THE UNITED STATES POPULATION: WHERE THE NEW IMMIGRANTS ARE

By William H. Frey

With immigration to the United States clipping along at one million newcomers per year — largely of Latin American and Asian origin — America's demographic profile is becoming increasingly diverse in its race and ethnic makeup. At least this is the perception one gets when looking at national statistics. The year 2000 census will show that at least three out of ten U.S. residents will be something other than white Anglos. In the year 2006, the Hispanic population will outnumber the black population. And in the year 2030, one out of four will be either Hispanic or Asian in ethnic makeup.

These nationwide statistics suggest the formation of a "single melting pot" made up of new Americans from a variety of cultural backgrounds. Yet, an examination of individual metropolitan area settlement patterns suggests something quite different. On the one hand, we find that there are already 25 metropolitan areas that fit the "year 2030" national profile (where at least 25 percent of the population is either Hispanic or Asian, and less than 60 percent is Anglo). These include such large metropolitan areas as Los Angeles, San Diego and San Francisco (California), Miami (Florida) and Houston (Texas), as well as many smaller metropolitan areas in California, New Mexico and along the Texas-Mexico border. On the other hand, well over half (148) of the nation's 271 metro areas are at least 80 percent white — in the Northeast, Midwest and Mountain States, as well as large parts of the South — where African Americans rather than the new immigrant minorities tend to comprise the major non-white group.

In short, new immigration and infusion of Latin American and Asian minorities to the United States remain highly clustered within a handful of metropolitan areas or "multiple melting pots." Within these, levels of interracial marriages and lower levels of residential segregation accompany ethnic enclaves, new entrepreneurship and the rich cultural diversity that defined immigrant communities at the turn of the last century in the United States. At issue is when and how fast this diversity "spills over" into the rest of the nation. The new analysis that follows is based on recently released census statistics suggesting that some "spillover" of new immigrant minorities in fact is occurring, and pinpoints metropolitan areas that can expect to see continued growth of Hispanic and Asian populations.

First, though, let us consider the classic immigrant magnet metropolitan areas that still house the plurality of the nation's foreign-born, new immigrant minority groups.

"Classic" Immigrant Magnets

During the first seven years of the 1990s, about 65 percent of all immigrants to the United States situated themselves in just 10 metropolitan areas. New York and Los Angeles received about one million each, San Francisco received about a third as many, followed by Chicago (Illinois) at one-quarter million. The remaining six (Miami; Washington, D.C.; Houston and Dallas, Texas; San Diego, and Boston, Massachusetts) together received less than either New York or Los Angeles alone.

These 10 areas, which represent the dominant destinations of recent immigrants, are home to only about 30 percent of the total U.S. population. Moreover, all except Dallas and Houston are losing domestic migrants to other parts of the country at the same time that they are gaining large numbers of immigrants. And New York and Los Angeles dominate the statistics by losing about 1.5 million domestic migrants each over the 1990-97 period.

Why do immigrants continue to flock to areas that seem to be becoming less desirable to U.S. residents? The answer lies with the strong family reunification tradition in U.S. immigration laws, and the need for co-nationals from countries with similar backgrounds, languages and cultures to live in communities where they will receive both social and economic support. Family reunification immigration tends to occur in "chains" that link family members and friends to common destinations. This is especially the case for lower-skilled immigrants since they are more dependent on kinship ties for assistance in gaining entry to informal job networks that exist in the "classic" immigrant magnet metro areas.

By contrast, most native-born and longer-term residents, especially whites and blacks, are far more "footloose." They are not as economically and socially constrained to concentrate on particular parts of the country. Their migration patterns are dictated much more strongly by the pushes and pulls of employment opportunities and quality of life amenities than by kinship ties. Hence, the domestic migration losses for New York, Los Angeles and other high immigrant metro regions do not necessarily mean that U.S. residents are "fleeing" immigrants. Rather, non-immigrants are less dependent on friends and family networks for job information. They tend to move where job growth has been most explosive in recent decades, specifically large parts of the West outside of California and many of the "New South" job generating sectors like Atlanta — areas whose race-ethnic profile has been largely white and black.

Just as the 10 "classic" immigrant magnets have attracted most of the recent immigrant population, it should come as no surprise that they house most of the nation's Hispanic and Asian populations. Close to six out of ten Hispanics and Asians reside there. Los Angeles alone houses about one-fifth of the U.S. Hispanic population; yet each metropolitan area has its own particular mix. Miami holds a strong attraction for Cubans; New York City draws Dominicans, Puerto Ricans and other Caribbean-origin groups; and Chicago remains a perennial magnet for Mexicans. Just three metro areas, Los Angeles, New York and San Francisco, house over 40 percent of all U.S. Asians, although here too, the primary countries of origin differ. The Chinese are a major immigrant group for New York, Filipinos are drawn heavily to Los Angeles, and both groups show a large presence in San Francisco.

In light of these statistics, it is not surprising that four of the 10 "classic" immigrant magnets have achieved, or are close to achieving, "minority white" populations (43 percent in Miami and Los Angeles, 54 percent in Houston and 55 percent in San Francisco). The Greater New York metropolitan region, spanning 29 counties across four different states, is already only 60 percent white — well below the national average (72 percent). Moreover, the diversity is spilling over into the entire metropolitan area, not just the center of the city. Of those 29 counties, 21 are experiencing immigration gains while, at the same time, losing domestic migrants to other parts of the country.

These metropolitan areas benefit from being "multiple melting pots" despite the fact that the rest of the country is not nearly as diverse. The concentration of large numbers of new race and ethnic minorities, along with whites and blacks, should lead to a greater social and economic

incorporation of these groups within their metropolitan areas. The nature of this incorