. The number of blacks increased by 25 percent between 1980 and 1998, from 26.1 million to 32.7 million. The number of whites increased even more slowly—at one-third the rate of African Americans—but they remain the predominant racial and ethnic group in numbers as well as in political and economic power.

The four minority groups accounted for 66 percent of the 43.8 million people added to the U.S. population between 1980 and 1998.

Increasing Diversity

In 1900, nine of every 10 minorities were African American. In 1998, blacks made up less than one-half of all minorities, and their share is declining. Hispanics, with a 1998 population of 30 million, are the second-largest minority, accounting for 40 percent of U.S. minorities. The U.S. Census Bureau projects that Hispanics will outnumber non-Hispanic blacks by 2005. Asians accounted for 13 percent of minorities in 1998, while American Indians, Eskimos, and Aleuts made up 3 percent.

The national-origin groups within the Hispanic and Asian populations are growing at different rates, which is changing the mix of cultures, languages, and socioeconomic characteristics of these groups. Interethnic marriage is also increasing, which contributes further to America's ethnic diversity (see Box 2, page 12).

African Americans

Most African Americans are descendants of families that have been in the United States for many generations. Increasing numbers of blacks also share ties with immigrant groups from Africa, the Caribbean, and elsewhere that have differing linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Immigration is likely to increase the diversity within the African American population. In 1980, about 3 percent of blacks were foreign-born. Many African-origin immigrant groups swelled in size over the past two decades and by 1998, 5 percent of blacks were foreign-born.

The Caribbean is the source of most U.S. immigrants of African descent. In 1998, nearly 3 million Americans were born in the Caribbean, and almost one-half of these immigrants were black.¹⁷ The Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Jamaica are among the leading sources of black Caribbean immigrants, including Hispanic blacks.

Table 1

Growth of U.S. Population by Race and Ethnicity, 1980 to 1998

Race/ethnicity	Population (thousands)		Persons added 1980–1998		Percent increase 1980–1998
	1980	1998	thousands	percent	
Total U.S.	226,546	270,299	43,753	100	19
White*	180,603	195,440	14,837	34	8
Minority	45,943	74,859	28,916	66	63
African American*	26,092	32,718	6,626	15	25
Asian and Pacific Islander*	3,551	9,890	6,339	14	179
American Indian, Eskimo, & Aleut*	1,433	2,001	568	1	40
Hispanic	14,604	30,250	15,646	36	107

Note: The 1980 total includes 264,000 non-Hispanic people of other races.

*Excludes Hispanics. Hispanics may be of any race.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *1980 Census of Population* PC80-1-C1 (1983); Table 75; and table accessed online at <http://www.census.gov/population/estimates/nation/intfile3-1.txt>, on Aug. 13, 1999.

Immigration from this region continued at a high level throughout the 1990s. Severe political and economic problems in Haiti brought 163,000 Haitian immigrants to the United States between 1990 and 1998. Jamaica sent 168,000 immigrants over the period; about 60,000 entered from Trinidad and Tobago. And, many black Hispanics were among the nearly 350,000 immigrants from the Dominican Republic who arrived between 1990 and 1998.¹⁸ Caribbean immigrants helped the number of black Hispanics to grow from 1.2 million to 1.7 million over the period.

Africa was the source of less than 4 percent of U.S. immigrants between 1981 and 1998, but new migration streams are being formed that suggest the flow from Africa may expand in the future. In 1998, about 560,000 Americans were born in Africa, up from 360,000 in 1990, and from just 60,000 in 1970.

Some African immigrants identify as white, in particular those from North Africa, but an increasing share are blacks from sub-Saharan countries. In 1990, 55,000 foreign-born Americans were from Nigeria and 35,000 were from Ethiopia. Ghana, Kenya, and Morocco were other

major source countries for African immigrants.¹⁹

New population estimates for African immigrant groups will not be available until after the 2000 census, but the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) reports that nearly 250,000 immigrants came from African countries between 1990 and 1998; about 54,000 came from Nigeria and 41,000 from Ethiopia.

Box 2

Interracial Marriages and Multiracial Americans

The requirement to choose only one race or ethnic group on standard forms has long been a sore point with people whose parents or grandparents are of different races. Many feel they are rejecting one parent and part of their heritage by officially identifying with a single race.¹ Some resolve their dilemma by selecting the “other” race category or by refusing to choose a race at all.

The 2000 census will be the first to let Americans identify with more than one race. Less than 3 percent of Americans are likely to identify themselves with more than one race in the 2000 census, but this percentage is almost certain to expand in the next century because of increases in interracial marriages.

Marriages between people of different races are still the exception in the United States, which reveals a persistent social gulf between racial groups. The prevalence of intergroup (interracial or interethnic) marriage is a telling indicator of the social distance between racial and ethnic groups. It also depends on the pool of marriage partners—the number of American Indians is relatively small, for example, which makes it less likely that Indians will marry within their race.²

In 1998, about 5 percent of U.S. married couples included spouses of different races, or a Hispanic married to a non-Hispanic.³ This small percentage masks a remarkable growth in the number of interracial marriages since 1970. Between 1970 and 1998, the number of interracial couples surged from 300,000 to 1.4 million.⁴

Hispanics

The nation’s Hispanic population primarily includes people who can trace their ancestry to Spanish-speaking countries throughout Latin America. The Census Bureau publishes data for at least four Hispanic groups: Cubans, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and an “other Hispanics” category. In 1997, there were 18.7 million Mexican Americans, 3.1 million Puerto Ricans (living on

The number of Hispanics married to non-Hispanics rose from 600,000 to 1.7 million.

Marriage between Hispanics and non-Hispanics is one of the most prevalent types of intergroup unions. This suggests there is less “social distance” between Hispanics and non-Hispanics than among people from different racial groups.

American Indians are the racial group most likely to marry outside their group. They are more likely to marry a white American than another American Indian.

Asians also marry non-Asians—primarily white Americans—at a high rate. The 1990 census found that about 40 percent of Asians were married to non-Asians.

African Americans are much less likely than other minority groups to marry outside their race. About 9 percent of couples with a black spouse included a nonblack spouse in 1998, a modest increase from about 6 percent in 1980. About 89 percent of these marriages consisted of black-white couples.

Whites are slightly less likely than blacks to marry outside their race. In 1998, less than 3 percent of married couples including a white American had a nonwhite husband or wife. Most were married to an Asian or American Indian.

Even if the social distance between blacks and whites does not narrow substantially, the share of interracial marriages and interracial births is likely to expand because American Indians, Asians, and Hispanics are an increasing share of U.S. minorities.

the U.S. mainland), 1.3 million Cubans, and 6.4 million Hispanics from other areas (see Table 2, page 14). Salvadorans, Colombians, and Dominicans led the “other Hispanics” group in the 1990 census, the most recent source of counts for these groups. The “other Hispanics” category has seen remarkable growth in the last two decades—the number more than doubled between 1980 and 1997.

For much of U.S. history, many states had laws prohibiting marriage between people of different races. In 1967, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Loving vs. Virginia* that states could not prohibit interracial marriages. This ruling invalidated the 16 remaining state statutes that outlawed interracial marriage.

The increase in interracial marriage and growth of the minority population since the 1960s produced a boomlet of interracial children. The number of babies born to parents of different races increased from about 60,000 (less than 2 percent of births) to at least 159,000 (about 5 percent of births) between 1977 and 1997. The numbers may be higher because many birth certificates do not record the race of both parents. In 1997, about 15 percent of birth certificates did not record the race of the father. Father’s race was not recorded for 40 percent of births to African American mothers and 28 percent of births to American Indian mothers.

In California, where one-fifth of U.S. interracial couples live, interracial babies were the third largest racial or ethnic category of births in 1997—after Latinos and whites, but ahead of Asians, blacks, and American Indians. With the nation’s largest concentrations of almost every ethnic minority, California is likely to have the largest population of interracial Americans in coming years.

Interracial births are highest for American Indians—about one-half of American Indian births were biracial in 1997 (excluding babies with fathers of unknown race). About 20 percent

Central Americans and South Americans are becoming a larger share of the U.S. Hispanic population as immigrant streams from Latin America expand and diversify. Central and South Americans accounted for 14 percent of all U.S. Hispanics in 1997, up from 11 percent in 1990. The Mexican-origin population remains the largest group and continues to expand. The Mexican share of

of births to Asian women were biracial. In sharp contrast, less than 5 percent of births to whites and blacks were biracial in 1997.

The likely increase in the number of interracial Americans in the next century raises a number of intriguing questions about racial identity and the status of minorities in the United States. Will interracial Americans be considered a separate group that requires special protection from discrimination? Will they be included or excluded from the minority population depending on their mix of races? Will the increase in interracial Americans mean that race will become less important in American society? Such social change is slow, as evidenced by the low status of some minority groups that have been in the United States for generations. But by the end of the 21st century, race, minority status, and ethnicity are certain to hold different meanings than they do today.

References

1. See Maria P.P. Root, ed., *Racially Mixed People in America* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1992): 24-36.
2. Stanley Lieberson and Mary C. Waters, *From Many Strands: Ethnic and Racial Groups in Contemporary America* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1988): 162-203.
3. Population Reference Bureau analysis of the March 1998 Current Population Survey.
4. *Ibid.*; and U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1998* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1998): Table 67.

Table 2

Hispanic and Asian and Pacific Islander Ethnic Groups, 1980 and 1997

Race/ethnicity	Population (thousands)		Growth 1980-1997	
	1980	1997	thousands	percent
Hispanic	14,604	29,348	14,744	101
Mexican	8,679	18,650	9,971	115
Puerto Rican	2,005	3,070	1,065	53
Cuban	806	1,270	464	58
Other Hispanic	3,114	6,358	3,244	104
Asian/Pacific Islander¹	3,726	10,033	6,307	169
Chinese	812	2,268	1,456	179
Filipino	782	1,995	1,213	155
Asian Indian	387	1,215	828	214
Vietnamese	245	1,045	800	327
Korean	357	982	625	175
Japanese	716	925	209	29
Other Southeast Asian ²	69	444	375	543
Hawaiian	172	269	97	56
Other Asian/Pacific Islander	186	890	704	379

Note: Hispanics may be of any race.

¹Includes Hispanic Asians.

²Cambodian, Laotian, and Hmong.

Source: 1980 figures from U.S. Bureau of the Census, *1980 Census of Population PC80-1-C1* (1983): Tables 74 and 75; 1997 Hispanic figures from National Center for Health Statistics, *National Vital Statistics Reports* 47, no. 18 (April 29, 1999): 90, Table III; 1997 Asian and Pacific Islander figures from Sharon M. Lee, *Population Bulletin* 53, no. 2: Table 3, and PRB tabulations.

U.S. Latinos rose from 59 percent to 64 percent between 1980 and 1997.

Asians and Pacific Islanders

Asians and Pacific Islanders are the most diverse U.S. minority group. Publications from the 1990 census included population characteristics for 13 Asian ethnic groups and six Pacific Islander groups, but many smaller groups were listed in census questionnaires.²⁰ Among the 10 million Asian Americans (including about 600,000 Hispanic Asians) estimated in 1997, six groups numbered 900,000 or more: Chinese, Filipino, Vietnamese, Asian Indian, Korean, and Japanese. These six groups made up 84 percent of Asians and Pacific Islanders. Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders accounted for just 5 percent of the Asian and Pacific Islander population.

Primarily because of immigration, the number of Asian Indians, Chinese, Filipinos, Koreans, and Vietnamese more than doubled over the past two decades. In comparison, the number of Japanese Americans (who had low immigration levels) and Hawaiians (a native American group) grew relatively slowly over the period.

American Indians and Alaska Natives

The American Indian, Eskimo, and Aleut minority population also combines people with different pasts and presents. They are linked because their civilizations were thriving in North America before Europeans and Africans began to settle the continent. The Census Bureau estimated there were 2.4 million American Indians and Alaska Natives in 1998, including 347,000 Hispanic Indians. The 1990 census provides the most recent estimates of the Eskimo and Aleut populations. The 2 million American Indians counted in the 1990 census included 57,000 Eskimos and 24,000 Aleuts.

There are more than 500 recognized American Indian tribes, but one-half of all American Indians identify with one of the eight largest tribes. The Cherokee, Navajo, Chippewa, and Sioux tribes have the most members and account for four of 10 American Indians, as shown in Table 3. The largest of the other tribes are Choctaw, Pueblo, Apache, and Iroquois.

Higher birth rates among American Indians than among most other racial and ethnic groups, better census reporting, and a resurgence of ethnic pride helped increase the American Indian population by 28 percent between the 1980 and 1990 censuses. The Apache, Chippewa, Choctaw, and Navajo tribes grew by 38 percent to 64 percent over the decade, for example, and the number of Aleuts increased by 68 percent, far more than could be accounted for by natural increase.

Sources of Population Change

Immigration has accounted for more than one-third of the growth of the minority population since 1980. Along with higher fertility among minority women than white women, immigration caused the number of minorities to increase faster than the number of whites. Some minorities also have higher death rates than whites, especially at specific ages and from certain causes, which affects the health and demographic profile of the U.S. population. Immigration, fertility, and mortality—the basis of all demographic change—affect and are affected by the relatively youthful age profile of U.S. minorities.

Immigration

Between 1980 and 1998, nearly three-quarters of all immigrants entering the United States came from Asia and Latin America; another 4 percent of immigrants came from Africa. About 20 percent of U.S. immigrants came from Europe between 1980 and 1998. This pattern is a marked change from the 1950s, when about one-half of immigrants came from Europe and 15 percent came from Canada. Less than 40 percent of immigrants arriving in the 1950s came from Africa, Latin America, Asia, and Oceania, the source regions for the three largest U.S. minority groups.

Immigration accounted for about two-fifths of the growth of Hispanics and nearly two-thirds of the growth of Asian Americans in the 1990s. Consequently, a large proportion of people from these populations became Americans very recently. Most Asian Americans were not born in the United States—59 percent were foreign-born in 1998 (see Figure 2, page 17). About 74 percent of these Asian immigrants arrived since 1980. Thirty-eight percent of Hispanics were born outside the United States. In contrast, just 5 percent of African Americans and 3 percent of non-Hispanic

Table 3

Aleuts, Eskimos, and the Largest American Indian Tribes, 1990

	Population (thousands)	Percent change 1980–1990
Total American Indian, Aleut, and Eskimo¹	1,959	28
Aleut	24	68
Eskimo	57	36
American Indian	1,878	27
Cherokee	308	33
Navajo	219	38
Chippewa	104	41
Sioux	103	31
Choctaw	82	64
Pueblo	53	24
Apache	50	40
Iroquois	49	28
Other tribes ²	910	18

Note: The 1990 data are from the census bureau tabulations. The data include persons who also specified Hispanic origin. Race and tribal identification were self-reported on census forms and may differ from counts from tribal rolls or other sources.

¹Includes Hispanics.

²Includes at least 100 other major tribes, over 300 tribes with less than 1,000 people, and tribe not reported.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, press releases CB91-215 (June 12, 1991) and CB92-244 (Nov. 14, 1992).

whites and American Indians were foreign-born.

The large numbers arriving over a short time period have promoted the growth of immigrant communities, which provide support for newcomers but can also isolate them from other Americans. Cohesive immigrant communities can slow the acquisition of English and the assimilation of newcomers into mainstream society.

The forces propelling immigrants to leave their home countries and come to the United States are varied. Some people come to escape deplorable conditions. Others are attracted by economic opportunities in the United States. Still others join families already living here. And while most come legally, some slip across the border without proper documentation, or remain in the United States long after their

Photo removed for
copyright reasons.

A resurgence of ethnic pride has encouraged more people to identify as American Indian in recent decades.

temporary student or tourist visas have expired.

Immigrants already here often help newcomers from their home countries find housing and employment. They form networks that perpetuate the flow from their countries.

Recent immigration from Asia and the Pacific Islands reflects two major streams. One stream flows from the Asian countries that already have large communities here, including China, Korea, and the Philippines. Many of these immigrants are college-educated and gained entry under the employment provisions of immigration laws that favor immigrants with special skills and knowledge.

The second stream is composed of immigrants and refugees from Southeast Asia: Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Their arrival is tied to U.S. policies following the Vietnam War and the unstable political and economic conditions in their home countries. These immigrants tend to arrive with less education and fewer resources than other Asian immigrants. They are much more likely to be poor and to live in segregated neighborhoods than are Asians.²¹

Immigration from Africa and the Caribbean has accounted for about one-fifth of the growth of the African

American population (including Hispanics) between 1990 and 1997.²² Immigration (primarily from Canada, Mexico, and Central America) accounted for one-sixth of the increase in the American Indian and Alaska Native population (including Hispanics), according to Census Bureau estimates.

Immigration is likely to sustain the brisk rate of minority population growth. The most recent projections from the Census Bureau anticipate a net addition of 820,000 immigrants a year until 2050, including 350,000 Hispanics, 226,000 non-Hispanic Asians, 186,000 non-Hispanic whites, and 57,000 non-Hispanic blacks.²³ Annual immigration at these levels will bring the share of minorities in the population from 28 percent in 1998 to 47 percent in 2050.

Immigration could slow, accelerate, or change direction because of world events, economic trends, or new immigration laws. U.S. immigration laws are inextricably linked to minority issues because they affect the number and ethnic origins of people who move here.

Americans are divided on many immigration issues. Should we try to slow or increase the flow of immigrants? Should we give a greater preference to foreign relatives of U.S. residents or immigrants with valuable skills and financial resources to invest in our economy? How much should we spend to apprehend and deport illegal immigrants? Events outside Americans' control—population pressures, racial and ethnic strife, and poor economic opportunities—will determine the origins and numbers of people who want to come to this country. But U.S. policies will determine how many and whom we will accept and, in part, reflect Americans' assessment of the effect of minorities on society.

Higher Fertility

Minorities contributed 40 percent of the 3.9 million U.S. births in 1997, although they made up only 28 percent

of the population. One reason minorities account for a disproportionate share of births is that a larger proportion of minority women are in their childbearing ages, but minority women also have more children than non-Hispanic white women, on average. African Americans have had higher fertility rates than whites throughout the 20th century. Many of the “new minorities” tend to come from countries where large families are the norm. In Mexico and Vietnam, for example, women have three children, on average. In Honduras and the Philippines, the average is closer to four children. The average for U.S. whites has been two or fewer children since 1972.

Hispanic women have the highest fertility rates. In 1997, the total fertility rate (TFR, the total number of children a woman will have given current birth rates) was estimated at 3.0, one child more per woman than the rate for non-Hispanic whites (see Figure 3, page 18). Non-Hispanic blacks, with a TFR of 2.2 children per woman, have the second-highest fertility, followed by American Indians (2.0), Asians (1.9), and whites (1.8).

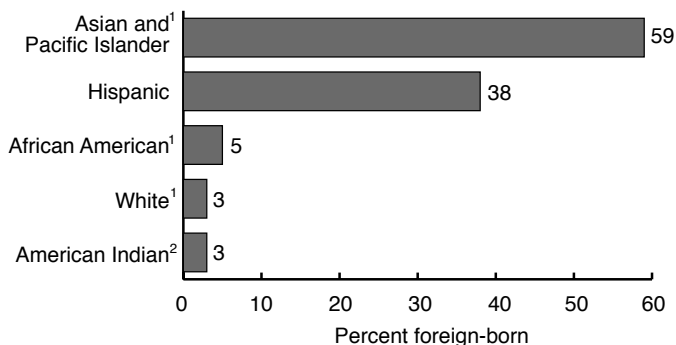
Hispanic, black, and American Indian women tend to have their first child at a younger age than do white or Asian women—which contributes to a larger total family size.

They are also more likely to become teenage mothers. Overall, 13 percent of U.S. births occurred to teenage mothers in 1997. But the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) reported that teenagers accounted for 22 percent of black births, 21 percent of American Indian births, 17 percent of Hispanic births, 10 percent of non-Hispanic white births, and 5 percent of Asian and Pacific Islander births.²⁴

Teen childbearing has been associated with negative economic consequences for both mother and child, although some researchers debate whether these consequences reflect age at birth or the socioeconomic circumstances of many teen mothers before they had a child.²⁵ Women who

Figure 2

Percentage of Americans Who Are Foreign-Born, by Race and Ethnicity, 1998



Note: Hispanics may be of any race.

¹Excludes Hispanics.

²Includes Eskimos and Aleuts and excludes Hispanics.

Source: Population Reference Bureau analysis of the March 1998 Current Population Survey.

have children while in their teens are less likely to finish high school, to be employed, or to earn high wages, and are more likely to live in poverty than women who became mothers after age 20. The children of teenage mothers start life at a disadvantage. In addition to economic disadvantages, they are more likely to live apart from their fathers and to encounter problems in school.

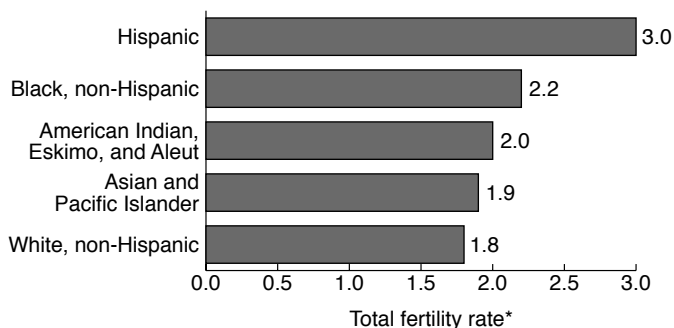
Black, Latino, and American Indian babies are more likely than white or Asian babies to be born to an unmarried mother. In 1997, 32 percent of U.S. children were born to unmarried women, according to NCHS. The share was 69 percent among African Americans, 59 percent among American Indians, 41 percent among Hispanics, 22 percent among non-Hispanic white women, and 16 percent among Asian women. Like children of teen mothers, children born to unmarried mothers are more likely than other children to grow up in poverty.²⁶

Disparities in Health and Mortality

While the health of all Americans has improved markedly over the past century, minorities often have more

Figure 3

Fertility Rates by Race and Ethnicity, 1997



Note: Hispanics may be of any race. Rates for Asians and Pacific Islanders and American Indians, Eskimos, and Aleuts include Hispanics.

*The average number of children a woman will have under current birth rates.

Source: National Center for Health Statistics, *National Vital Statistics Report 47*, no. 18 (1999): Tables 4 and 9.

health problems and higher mortality rates than whites in the same age groups. Much of this difference in health status is associated with minorities' lower socioeconomic status and more limited access to health care.

Life expectancy estimates, which are published only for blacks and whites, show a persistent racial gap. In 1997, the average life expectancy at birth was 77.1 years for whites (including Hispanics) and 71.1 years for blacks—the highest levels ever for both groups. Life expectancy has increased more rapidly for whites than for African Americans, which caused the gap between the two groups to expand from its historic low point of 5.7 years in 1982 to 7.1 years in 1987. By 1997, the white advantage in life expectancy had narrowed to 6.0 years. Life expectancy increased every year for whites over the period, while it fluctuated for blacks after 1984, primarily because of a temporary decline in life expectancy for black men.²⁷

African Americans have higher mortality rates in most age groups. The difference is especially stark among infants. The infant mortality rate (deaths to children under age 1 per 1,000 births) for African Americans was 14.7 in 1995, more than twice the rate for Asians or

whites and Hispanics, and more than one-third higher than the rate for American Indians.²⁸

Many minority infants face precarious health situations that begin before their birth. Because of a lack of health insurance, limited access to health facilities, and a host of other reasons, less than three-fourths of black (72 percent), American Indian (68 percent), and Hispanic (74 percent) women reported receiving prenatal care during their first trimester of pregnancy in 1997. Asian women (82 percent) and white women (88 percent) were much more likely to receive first trimester prenatal care.

African American babies are much more likely than other babies to be born prematurely and to have a low birth weight. Thirteen percent of African American babies born in 1997 were low-birth-weight babies—they weighed less than 2,500 grams (about 5.5 pounds) at birth. In sharp contrast, just 6 percent to 7 percent of American Indian, Hispanic, Asian, and white babies weighed less than 2,500 grams at birth in 1997. Low birth weight is associated with a lower chance of surviving the first year of life and with many long-term health and developmental problems.²⁹

Minorities of all ages face a much greater risk of death from homicide and HIV/AIDS than whites. Homicide was not among the top 10 causes of death for white men in 1997, for example, yet it was the fourth most common cause of death for Hispanic men, and the fifth most common cause of death for African American men. In 1996—the latest year available—homicide ranked as the ninth most common cause of death among American Indian and Asian men. NCHS reports show that minority men are much less likely than white men, however, to die from an automobile crash, heart disease, or (except for American Indians) from suicide.

Among women, death rates from diabetes—a disease exacerbated by poor nutrition and health care—are noticeably higher among blacks,

Hispanics, and American Indians than among Asians or whites. Minority women also face a greater risk of dying from infectious diseases or homicide than white women, but they have a lower risk of dying from suicide.

Inadequate prenatal care, higher death rates, and other health problems among a sizeable segment of the minority population stem in part from their limited access to health insurance and, consequently, to medical care. Minorities are much less likely than whites to have health insurance. About 12 percent of non-Hispanic whites reported they had no health coverage in 1997, compared with 21 percent of Asians and African Americans, 25 percent of American Indians, and 34 percent of Hispanics.³⁰

Age and Gender

Minority groups have a different age and sex profile than non-Hispanic white Americans. Accordingly, public policies related to education or social security, for example, will have different effects on minorities than on whites. This racial and ethnic age imbalance can also have a number of social and political consequences. Whites may be less likely to support tax increases to improve schools, for example, and more likely to support programs that would benefit the largely white elderly population.

Immigration, fertility, and mortality trends among America's minorities are reflected in the age and sex profiles of each group. The ratio of men to women among Hispanics in the United States is unusually high, for example, because early immigration streams were dominated by men whose economic circumstances caused them to leave their families behind. In contrast, African Americans have a slightly lower ratio of men to women, most noticeably among young adults. This gap is thought to reflect both an underestimation of the number of African American men (because of undercounting in the census,

surveys, and administrative records, see Box 3, page 20) and the relatively high mortality among young black men.

The minority population is younger than the non-Hispanic white population, on average. This age difference is one reason that the minority population is growing faster than the white population. Younger populations have proportionately more women of childbearing age than do older populations. Consequently, they are likely to have more births than a population with an older profile. Even if the United States had accepted no more immigrants after 1995, the higher fertility rates among minorities, combined with their younger age structure, would increase the share of the minority population from 28 percent in 1998 to 39 percent by 2050.³¹

The large numbers of Asian and Hispanic immigrants keep these minority groups relatively young because most immigrants are young adults. Young, working-age people are usually the most willing to face the challenges involved in moving to a new country. Many immigrants bring children with them or start families after they arrive.

In 1998, about one-third of the minority population was under age 18, compared with just one-fourth of the non-Hispanic white population. In contrast, about 7 percent of minorities were ages 65 and older, compared with 15 percent of non-Hispanic whites. By 2050, an estimated 14 percent of minorities and 25 percent of non-Hispanic whites will be ages 65 and older.

Immigration trends will directly affect the age structure of U.S. minorities, and, consequently, of the total U.S. population. If immigration from Latin America and Asia subsides, it will slow the infusion of young adults and their children into the Hispanic and Asian populations and these populations will age faster. If immigration from African and Caribbean countries increases, the African American population may age more slowly.

Minorities face a greater risk of death from homicide and HIV/AIDS than whites.

Because minorities account for an increasing share of the nation's children, the racial and ethnic composition of the country's schools, future work force, and future retirement population is changing. More than one-third (35 percent) of all children under age 18 were minorities in 1998; nearly one-half are projected to be a minority by 2025. In four states—California, Hawaii, New Mexico, and Texas—the minority share of children has already exceeded one-half, and the percentage is close to one-half in two other states—Louisiana and Mississippi.³²

Minorities' growing share of U.S. children—the future work force—has implications for American businesses and public policy. Minorities have lower educational attainment and higher poverty rates than whites, on average. Because such a large percentage are immigrants or the children of immigrants, many Asian and Hispanic children have limited English skills and require special language classes. Policymakers will need to ensure that minority children from disadvantaged homes receive adequate education, nutrition, and health care in order to provide the nation with a trained

Box 3

The Undercount of Minorities in the Census

The decennial census attempts to count each U.S. resident every 10 years, but enumerators always miss a small fraction of the population. Minorities are more likely than non-Hispanic whites to be undercounted. About 60.6 million Hispanics and non-Hispanic blacks, Asians, and American Indians were counted in the 1990 census, but the true number, after adjusting for the undercount, was estimated at 63.3 million. Young blacks living in inner-city areas, illegal immigrants, children, American Indians living on reservations, and non-English-speaking minorities are among the groups most likely to be missed by the census and by other surveys and administrative records used to derive demographic estimates. In the 1990 census, 4 percent to 5 percent of African Americans, Hispanics, and American Indians were missed, compared with 1 percent to 2 percent of Asians and whites (see table).

The differential undercount between whites and minorities has been observed in every census since 1940, and over the past two decades the undercount has become a contentious political issue. Preparations for the 2000 census have been particularly fractious because of disagreements over the use of scientific sampling methods to adjust for the undercount. In January 1999, the U.S.

Supreme Court ruled that the Census Bureau could not use sampling for reapportioning seats among the states in the U.S. House of Representatives—but it left open the possibility of using sampling for other purposes, such as distributing federal funds among states and communities.¹

While the undercount is small relative to the total U.S. population, it affects some areas more than others, and it can distort the size and racial makeup of specific areas. Some cities and states with large populations of poor minorities feel they are not receiving their fair share of public funds because of the census undercount. The amount at stake can be large. In 1998, for example, \$185 billion in federal funds were distributed in part based on population. But cities and states were unsuccessful in their suits against the U.S. Department of Commerce to force an adjustment of the 1980 and 1990 census figures.

The undercount can disrupt long-range planning, especially planning services for children. In New York City, for example, 77,000 children were missed in the 1990 census. This number is equivalent to the enrollment in 150 average-sized elementary and secondary schools.² Minority children are most likely to be undercounted, and minorities will make up more than one-third of the children in the 2000 census.

and competitive work force in the years ahead.

The working-age population will also become increasingly diverse (see Figure 4, page 22). More than one-quarter (27 percent) of Americans ages 18 to 64 are minorities; by 2050, this share will rise to nearly one-half. Minorities tend to be concentrated in the younger working ages, ages 18 to 44. In 1998, 73 percent of minorities of working age were in the younger age group (ages 18 to 44), compared with 62 percent of non-Hispanic whites of working age.

The older working ages (45 to 64) are generally the ages when people are most likely to reach the top ranks of management. In part because whites are concentrated in the older working ages and because of the history of discrimination against minorities in hiring and promotion, a largely white group of managers supervises a work force that is increasingly multiracial and multicultural. Many business leaders recognize the need for diversity training within their corporations, and minority advocates are keeping a watchful eye on signs of a “glass ceiling” that appears to prevent minori-

Results from 1998 “dress rehearsals” in three communities—Columbia, S.C., Sacramento, Calif., and Menominee County, Wis. (home to an American Indian reservation)—hint at how high the undercount might be in 2000. In

Columbia, for example, the net undercount rate for non-Hispanic blacks (13 percent) was more than twice that of non-Hispanic whites (6 percent). In Sacramento, the net undercount rates for blacks (9 percent), Hispanics (8 percent), and even Asians (6 percent) were higher than the rate for whites (5 percent). In Menominee County, the net undercount was 4 percent for American Indians and 3 percent for all racial and ethnic groups.³ These results are not necessarily indicative of what will happen in the 2000 census because the undercount for the dress rehearsal traditionally has been much higher than that for the actual census. But they do suggest that the differential undercount will continue to be a problem in 2000.

Percentage Missed in the 1990 Census

	Total	Children		
		Male	Female	under age 18
Total U.S.	1.6	1.9	1.3	3.2
White, non Hispanic	0.7	—	—	2.0
African American	4.4	4.9	4.0	7.0
Hispanic	5.0	5.5	4.4	5.0
Asian and				
Pacific Islander	2.3	3.4	1.2	3.2
American Indian*	4.5	5.2	3.9	6.2

— Not available.

Note: Hispanics may be of any race.

*Includes Eskimos and Aleuts.

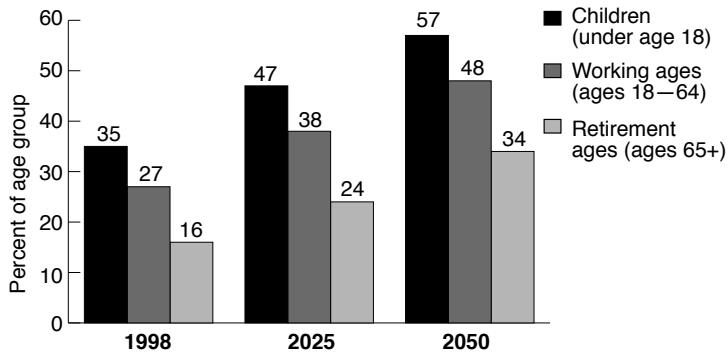
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Report of the Committee on Adjustment of Postcensal Estimates* (Aug. 7, 1992); Table 2; data accessed online at <http://tier2.census.gov/pl94171/pl94data.htm>, on Aug. 26, 1999; and J.G. Robinson, B. Ahmed, and E.W. Fernandez. Paper presented at the 1993 Annual Research Conference, March 21-24, Arlington, VA; Table 3.

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1. See Barry Edmonston, “The 2000 Census Challenge,” *PRB Reports on America* 1, no. 1 (February 1999); and information accessed online at <http://www.census2000.org>, on July 30, 1999.
2. William P. O’Hare, “The Overlooked Undercount: Children Missed in the Decennial Census,” *KIDS COUNT Working Paper* (Baltimore: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 1999): 4-5.
3. U.S. Bureau of the Census, “Racial, Ethnic Undercounts Detailed For Census 2000 Dress Rehearsal Sites By Census Bureau.” Press release CB99-CN.09 (Feb. 24, 1999).

Figure 4

Minority Share of Selected Age Groups, 1998 to 2050



Note: Minorities include African Americans, Asians and Pacific Islanders, American Indians and Alaska Natives, and Hispanics.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Reports* P25-1130; and table accessed online at <http://www.census.gov/nation/e90s/e9898mp.txt>, on June 15, 1999.

ties from rising to the upper ranks of management.

This age gap between minorities and non-Hispanic whites also means that minority workers support a disproportionately large number of white retirees. Under the U.S. retirement system, Social Security payments for retirees are deducted from the income of current workers.

Older Americans will also be affected by the nation's growing racial and ethnic diversity. Between 1998 and 2025, for example, the number of minorities ages 65 and older will increase from 5.4 million to 14.6 million—a 171 percent increase, compared with a 63 percent increase among the non-Hispanic white older population. Minorities represented 16 percent of the population ages 65 and older in 1998, but their share is expected to reach 24 percent by 2025, and 34 percent by 2050—more than double the 1998 share. Asians and Hispanics will be the fastest growing segments of the older population. As a result of these changes, policies, programs, and even commercial products targeted at today's older population need to be reassessed to meet the needs of tomorrow's elderly.

Families and Households

Primarily because minorities are younger and have higher birth rates than the non-Hispanic population, they are more likely to live in family households and to have dependent children (see Table 4). In 1998, between two-thirds and four-fifths of households among all racial and ethnic groups were family households. Under the Census Bureau definition, a family household consists of two or more people living together who are related by adoption, blood, or marriage. It may or may not include dependent children.

Differences in living arrangements among minority groups often were as large as the difference between minorities and whites. Asians and Hispanics were most likely to live in family households and least likely to live alone. Nearly 30 percent of both white and black households consisted of a single person in 1998, compared with just 14 percent of Hispanic and 18 percent of Asian households. Elderly people, particularly widows, often live alone, which partially explains the lower incidence of single-person households among the relatively young Hispanic and Asian populations.

Nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of Hispanic family households and 57 percent of African American family households included children under age 18 in 1998. Less than one-half of white families included children, reflecting the older age structure of white adults and lower fertility among white couples.

Except for Asians, minority families were more likely than white families to be headed by a single parent—usually a woman—living with dependent children. In 1998, nearly 20 percent of Hispanic and American Indian families and 33 percent of African American families were composed of a single parent with dependent children. Such families comprised just 6 percent of Asian families and 9 per-

cent of white families. Female-headed households with children were the most common family arrangement for African Americans. They accounted for 30 percent of black family households in 1998.

Cultural traditions and economic differences also affect peoples' living arrangements. Many researchers have noted the tendency for Asian households to include extended family members; others have noted the greater tendency of young Hispanics, especially women, to live with their parents until marriage.³³ These living patterns may be even more pronounced among recent immigrants, who are more likely to adhere to traditional values, or who may be less able to afford a home of their own.

Where Minorities Live

Minority Americans are found in every U.S. region, state, and metropolitan area, but they are highly concentrated in a few states and areas. In much of the United States, non-Hispanic whites have relatively little contact with minorities. More than one-half of America's minority population lives in just five states: California, Texas, New York, Florida, and Illinois. Twenty-two percent live in California alone. The regional location of different minority groups is linked to historical circumstances and migration streams.

African Americans

Although African Americans may be the most widely dispersed minority group, they are still highly concentrated in southern states (see Figure 5, page 24). As late as 1910, 89 percent of all blacks resided in the South, a legacy of the pre-Civil War plantation economy.³⁴ Blacks started to move to the industrial cities of the North when the cheap labor supplied by European immigrants was cut off during World War I. Following World War II, blacks

Table 4

Household and Family Structure by Race and Ethnicity, 1998

Race/ethnicity	Non-Hispanic				Hispanic
	White	African American	Asian	American Indian	
Number of households (millions)	77.9	12.2	3.1	0.7	8.6
Family households (%)	68	67	77	70	81
Nonfamily households (%)	32	33	23	30	19
Single-person households (%)	27	29	18	23	14
	Percent distribution of family households				
With own children, total	46	57	53	52	64
Married couple	36	24	47	33	45
Male head (no wife)	2	3	1	6	3
Female head (no husband)	7	30	5	13	16
Without own children, total	54	43	47	48	36
Married couple	46	22	35	34	24
Male head (no wife)	3	4	5	3	4
Female head (no husband)	6	16	6	11	7

Note: Subtotals may not add to totals because of rounding. Hispanics may be of any race. Asian includes Pacific Islanders. American Indian includes Eskimos and Aleuts.

Source: Population Reference Bureau analysis of the March 1998 Current Population Survey.

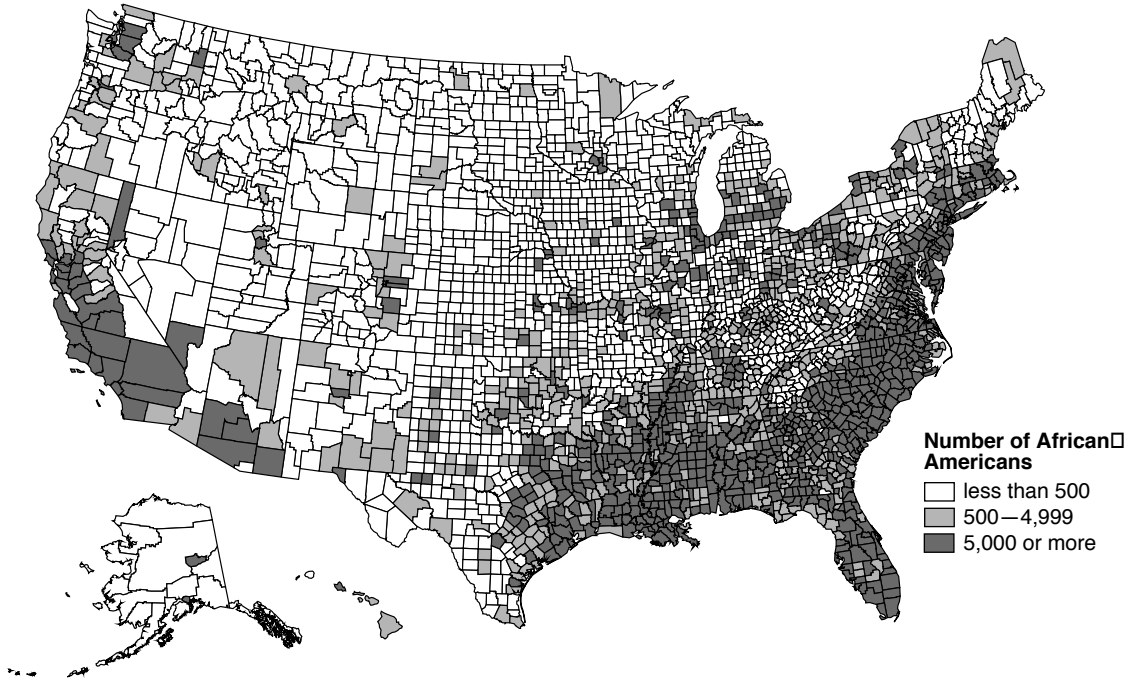
continued to move north but also began to migrate to a few large cities in the West, mostly in California. Blacks were drawn by California's strong economy and relatively benign race relations, and the state's blacks have fared well relative to blacks in other parts of the country.³⁵ In 1997, however, 55 percent of African Americans (including black Hispanics) lived in the South. Another 36 percent lived in the Northeast and Midwest, mostly in metropolitan areas. About 9 percent of blacks lived in the West.

Hispanics

Hispanics are highly concentrated in the Southwest (see Figure 6). Five southwestern states (California, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, and Texas) were home to 61 percent of U.S. Hispanics in 1997. More than one-half lived in just two states: California and Texas. While many southwestern Latinos are recent immigrants, others identify as "Hispanos," who are descendants of Mexican and

Figure 5

African American Population of U.S. Counties, 1997



Note: The highest number in any county was 1,369,633. The population estimates include Hispanic African Americans.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census. Accessed online at <http://www.census.gov/population/estimates/county/crh/> (various files), on Feb. 1, 1999.

Spanish settlers who lived in the territory before it belonged to the United States. More recent immigrants from Mexico and Central America are drawn to this region because of its close proximity to their home countries, job opportunities, and established Latino communities that can help newcomers find jobs. Outside the Southwest, New York and Florida house the largest concentrations of Latinos. New York had 9 percent and Florida contained 7 percent of Latinos in 1997.

The geographic concentration of specific Hispanic populations is even more striking. More than four-fifths of Mexican Americans live in the Southwest (three-fourths in Texas and California alone). Two-thirds of Puerto Ricans are in the Northeast (primarily New York and New Jersey), and two-thirds of Cubans live in Florida. This intense geographic concentration makes it important

to look beyond national averages to better understand U.S. Latinos.

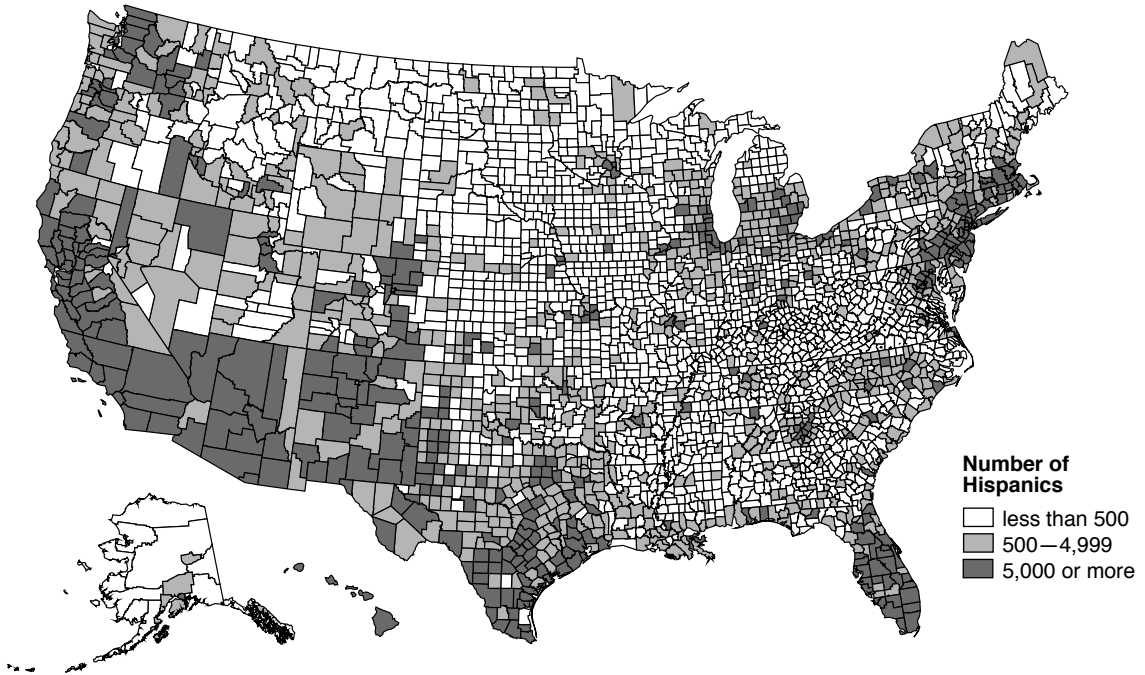
In the 1980s and 1990s, new job opportunities in such industries as meat processing brought Hispanic immigrants to communities that had little previous experience with foreigners. New Latino communities are emerging in small towns and rural areas in Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, New York, Tennessee, Wisconsin, and Washington, among other states.³⁶

Asians and Pacific Islanders

Asians and Pacific Islanders are also concentrated in the West (see Figure 7, page 26). More than one-half (53 percent) lived in that region in 1997. Some Asian Americans are descendants of Chinese workers brought to western states beginning in the mid-1800s to work as laborers

Figure 6

Hispanic Population of U.S. Counties, 1997



Note: The highest number in any county was 4,000,642.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census. Accessed online at <http://www.census.gov/population/estimates/county/crh/> (various files), on Feb. 1, 1999.

on the railroads, or are Japanese who came in various immigration waves in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. But most Asians immigrated here after 1965. Asian immigrants tend to enter the United States through either California or New York. Next to California, New York has the largest number of Asians, with Hawaii a close third. In 1997, 37 percent of all Asians and Pacific Islanders lived in California, 10 percent lived in New York, and 7 percent lived in Hawaii.

The largest share of nearly every major Asian ethnic group lives in California. The 1990 census showed that three-fifths of Chinese Americans lived in California or New York, while about two-thirds of Filipinos and Japanese lived in California or Hawaii. Asian Indian and Korean populations are somewhat less concentrated geographically, although large communities have emerged in a handful of states, including Illinois, New Jersey,

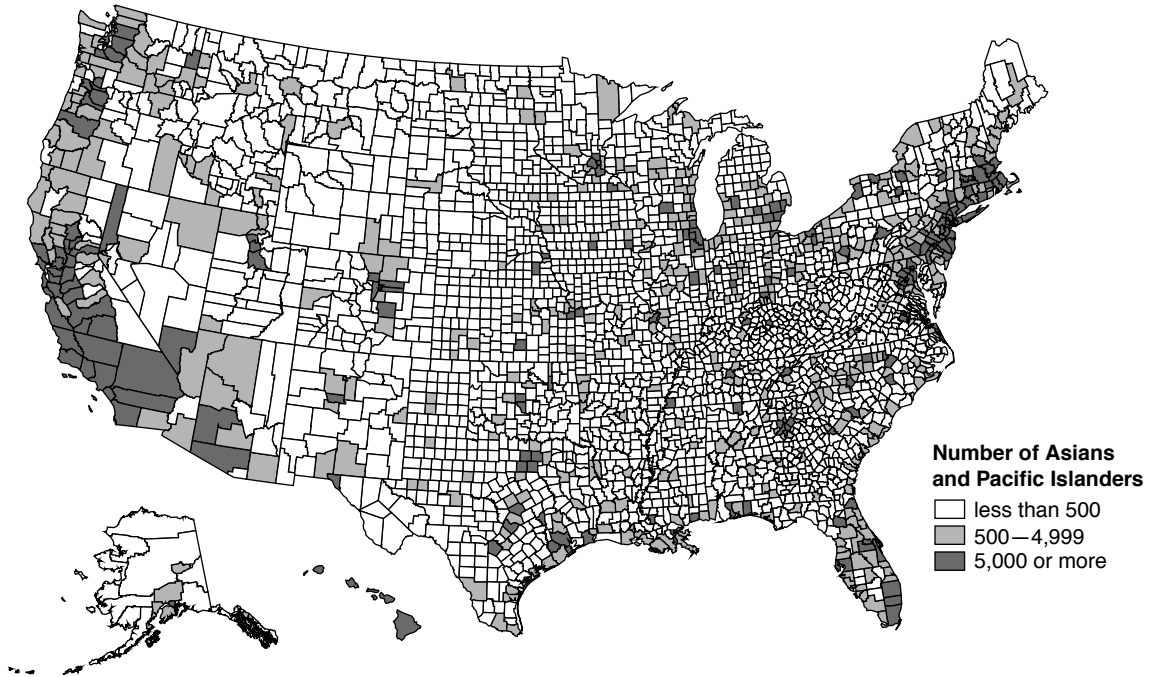
and Texas, as well as California and New York. Southeast Asians had a different pattern because of federal resettlement schemes that created pockets of Southeast Asian refugees in a few states. Nearly two-fifths of the U.S. Hmong population lived in Minnesota and Wisconsin in 1990. One-tenth of American Vietnamese lived in Texas—the largest concentration of Vietnamese outside California.

American Indians

American Indians, Eskimos, and Aleuts are also concentrated in the West. Nearly one-half (48 percent) lived in that region in 1997 (see Figure 8, page 27). The geographic concentration of American Indian populations reflects government policies and private practices that reduced the American Indian population in the eastern part of the United States during the 1800s. Many Indians were

Figure 7

Asian and Pacific Islander Population of U.S. Counties, 1997



Note: The highest number in any county was 1,187,392. The population estimates include Hispanic Asians and Pacific Islanders.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census. Accessed online at <http://www.census.gov/population/estimates/county/crh/> (various files), on Feb. 1, 1999.

killed, while others were forced to move to reservations in the West.

In 1930, just 10 percent of American Indians lived in urban areas, compared with 56 percent of all Americans. World War II and federal urban relocation policies of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s brought large numbers of Indians to cities. More than 25,000 American Indians served in the armed forces during World War II and another 50,000 left reservations to work in war-related industries. Many remained in urban areas after the war; some took advantage of job opportunities or education benefits for former military personnel through the GI Bill.³⁷ By the 1990s, about one-half of American Indians lived in urban areas compared with three-fourths of all Americans.

The geographic distribution of American Indians has changed little since the 1970s, and demographer Matthew Snipp sees that “the current

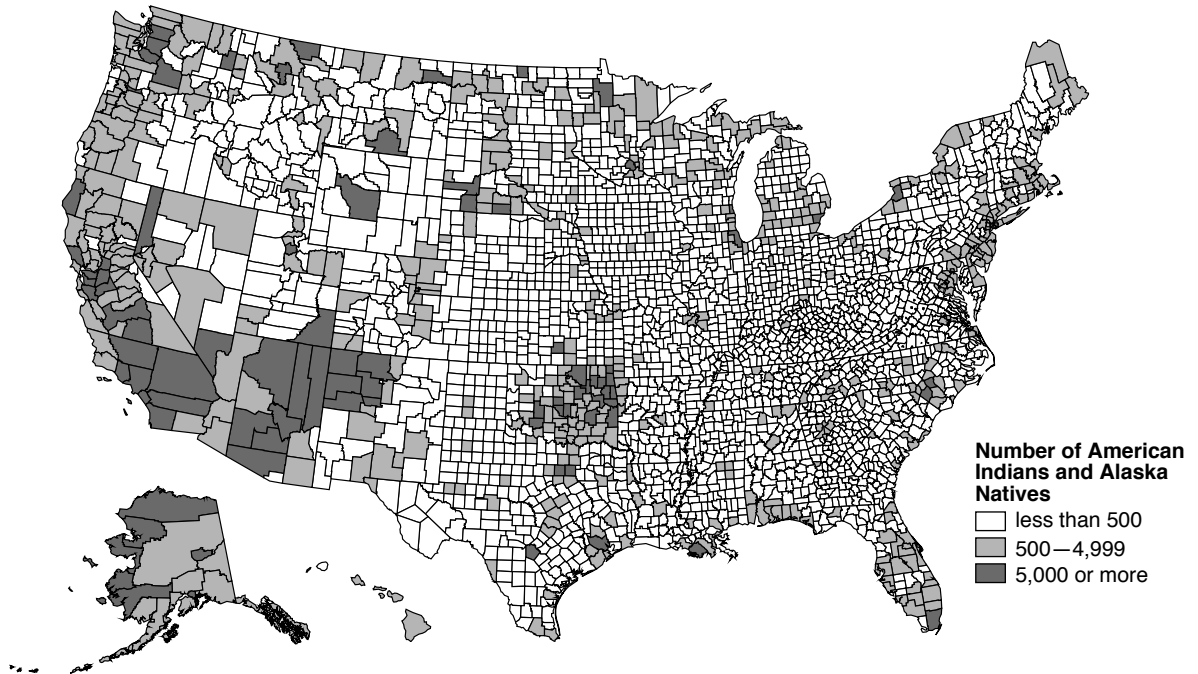
distribution of American Indians appears to be a relatively stable one for the foreseeable future.” He notes that, although Indians are highly mobile, they tend to move according to well-established patterns that maintain the current distribution among counties and states.³⁸

California’s 1997 American Indian population of 307,000 (including 118,000 American Indians of Hispanic origin) results in part from the urban relocation programs of the 1950s and 1960s. Oklahoma had the second-largest population of American Indians (including Hispanics): 260,000 in 1997.

The Navajo Reservation and Trust Lands, which extend from Arizona into New Mexico and Utah, contain by far the largest Indian enclave in the country. The 1990 census counted 143,000 Navajos and other Indians in this area—but this number is known to be an undercount. An estimated 12

Figure 8

American Indian and Alaska Native Population of U.S. Counties, 1997



Note: The highest number in any county was 56,346. The population estimates include Hispanic American Indians and Alaska Natives.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census. Accessed online at <http://www.census.gov/population/estimates/county/crh/> (various files), on Feb. 1, 1999.

percent of American Indians living on reservations may have been missed in the census.³⁹

Eskimos and Aleuts are highly concentrated in the Pacific Northwest. In 1990, 78 percent of Eskimos and 42 percent of Aleuts lived in Alaska. Nine percent of Eskimos and 26 percent of Aleuts lived in other Pacific states.

Urban Residence

Minorities are more likely than whites to live in cities and metropolitan areas. In 1997, 88 percent of minorities lived in metropolitan areas, compared with 77 percent of non-Hispanic whites.⁴⁰ Blacks and American Indians are the only minority groups with any significant rural population. Nearly one-half of American Indians live in rural areas, many on reservations. About one in seven African Americans

resided in rural areas in 1997—primarily in the South.

Minorities are a significant presence in many of the nation's largest metropolitan areas. Minorities accounted for at least one-third of the residents in seven of the largest metropolitan areas in 1997, including New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Washington-Baltimore, and San Francisco-Oakland-San Jose. Minorities were more than one-half of the residents in the Los Angeles and Miami-Fort Lauderdale metropolitan areas.⁴¹ In most cases, these metro areas include a mix of racial and ethnic groups—no single group dominates.

Central Cities

Minorities make up a disproportionately large share of residents in the central cities that form the core of metropolitan areas. The percentage has been increasing. Between 1980

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Puerto Ricans tend to live in urban areas in the Northeast, where segregated neighborhoods are the rule.

and 1998, the minority share of central-city populations climbed from 35 percent to 47 percent.

The growing minority share of central city populations is reflected in the shifting makeup of local governments and has contributed to a new generation of minority politicians. Many of the nation's leading minority politicians gained national prominence as mayors of large cities, including Michael White (Cleveland) and Federico Peña (Denver). Peña later served in President Bill Clinton's cabinet.

Several factors help explain the high concentration of minorities in central cities. First, cities are the ports of entry for Asian, Hispanic, and other minority immigrants. Second, large industrial cities where segregated neighborhoods were the rule absorbed most of the millions of southern blacks who moved north after 1910. Third, discriminatory real estate practices and de facto segregation restrained the movement of minorities to the suburbs at the same time that non-Hispanic whites were moving out of central cities. Fourth, minorities are disproportionately poor and many cannot afford housing in the suburbs. About 11 percent of white renter-households lived in public or subsidized housing in 1998, compared with 24 percent of black, 17 percent of

American Indian, 16 percent of Latino, and 8 percent of Asian renter-households.

While economies are booming in some central cities, they are in decline in others. The restructuring of the American economy eliminated many traditional entry-level jobs in manufacturing and other industries located in cities. Meanwhile, many entry-level service jobs have moved to suburban areas. Entry-level jobs available in central cities tend to pay less than similar jobs in the suburbs.⁴²

Suburbs

At the same time that low-income minorities have been concentrating in central cities, middle-class and affluent minorities have been moving to the suburbs, particularly in large metropolitan areas. The minority share of suburban populations increased in most metropolitan areas during the 1980s and 1990s. Minorities accounted for 22 percent of suburbanites in 1998, up from 18 percent in 1990 and 13 percent in 1980. In 1998, 31 percent of blacks, 43 percent of Hispanics, and 53 percent of Asians lived in the suburbs. In 1990—the most recent figure available—about 25 percent of American Indians lived in suburban areas.⁴³

Minority suburbanization tends to be greatest in metropolitan areas where post-1965 immigration helped create large Hispanic and Asian populations.⁴⁴ Suburbanization of minorities is most pronounced in western cities—where 51 percent of minorities and 62 percent of non-Hispanic whites lived in suburban areas in 1990. The trend is least pronounced in the North, where just 27 percent of minorities lived in suburbs, compared with 70 percent of non-Hispanic whites.

Because suburbanization coincides with increasing incomes for many minority families, suburbs with large minority populations are being targeted by businesses looking for affluent consumers. Starting in the late 1980s, for example, developers began to build

new shopping centers in areas with large minority populations and to select retailers and merchandise that reflected the preferences of specific minority groups.⁴⁵

Residential Segregation

Minorities tend to live in residential areas that are segregated by race and ethnicity, but living patterns differ among minority groups. In most metropolitan areas, demographers Roderick Harrison and Daniel Weinberg found that in 1990, "... blacks suffer the most segregation. American Indians, Eskimos, or Aleuts have roughly the same level of segregation as Asians or Pacific Islanders, but both have lower levels than Hispanics."⁴⁶

Movement to the suburbs does not necessarily mean living in integrated neighborhoods, especially for blacks. In a study of the New York metro area, for example, Asian Americans were fully integrated in the suburbs, Hispanics were somewhat integrated, and blacks were largely segregated, even after adjusting for differences in family size and education.⁴⁷

Patterns of residential segregation vary among cities and regions. African Americans in fast-growing, economically vibrant metropolitan areas of the South and West live in less segregated neighborhoods than African Americans in the older industrial cities in the Northeast and Midwest. Except for Chicago, the most segregated cities for Hispanics are all in the Northeast. For Asian Americans, cities in California tend to be the most segregated; for American Indians, the most segregated cities are in the West and Midwest.⁴⁸

The influx of new Asian and Hispanic groups has increased residential segregation in many cities that are major ports of entry for immigrants. Demographer William Clark finds, for example, that Southeast Asians in the Los Angeles area are highly segregated. "These very high levels of separation reflect strong cultural and economic differences and

the presence of very recent arrivals," and shows "the importance of ethnic havens in creating new residential environments."⁴⁹ Segregation was lower for Asian Indians and Filipinos in Southern California.

Clark suggests that immigrant ethnic groups cluster to protect and enhance their status—much as Italian or Polish Americans did at the beginning of the century. But, he says, whether the new enclaves are way-stations through which immigrants will pass into the mainstream or whether they are permanently segregated neighborhoods will depend on the socioeconomic advancement and the preferences of each group.

The segregation of blacks declined in metropolitan areas that received large numbers of Asian and Hispanic immigrants in the 1980s, according to demographers William Frey and Reynolds Farley.⁵⁰ Similarly, William Clark found that while the separation increased among some ethnic groups in Southern California between 1970 and 1990, the residential separation of blacks from whites and Hispanics decreased.

While racial discrimination—past and present—explains much residential segregation, personal preference also plays a role. A study of Los Angeles residents found, for example, that most minorities prefer to live in areas where their ethnic or racial group makes up at least 40 percent of the population.⁵¹ Public policies have sought to end involuntary segregation, reflecting the consensus that discrimination in housing harms society, but there is less agreement about whether voluntary segregation is detrimental.

Racial differences in perceptions of what constitutes an integrated neighborhood may also sustain residential segregation. Clark found, for example, that blacks in several large cities preferred neighborhoods that were equally divided among blacks and whites. Most whites preferred an integrated neighborhood as well, but one where 80 percent of the residents were white and just 20 percent black.⁵²

Suburbs with large minority populations are being targeted by businesses.

Residential segregation is a fundamental feature that distinguishes minorities from the majority.

Where people live often signifies their socioeconomic status and may affect their chances of employment or determine their ability to borrow money. Neighborhoods also differ in the caliber of schools and services, and the likelihood of being affected by crime. Residential segregation is one of the fundamental features that distinguishes minorities from the majority society. While it may serve as a source of strength, by virtue of the support a cohesive community can provide, it can also hinder advancement. Using the conventional measures of success—such as education, occupation, and income—minorities are unlikely to advance in U.S. society unless they have the opportunity to interact with the majority society outside their own ethnic communities.

Educational Achievements

For most Americans, education is the key to a good job and promising future. In addition, upgrading the skills and education of minorities is crucial if the United States is to compete in the global economy of the 21st century.

Educational attainment has increased for minorities—as it did among non-Hispanic whites—over the past few decades. The percentages graduating from high school and attending four or more years of college improved most for African Americans and American Indians. Yet a smaller percentage of minority students than non-Hispanic whites graduate from high school. This is an increasingly serious problem given U.S. Department of Labor projections that most new jobs in the next decade will require an education beyond high school.⁵³ Smaller percentages of minorities than whites get the college or post-graduate degrees that provide access to jobs with the highest pay and greatest potential for advancement. During the 1980s and 1990s, college gradu-

ates were the only group whose income increased after adjusting for inflation.⁵⁴

The parents of today's minority youths often had less formal education than the parents of young whites. Because a student's academic performance is often affected by the parents' educational level, minority students may start school at a disadvantage. Children whose parents never attended college are much less likely to visit a library, or to have books read to them, for example, than children whose parents attended college.⁵⁵

But parents' educational levels do not explain all of the education gap among U.S. racial and ethnic groups. Researchers also look for explanations in the quality of schools, cultural values that de-emphasize education, and a tendency to track minority students into lower-level, remedial classes rather than the more rigorous classes needed to get into college.⁵⁶

Among younger adults, Hispanics have the lowest educational attainment, while non-Hispanic whites and Asians have the highest (see Figure 9, page 32). Nearly 40 percent of Latinos ages 25 to 44 never finished high school in 1998, compared with 18 percent of American Indians, 14 percent of African Americans, 10 percent of Asians and 7 percent of non-Hispanic whites.

The generally lower education levels of Hispanics are partially explained by the large numbers of Hispanic immigrants who completed little formal education in their home country. In 1998, 44 percent of foreign-born Hispanic adults were high school graduates, compared with 70 percent of U.S.-born Hispanic adults. Many Hispanic students come from homes in which little English is spoken, which can hinder their academic progress. Hispanic children are also much less likely to attend preschool, where many young children learn the social and academics skills that help them succeed in school. In 1996, 49 percent of Hispanic 4-year-olds were enrolled in a school program, com-

pared with 65 percent of white and 79 percent of black 4-year-olds.

Hispanics are less likely than other minority groups to attend or graduate from college. Less than one-third of young Hispanic adults had attended college in 1998, compared with two-fifths of American Indians, nearly one-half of blacks, three-fifths of non-Hispanic whites, and two-thirds of Asians.

American Indians also have a relatively low likelihood of graduating from high school or college. Uneven access to good schools and cultural and linguistic barriers explain some of this lower educational attainment. In the past, many reservation Indians attended boarding schools that stressed cultural assimilation rather than academic achievement. Native languages and religious practices were forbidden, which discouraged many children from attending school. In 1980, just over one-half (56 percent) of American Indians ages 25 or older had completed 12 or more years of school. By 1990, about two-thirds of all American Indians ages 25 or older were high school graduates. Four-fifths of younger adults (ages 25 to 44) had graduated from high school by 1998. One-seventh of young American Indian adults had graduated from college in 1998.

The lower educational attainment among African Americans adults is in part a vestige of past discrimination that denied educational opportunities to large numbers of blacks, especially in the rural South. In 1970, only about one-third of African American adults had graduated from high school. Younger blacks have benefited from the civil rights advances of the 1960s. In 1998, 86 percent of blacks ages 25 to 44 graduated from high school, close to the percentage for whites and Asians (see Figure 9, page 32). Yet non-Hispanic whites in this age group are still twice as likely—and Asians are three times as likely—as young African Americans to complete four or more years of college.

About 90 percent of both Asians and non-Hispanic whites graduate

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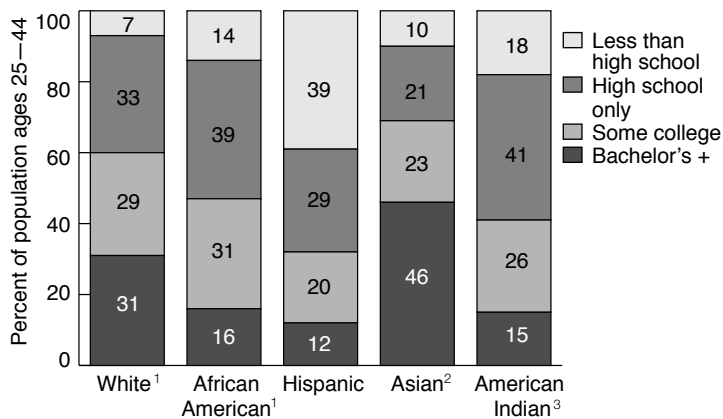
The percentage of young African Americans graduating from high school increased from 56 percent to 88 percent between 1970 and 1998.

from high school, but Asians are more likely than whites to complete four or more years of college. The educational success of Asians and Pacific Islanders may be best exemplified by the share who continue beyond a four-year college degree. About 15 percent of Asians and Pacific Islanders ages 25 or older had a graduate or professional degree in 1998—much higher than the percentage for whites (9 percent) and roughly three to four times the rates for other minorities.⁵⁷ This may reflect the fact that many Asian adults came to the United States specifically to attend universities. Others came already holding college degrees.

The persistent gap in educational attainment is linked to experiences in elementary and secondary school for many minorities. Many black, Hispanic, and American Indian students do not take the advanced math and science courses that prepare students for higher education. Among eighth graders in 1996, 27 percent of white and Asian students were taking algebra, compared with 20 percent of black and Hispanic students and 14 percent of American Indian students. The gap widens at higher levels of mathematics. Nearly one-fourth (23

Figure 9

Educational Attainment of Adults Ages 25 to 44 by Race and Ethnicity, 1998



Note: Hispanics may be of any race.

¹Excludes Hispanics.

²Includes Pacific Islanders and excludes Hispanics.

³Includes Eskimos and Aleuts and excludes Hispanics.

Source: Population Reference Bureau analysis of the March 1998 Current Population Survey.

percent) of the Asian graduates of the high school class of 1994 had taken calculus, compared with 4 percent of black and American Indian students, 6 percent of Hispanics, and 10 percent of whites.⁵⁸

Beginning in the 1960s, affirmative action policies tried to make up for past discrimination by giving minority youth some advantage in college admissions. In the 1990s, however, these policies are being scaled back or abandoned in many states (see Box 4, page 34). Some minority advocates fear that minorities will lose ground in educational attainment if they are not given extra help in getting into good colleges. Others maintain that minorities were not really helped by preference policies, and that the policies discriminated against whites.

Working Lives

The more education people complete, the more likely they are to be working. Eighty-one percent of college-educated Americans were in the labor force in 1998, for example, compared with 45 percent of high school

drop-outs. And fewer new jobs will be available for lower-skilled workers in the future.

But labor force participation differs among racial and ethnic groups regardless of educational level, which suggests that cultural, societal, economic, and other factors also affect employment. Among men, Hispanics were the mostly likely to be working in 1998—79 percent of Hispanic men ages 16 and older were in the labor force. Black men were least likely to be working (68 percent). The reverse was true for women. Black women had the highest female labor force participation (64 percent) of all racial and ethnic groups, while Hispanic women (56 percent) had the lowest.⁵⁹

Although many minority Americans have achieved remarkable success in business, academia, and other sectors, minorities encounter difficulties in getting and keeping good jobs. They tend to be clustered in the lower-status occupations, and many continue to face discrimination in hiring and promotion. Except for Asians, minorities are more likely than whites to be unemployed. African American, American Indian, and Hispanic men were roughly twice as likely as white men to be unemployed in 1998. The pattern is similar among women.

Unemployment statistics do not capture the number of discouraged workers—people who have given up hope of finding a job. Neither do they reflect the number of underemployed individuals—people who are working part-time or in jobs for which they are overqualified. Bureau of Labor Statistics data show that minorities are overrepresented among discouraged and part-time workers as well.

Hispanics, African Americans, and American Indians are more likely than non-Hispanic whites or Asians to work in lower-paying, semi-skilled jobs, or as service workers (see Table 5). They are less likely to hold white-collar jobs, which range from managerial and professional to clerical positions. Minorities who do hold white-collar jobs are more likely than

whites or Asians to work as typists, clerks, or salespeople rather than as higher-earning managers or professionals. And, while the share of U.S. workers in farming, fishing, or forestry is quite small, it is greatest among Hispanics, reflecting the large number of Hispanics who work in agriculture.

The occupational status of minorities has improved slowly over the past decade. Between 1990 and 1998, the percentage of blacks in managerial and professional occupations increased from 17 percent to 20 percent, while the percentage increased from 13 percent to 15 percent for Hispanics and from 16 percent to 20 percent for American Indians.

Economic restructuring during the last few decades eliminated many jobs in large industrial cities that have sizable minority populations. These job losses were especially problematic for African American men living in the Northeast and Midwest. While black men were struggling to find and keep jobs, black women saw their employment options expanding. Some analysts think that the near equality of labor force participation rates and earnings of African American men and women discouraged marriage and contributed to the high rates of unmarried childbearing and of female-headed families.⁶⁰

The growing importance of information technology in the U.S. economy has also put many minorities at a disadvantage. A 1999 report by the U.S. Department of Commerce noted that black, Hispanic, and American Indian households are less likely than white or Asian households to own a computer or use the Internet.⁶¹ In 1998, roughly one-half of Asian and white households had a personal computer, compared with only one-third of American Indians and one-fourth of blacks and Hispanics. Minorities are also less likely to use a computer at work. The report warns that non-Asian minorities will not be as competitive for jobs in the future if they lack experience with information technology.

Table 5

Occupational Distribution by Race and Ethnicity, 1998

Occupation	Percent of employed persons, ages 16+				
	Non-Hispanic				Hispanic
	White	African American	Asian	American Indian	
Total (thousands)	97,162	14,028	4,942	892	12,983
White Collar					
Managerial and professional ¹	33	20	34	20	15
Technical and administrative ²	30	30	31	31	23
Blue Collar					
Skilled labor ³	11	8	8	12	13
Semi-skilled and unskilled labor ⁴	12	20	11	17	22
Services⁵	12	21	15	17	21
Farming, fishing, and forestry	2	1	1	2	5

Note: Hispanics may be of any race. Asian includes Pacific Islanders. American Indian includes Eskimos and Aleuts. Percentages may not add to 100 because of rounding.

¹ Includes managers, administrators, professionals, and teachers.

² Includes technicians and related support staff, administrative and clerical support, and sales.

³ Includes precision production, craft, and repair workers.

⁴ Includes machine operators, assemblers, inspectors, transportation workers, handlers, equipment cleaners, helpers, and laborers.

⁵ Includes private household workers, protective service, and other service workers.

Source: Population Reference Bureau analysis of the March 1998 Current Population Survey.

The labor force experience of minorities—and its effects on other aspects of life—is a crucial part of U.S. society. The growing size of the minority population makes the full participation of all racial and ethnic groups in the labor force increasingly important for the United States. The share of minorities in the civilian labor force grew from 18 percent in 1980 to 26 percent in 1998, and is projected to increase further.⁶² While more minorities are getting the education that provides entry to higher-status jobs, many remain in “dead-end” jobs or face frequent unemployment. And many minorities who have made it to the professional sphere still encounter barriers to full participation. As doors open to better opportunities, they often reveal closed doors farther along the career path. This “glass ceiling” that keeps many minorities out of executive suites and board rooms remains a salient issue as we enter the new century.

Income, Wealth, and Poverty

The disadvantaged position that minorities hold in the United States is exemplified by their low economic status. Minorities tend to earn less than whites—even when they have similar educational levels—and they possess far fewer material and financial assets than whites. But averages and medians mask vast differences in

the economic well-being within minority groups and the improvements in minorities' socioeconomic status.

In 1997, Asians earned higher incomes than whites or other minorities, which reflects their higher educational attainment and higher-status jobs. At \$45,400 per year, the median household income of Asians was 12 percent higher than that of whites (\$40,600) in 1997. The incomes of other minority groups were significantly lower. Annual median

Box 4

Affirmative Action in University Admissions

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 provided the most comprehensive anti-discrimination initiatives in history. It outlawed discrimination in employment, public accommodations, and programs funded by the federal government. The following year, President Lyndon B. Johnson issued Executive Order 11246, which authorized the U.S. Department of Labor to take “affirmative” efforts to ensure the employment and equal treatment of minority workers. The latter order launched an umbrella of programs designed to remedy past discrimination against minorities and women in such areas as hiring, job promotion, and education.¹

Affirmative action measures in education have been especially contentious in the 1990s for two reasons. First, despite affirmative action, young whites (and Asians) are more likely to graduate from college than young blacks, Hispanics, and American Indians. Second, this gap in educational attainment is a major barrier to minorities' entry into higher status occupations and upper-level incomes.

Supporters argue that affirmative action programs are necessary to combat institutional barriers to the advancement of historically disadvantaged groups. Affirmative action opponents feel that these programs often promote less qualified individuals, dilute academic and employment standards, unfairly exclude whites, and even heighten racial tensions. Few proponents or opponents have

focused on why minorities are not on equal footing with whites when they graduate from high school.

The last several years have seen various efforts to roll back affirmative action, mostly in university admissions. In a 1996 ruling in *Hopwood vs. Texas*, the U.S. Supreme Court let stand a lower court decision that prohibited public universities in Texas from using race as a consideration for admission. Also in 1996, California voters approved Proposition 209, a ballot initiative that abolished affirmative action in various state programs, including college admissions. Voters in Washington state passed a similar measure two years later, and efforts are being made to place an anti-affirmative action initiative on the Florida ballot in 2000. These state actions appear to reflect national sentiments. A 1995 *Washington Post* poll showed that three-fourths of Americans opposed programs giving preference to minorities. And while whites were much more likely to oppose affirmative action, nearly half of African Americans also opposed it.²

Early findings resulting from these measures have concerned affirmative action supporters. In fall 1997, the 6,500-student freshman class at the University of Texas contained just 150 African Americans, about half the previous year's number. The university's first-year law school class that year had just four blacks and 26 Hispanics. There also was a sharp decline in the number of black and Hispanic fresh-

household income was lowest among blacks (about \$25,100) and was only slightly higher for Hispanics and American Indians (see Figure 10, page 36).

Incomes have risen for most Americans in the past 30 years. Black households enjoyed a 31 percent boost in real median household income between 1967 and 1997, compared with a 18 percent increase for whites (including Hispanics). But neither Hispanics nor Asians have seen

much improvement in the years that the Census Bureau has tracked their incomes. Hispanic households suffered a slight decline in median income between 1972 and 1997, and Asian households were no better off financially in 1997 than they were in the late 1980s.⁶³

During the 1990s, the U.S. economy went from a recession to a protracted period of growth. The robust economy during the middle and late 1990s helped raise the median house-

men at the two elite universities in the University of California system—Berkeley and Los Angeles (UCLA)—in 1998, although that number edged up in 1999. Asian admissions to Berkeley and UCLA increased both years.³ The number of black applicants to University of Washington Law School declined 41 percent between 1998 and 1999.⁴

Universities and policymakers in these states are scrambling for ways to ensure that minorities will not be excluded from enrolling in their top universities. Soon after the *Hopwood* decision, the Texas legislature passed a measure guaranteeing that all high school seniors who graduated in the top 10 percent of their class will be admitted to the state's major public universities. In early 1999, California announced a "diversity plan" for the University of California system, which would admit all students graduating in the top 4 percent of their graduating class. Also in 1999, the University of Massachusetts—in a decision referred to as a "sign of the times"—announced that it would de-emphasize race in admissions while placing greater emphasis on socioeconomic status and extracurricular activities.

Affirmative action probably will remain a hot topic for many years to come. Part of what makes the issue so complex is the fact that Americans overwhelmingly favor an equal opportunity society—the type of society to which Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. referred in his famous "I Have a

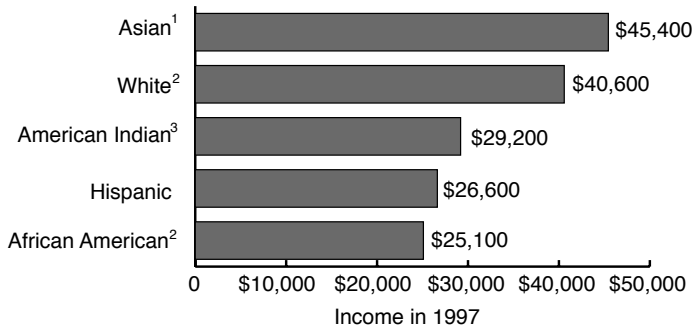
Dream" speech of 1963. In that speech, Dr. King expressed his hope for a society in which his children "will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."⁵ With ample evidence that race does make a difference in the kind of education students get, the question of exactly how to achieve equal opportunity for everyone will continue to be debated well into the next century.

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Figure 10

Median Household Income by Race and Ethnicity, 1997



¹ Includes Pacific Islanders and excludes Hispanics.

² Excludes Hispanics.

³ Includes Eskimos and Aleuts and excludes Hispanics.

Source: Population Reference Bureau analysis of the March 1998 Current Population Survey.

hold income for blacks, whites, and American Indians; yet the gaps between whites and Asians and the other minorities changed little. Hispanics and Asians saw a modest decline in household income between 1989 and 1997. The influx of Asian and Hispanic immigrants in the 1990s reduced the average incomes for these groups because recent immigrants usually earn less than longer-term residents. Immigrants' incomes tend to rise over time as they improve their language skills, knowledge of the job market, and U.S. job experience.

The racial and ethnic disparities in household income arise from a variety of reasons. Some of these reasons appear to be straightforward. Minorities have lower educational attainment than whites, for example, which usually translates into lower incomes. But income gaps also reflect complex social, cultural, and economic factors that affect educational levels, occupational choices, and ultimately household income. Hispanic women are less likely to work outside the home, for example; Asians are more likely than blacks or whites to include more than two working adults in the same household; and African American women are more likely to head a household without a husband. Also, minority youths may not be encour-

aged to prepare for college, and once in the workplace, they may be routed into jobs with little chance of advancement.

Even the educational differences among racial and ethnic groups have a complicated association with income. The financial rewards for education are lower for minorities than for whites, and they are not consistent across minority groups. Asians have higher earnings than other minorities with the same level of education, but they must complete more education than whites to earn comparable salaries.

Non-Hispanic whites with at least a bachelor's degree earned \$19,000 (in 1997 dollars) more per year than whites who had no more than a high school education, on average. The annual income added by a bachelor's degree was \$18,700 for Asians, \$16,000 for Hispanics, \$15,500 for American Indians, and \$12,800 for blacks.⁶⁴ The differences in the return on a college education probably also reflect regional differences in incomes, racial discrimination in hiring and promotions, and disparities in the quality of education they received.

Average incomes and living costs tend to be higher in cities and geographic regions where minority groups are concentrated. Most Asians, for example, live in large cities of the West or Northeast where salaries and living costs are relatively high. Although Asians' median household income exceeds that of whites for the nation as a whole, the 1990 census showed that Asians' median income was less than that of non-Hispanic whites in New York, Dallas, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C., in 1989. The lower average incomes of blacks and American Indians are related to the large share of blacks in the rural South and of American Indians in rural areas where average incomes and living costs are lower.

Blacks, Hispanics, and American Indians are more likely than whites or Asians to live in single-parent families with children. This could contribute

to their lower median family incomes because single-parent families have lower incomes than married-couple families, in part because there are fewer potential workers in the household and because single-parent families tend to be headed by women, who earn less than men, on average. In 1997, the annual median family income for female-headed families (\$21,000) was less than one-half that of all married-couple families (\$51,600).⁶⁵ Even among married couples, however, median income is lower among minorities. The median for black married couples is 84 percent that of non-Hispanic whites; the median for Hispanic couples is 62 percent that of non-Hispanic whites.

Household income reflects the number of earners in a household, as well as the income of each earner. In 1997, 58 percent of white families had two or more household members working, compared with 45 percent of black households and 49 percent of Hispanic households. But 18 percent of Asian families had three or more earners, compared with 13 percent of non-Hispanic white families.⁶⁶

Within the minority population, more families and households have entered upper-middle-class, even affluent, income levels. The number of minority households with inflation-adjusted incomes of \$50,000 or more grew from 2.7 million in 1979 to 4.4 million in 1989 and 6.0 million in 1997. Part of this increase resulted from the rapid growth of minority populations over nearly two decades, but it also reflects improvement in incomes within minority groups. The percentage of minority households with incomes of \$50,000 or more grew from 20 percent to 24 percent between 1979 and 1997.⁶⁷

More Hispanic, African American, and American Indian households climbed into the upper income bracket during the 1990s. Between 21 percent and 25 percent of these three groups had incomes of \$50,000 or more in 1997. But the percentages are small relative to whites and Asians. About 40 percent of white households

and 46 percent of Asian households had an annual income of \$50,000 in 1997.

While median incomes remain generally lower for minorities than for whites, the economic success of some minorities provides a positive example for minority youth and wider access to power and greater financial resources for minority communities. But this same success has some negative aspects as well. It has convinced many white Americans that racial discrimination no longer hinders the advancement of U.S. minorities and that minorities no longer need extra protection or help. Within minority groups, the movement of some families into the middle and upper classes can provide social connections that help others improve their status. It also may strain minority group cohesion because some remain in poverty while others are advancing.

Average incomes and living costs tend to be higher in cities where minorities are concentrated.

Accumulated Wealth

Income is only one measure of economic advancement and well-being. Minorities still lag far behind whites in terms of net savings and accumulated or inherited assets. Accumulated wealth is a critical dimension of economic status because it can cushion the financial impact of sudden health problems, unexpected unemployment, or other emergencies. Savings or loans secured by assets also help pay college costs for children or the down payment on a house. The vast racial gap in wealth perpetuates the lower status of minorities.⁶⁸

The median net worth of whites including Hispanics is about 10 times that of blacks or Latinos (see Table 6, page 38). Differences in family structure account for some of this disparity. The percentage of female-headed households is greater for blacks and Latinos than for whites. In 1993, the median net wealth of all married-couple households (\$61,900) was nearly five times that of female-headed households (\$13,300).

A large wealth gap exists even for households with similar incomes or

Table 6

Median Net Worth of Households by Race and Ethnicity, 1993

	White	African American	Hispanic
All households*	\$45,700	\$4,400	\$4,700
Households in:			
Lowest income quintile	\$7,600	\$300	\$500
Highest income quintile	\$123,400	\$45,000	\$55,900

Note: Hispanics may be of any race. White and African American totals include Hispanics.
 *Race/ethnicity is that of the householder.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census. Accessed online at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/wealth/wlth93f.html>, on May 16, 1999.

composition. Among households in the highest fifth (or quintile) of all incomes, for example, the median wealth of white households (\$123,400) is two to three times that of blacks or Hispanics. For households in the lowest fifth of incomes, the median wealth of white households was \$7,600 in 1993, more than 30 times that of black households, and 15 times that of Hispanics. Part of the reason for this gap is that low-income white households—especially those with elderly people—are more likely than their minority counterparts to own a home.

Data on the accumulated wealth of Asians and American Indians are not available, but measures of homeownership and business ownership provide clues to the value of their assets.

Homeownership

Equity in a home is the largest single source of wealth for most Americans. While rates vary among groups, all minority groups have homeownership rates 17 to 27 percentage points below that of whites. In 1998, 72 percent of white households owned homes. Just over one-half of American Indian and Asian American households owned a home in 1998, while about two-fifths of Hispanic and black households owned a home.

Homeownership is surprisingly low among Asians and Pacific Islanders, given their relatively high

income levels. One reason for this apparent anomaly is the large share of recent Asian immigrants who may not have been here long enough to accumulate enough money for a down payment. Another factor is that Asians and Pacific Islanders tend to live in cities with the nation’s most expensive housing. Nearly one-half of all Asians and Pacific Islanders reside in the Los Angeles, New York, Honolulu, or San Francisco metropolitan areas, where average home prices were between \$177,000 and \$307,000 in 1997, well above the national average price in metropolitan areas: \$122,000.⁶⁹ Many middle-class Asians cannot afford to buy a home in these cities.

Business Ownership

The rapid growth of the minority population and a surge in business activity within minority groups is changing the profile of U.S. business owners. Many immigrants begin their own businesses because they are excluded from promising jobs by limited English proficiency, lack of American educational credentials, or discrimination.⁷⁰ The number of minority-owned firms grew by about 750,000 between 1987 and 1992—increasing from 1,214,000 to 1,966,000. The minority share of all U.S. businesses rose from 9 percent to 11 percent over the same period—a notable increase, but still far below their proportion of the population.

The number of Hispanic-owned firms surged between 1987 and 1992, and surpassed the number owned by African Americans (see Table 7). These two minority groups account for just over two-thirds of all minority-owned businesses. Asians account for nearly 30 percent of minority businesses, although they make up just 13 percent of the minority population. Barely 2 percent of minority-owned firms are held by American Indians, Eskimos, or Aleuts.

Many Asian immigrants came to the United States specifically to take advantage of the business opportuni-

ties available here, and Asians' overall business ownership rates are higher than those of other minorities. The business ownership rate for Asians was 68 (businesses for every 1,000 Asians) in 1992, more than twice the rate for Hispanics, who had the next highest ownership rates among minorities. The average annual receipts for Asian-owned firms (\$166,000) were significantly higher than those of any other minority group.

Some Asian groups surpass the white business ownership rate of 80 per 1,000. By 1992, for example, Koreans had a business ownership rate of 113 per 1,000 population. The high Korean rate reflects the selective migration of highly educated Koreans, and possibly a greater willingness among Korean immigrants to pool resources to start or expand a business. Asian Indians (with 93 businesses per 1,000 population), Chinese (79 businesses per 1,000), Vietnamese (78 businesses per 1,000), and Japanese (69 businesses per 1,000) are other Asian groups well represented in the business community. Hawaiians and Filipinos, in contrast, are much less likely than other Asian groups to own businesses.

Among Hispanics, Cubans have the highest business-ownership rate. In 1992 Cubans owned 84 businesses for every 1,000 Cubans—more than three times the rate of Mexicans, and nearly five times the rate for Puerto Ricans. Many U.S. Cubans were professionals or business owners in Cuba before they immigrated to the United States. Cubans are heavily concentrated in southern Florida, which provides a solid base of Hispanic consumers. More than one-half of all Cuban businesses are in the Miami area, and many rely on a Cuban clientele.

Poverty and Welfare

While many minority group members have achieved economic success, the poverty rate for each minority group is higher than the rate for whites. The percentage of blacks, Hispanics, and

Table 7

Business Ownership by Race and Ethnic Group, 1987 and 1992

Race/ethnicity	Number of firms (thousands)		Firms per 1,000 population *	
	1987	1992	1987	1992
White, non-Hispanic	12,482	15,288	67	80
African American	424	621	15	20
Hispanic	422	772	21	32
Cuban	61	93	63	84
Other Hispanic	104	253	23	47
Mexican	230	379	19	25
Puerto Rican	28	47	11	17
Asian/Pacific Islander	355	565	57	68
Korean	69	99	102	113
Asian Indian	52	89	76	93
Chinese	90	148	63	79
Vietnamese	26	58	49	78
Japanese	53	62	66	69
Filipino	40	60	33	37
Hawaiian	4	8	22	34
American Indian/Alaska Native	21	41	14	19
Aleut	1	1	54	47
Eskimo	2	2	44	38
American Indian	18	38	10	18

Note: Hispanics may be of any race. African American, Asian/Pacific Islander, and American Indian/Alaska Native totals include some Hispanics.

*Authors' estimates based on total population figures derived from interpolation of published figures.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Survey of Minority-Owned Business Enterprises*, various volumes.

American Indians in poverty is about three times that of non-Hispanic whites (see Table 8, page 41). Even Asian Americans, who have a higher average income than non-Hispanic whites, are more likely than whites to live in families with incomes below the poverty line established by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget—\$16,400 for an average family of four in 1997. Further, minorities are overrepresented among the poorest of the poor—families with incomes less than one-half the official poverty threshold. More than one-half (57 percent) of those in extreme poverty are minorities.

The lower average educational attainment of minorities explains only part of their greater poverty rates. Poverty rates are higher among minorities than among non-Hispanic whites at every level of educational attainment. Among high school

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Business ownership rates are highest among Asian Americans. These high rates in part reflect the selective immigration of highly educated Asians.

dropouts ages 25 or older, the poverty rate for blacks (37 percent) is still more than twice that of non-Hispanic whites (18 percent). Latinos and American Indians with less than a high school education also have higher poverty rates than non-Hispanic whites or Asians without a high school diploma. Among college graduates, the poverty rates for blacks, Latinos, and American Indians are two to three times that of non-Hispanic whites. Even among Asians ages 25 and older, the poverty rate for college graduates is more than twice that of non-Hispanic whites.

Minorities in poverty rely on welfare benefits at a higher rate than poor non-Hispanic whites. About 70 percent of non-Hispanic whites lived in households where someone received government assistance in 1997, while nearly 90 percent of poor blacks and poor American Indians received welfare benefits. Eighty-three percent of poor Hispanics and nearly 70 percent of poor Asians received welfare in 1997. The relatively high reliance on welfare among blacks, Latinos, and American Indians may reflect the lack of savings, credit, home equity, or other assets that can sustain people through spells of poverty. Also, minorities are more likely to be in ex-

treme poverty, and to remain poor for longer periods than whites.

An important segment of the population is highly vulnerable to long-term poverty and welfare dependence, problems with the law, and other personal and family problems. This highly disadvantaged population—sometimes referred to as the “truly needy” or “underclass”—tends to be concentrated in neighborhoods of extreme poverty and to share certain risk factors, such as dropping out of high school, teenage childbearing, and incomes below the poverty line. The children raised in these high-risk circumstances are particularly worrisome for Americans, and a disproportionate share of these children are minorities. A recent study shows that, in 1998, minorities accounted for two-thirds of the 9.2 million children at greatest risk of joining the truly needy population.⁷¹

Political Participation

The rapid growth of the U.S. minority population has increased its political clout. In particular, protracted residential segregation, a strong Voting Rights Act, and good political organization created a surge of new minority-majority districts when political districts were redrawn following the 1990 census.⁷² Partly as a result of this, more minorities than ever are serving in the U.S. Congress. The 106th Congress includes among its 535 voting members 37 African Americans, 18 Hispanics, and three Asians and Pacific Islanders in the U.S. House of Representatives; and two Asians and Pacific Islanders and one American Indian in the U.S. Senate.⁷³

Minority voters are being wooed by both major political parties. African Americans and most Hispanic groups have tended to support Democratic candidates, while Asians and Pacific Islanders have more varied political preferences. Minority voters helped re-elect Bill Clinton as

president in 1996. Whites supported Republican candidate Bob Dole over Clinton by 3 percentage points (46 percent to 43 percent). Asians supported Dole over Clinton (48 percent to 43 percent), but 84 percent of blacks and 72 percent of Hispanics voted for Clinton.⁷⁴

Minorities played a key role in state political races as well. In November 1998, African American voters helped elect Democratic governors in Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina and re-elect a Democratic governor in Maryland. In each case, most white voters supported the Republican candidate. Minority voters also played a pivotal role in U.S. Senate elections in North Carolina and South Carolina. Moreover, black, Hispanic, and Asian coalitions were instrumental to the outcome of the U.S. Senate race in New York and the governor's race in California.⁷⁵

The growing number of minority voters has also helped elect more minorities to public offices. The ability of minorities to translate their growing numbers into political power was also bolstered by the federal Voting Rights Act, especially after it was extended in 1982. The number of African American elected officials jumped from 4,890 in 1980 to 8,658 in 1997, and the number of Hispanic public officials rose from 3,147 in 1985 to 5,459 in 1994.⁷⁶

The rapid growth and close proximity of minority groups in many multiethnic cities occasionally pits one minority group against another. In other cases, members of different minority groups within a jurisdiction can build effective coalitions that can control the outcome of elections when no single minority represents most voters.

Coalitions between minority and white voters also can sweep a minority candidate to office. Multiracial and multiethnic coalitions in recent years have led to the election of African American mayors in Denver, Minneapolis, Houston, and other cities, and to the election of African-

Table 8

Poverty and Welfare Receipt by Race and Ethnicity, 1997

	Non-Hispanic				
	White	African American	Asian	American Indian	Hispanic
Total U.S. population (thousands) ¹	191,859	33,631	10,317	2,035	30,637
Percent in poverty	9	26	14	25	27
Percent in extreme poverty ²	3	12	6	13	11
Percent receiving welfare ³	33	56	31	50	54
Percent of poor receiving welfare ³	69	87	67	88	83

Note: Hispanics may be of any race. Asian includes Pacific Islanders. American Indian includes Eskimos and Aleuts.

¹ Number of persons for whom poverty status is determined.

² Below 50 percent of the official poverty threshold.

³ In households where someone received at least one of the following: Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, General Assistance, Supplemental Security Income, Medicaid, food stamps, free or reduced-price school lunches, and housing or rent subsidies.

Source: Population Reference Bureau analysis of the March 1998 Current Population Survey.

American Douglas Wilder as governor of Virginia and Chinese-American Gary Locke as governor of Washington state. In 1992, according to the U.S. Conference of Mayors, minorities represented nearly one-third of the mayors of cities with populations of 500,000 or more.

As minority populations continue to grow and recent immigrants become naturalized, minorities will have a larger voice in politics. The geographic concentration of minorities will enhance their political strength, especially in large cities where non-Hispanic whites are no longer a majority. The number of cities of 50,000 or more residents in which non-Hispanic whites are a minority increased from 58 in 1980 to 100 in 1990, and it is likely to have increased further during the 1990s.

Minorities are still underrepresented among elected officials. A 1992 survey by the Census Bureau found that less than 5 percent of local elected officials were black, Hispanic, Asian, or American Indian. African Americans were 3 percent of all local elected officials, Hispanics were 1 percent, American Indians and Alaska Natives were 0.4 percent, and Asians and Pacific Islanders were

only 0.1 percent of all elected local officials.⁷⁷

Minorities make up 28 percent of the total population, yet they represent just 21 percent of the citizen voting-age population. In the November 1996 elections, minorities accounted for 18 percent of voters.⁷⁸

There are three reasons why the political strength of minorities still falls short of what their total population size would suggest. First, the younger age structure of minorities means that a smaller share of the minority population is of voting age, and an even smaller share is over age 50, the age when Americans are most likely to vote. Second, the large number of immigrants among minorities means that many are not citizens and therefore are ineligible to vote. Finally, minorities generally have a lower socioeconomic status than the national average, and individuals with low incomes and educational levels are less likely to register and vote than are more affluent, better-educated individuals.

Many minorities are not citizens and therefore are ineligible to vote.

Minorities and U.S. Culture

For much of this century, Americans of different racial backgrounds came into contact with one another in few places and in limited ways. Legal and social changes in the 1950s and 1960s lowered the barriers to minority participation in society and schools and workplaces became more integrated. But the private lives of minorities and non-Hispanic whites have continued along largely separate tracks. In recent decades, however, minorities' growing numbers and economic strength have helped introduce aspects of minority cultures to the majority white population.

American popular music provides a telling example of how minority groups can influence U.S. culture. A February 1999 *Time* magazine cover story examined the growing dominance of hip-hop, a musical form that

began two decades earlier among blacks in the inner cities. Hip-hop is not only influencing popular music, but also films and fashions. Latin music and culture are also gaining popularity among non-Hispanics. In 1999, several Hispanic artists, including Ricky Martin and Jennifer Lopez, had number one songs on *Billboard* magazine's pop music charts.

African American music has long influenced the American mainstream. Swing music—popular in the 1930s and 1940s—drew heavily from African American jazz, just as early rock-and-roll drew from African American rhythm and blues influences in the mid- and late 1950s. The black-owned Motown Records gained universal appeal in the 1960s.⁷⁹ More recently, Latin music has been influencing popular American music. Cuban-American Gloria Estefan, for example, has melded Latin and mainstream American popular music in a successful recording career.

Food preferences reflect another area of minority influence on mainstream culture. Until recently, most non-Hispanic whites distinguished between “American” and “ethnic” food, and encountered the latter only in “ethnic” restaurants. More recently, American cuisine has included traditional American dishes with ingredients and cooking techniques that are commonly used in minority cultures.

Changes in the nation's school curriculums are another example of how the majority sometimes must adapt to the minority culture, and illustrate that assimilation can involve adjustments by both sides. Many people are concerned that shifting the curriculum from one based solely on European history and culture to one that includes the history and literature of all the world's peoples will weaken students' education.⁸⁰ Other people believe that a broader understanding of world cultures will benefit all students, especially as they prepare for employment in an economy involved in global competition.

Resegregation and Market Segmentation

The widening influence of food and music originating with U.S. minority groups has paralleled other, potentially divisive trends: the resegregation of neighborhoods and schools and the increasing segmentation of the U.S. population into racial, ethnic, age, and geographic market groups.

The National Center for Education Statistics and a recent Harvard study report that students are more isolated by race and ethnicity in schools now than in the 1980s.⁸¹ The change is relatively small and is largely explained by the increasing percentage of minority students in many school districts, but it shows that minority students have less opportunity to interact with white students in school and vice versa. In 1987, the average black student attended a school that was 36 percent white. By 1996, this had dropped to about 33 percent. Hispanic students saw a similar drop in white classmates over this period—from 33 percent to 30 percent. Asians are much less segregated residentially and are much more likely than blacks or Hispanics to attend a majority white school. In 1996, the average Asian student attended a school that was 49 percent white, but this is a big drop from 1987, when Asian students were likely to attend a school that was 55 percent white.

Segmentation also has affected America's favorite leisure activity—television. According to A.C. Nielsen, the company that monitors television viewing, many minority groups have higher viewership rates than non-Hispanic whites.⁸² Yet minorities were almost nonexistent on TV until the 1960s. The civil rights movement and the growth in the nation's minority population prompted TV networks to become more inclusive. This shift was also promoted by advertisers working to attract minority consumers. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, viewers of all races and ethnic groups made programs like the all-black Bill Cosby family show national favorites.

More recently, changes in the broadcast industry, in which programmers focus on small demographic groups desired by advertisers, have fostered programming targeted at specific racial and ethnic groups. In addition, the rise of cable television has led to whole networks aimed at specific minority groups (such as Black Entertainment Television, Univision, and the International Channel). This proliferation of minority-themed programs on cable, however, has accompanied a decline in the number of such shows on the major broadcast networks. Few minority actors will appear, for example, in the new TV shows on the major networks' fall 1999 schedule. This lack of diversity has angered minority activists and called attention to the near absence of minorities among top network programming executives.⁸³

Recent data from Nielsen show that whites, blacks, and Hispanics watch different programs. African Americans are more likely than whites to watch TV shows that feature black casts, while Spanish-language programming has garnered the highest ratings among Hispanics. While targeted programming provides alternatives for minority television viewers, it can reinforce differences among groups and impede the development of a common culture shared by all Americans.

New Realities

The traditional image of racial and ethnic minorities in U.S. society is shifting. The relatively young age structure, high birth rates, and heavy immigration flows of minorities will continue to make the U.S. population more racially and ethnically diverse. Minorities will increasingly shape the national character, adding racial and ethnic diversity to schools, workplaces, and legislatures.

Shifting immigration patterns are injecting more diversity into individual racial and ethnic groups and eroding the numerical dominance

of African Americans in the minority population. The U.S. Hispanic population includes more Central Americans now than in the 1970s, for example, while the 1980s and 1990s brought impoverished refugees along with wealthy, college-educated professionals into the Asian American population. These demographic changes can disrupt established social patterns and at times contribute to racial tensions.

Minorities are still overrepresented among America's poor, but minority status is no longer synonymous with poverty. A growing segment of minorities are achieving affluence within mainstream society. All these changes are challenging traditional views about minorities. One belief has been that minorities will eventually blend into America's cultural melting pot. This was the experience of the European immigrants who came to America in the 19th and early 20th centuries and were absorbed into the broader society a few generations after they arrived.

Another view holds that pervasive racism, economic changes, and other factors still exclude minorities, in particular blacks and American Indians, from full participation in American society. Without intervention to ensure their civil rights and affirmative action in education and employment, a disproportionate share of minorities will remain stuck on the bottom rungs of the economic ladder.

Neither conceptual model fits today's minority groups completely. While many new immigrants seem to be following the assimilation path of European immigrants nearly a century ago, many blacks, American Indians, and Latinos—long-time Americans—remain undereducated,

underemployed, and impoverished. On the other hand, the achievements of some minorities indicate that minority status alone need not thwart advancement. An alternative future may be a more pluralistic or multicultural America, in which minorities participate fully in all aspects of society while maintaining their racial and ethnic identities.

Both the growing racial diversity of Americans and divergent economic paths followed by minorities call into question many government policies. Is providing aid solely on the basis of race or ethnicity unnecessary or unwise given the growing affluence of some minorities? Was this affluence possible only because of special government loans, scholarships, or other affirmative action programs? Recent court decisions regarding employment, minority business set-aside programs, education, and voting rights may reflect a growing tendency to abolish or weaken racially specific policies that were set in place to help minorities.

As we move into the 21st century, governments at all levels will be grappling with the new realities of America's minority population. Policymakers need to recognize the complexity and diversity of today's minority population as they reconsider existing public policies and formulate new ones. And, all Americans need to recognize that policies alone cannot ensure the inclusion of minorities at all levels of society. Individual behavior must also change. Given the broader context of majority-minority conflicts around the world, success in developing a harmonious multicultural society will offer the United States another avenue for global leadership.

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Suggested Resources

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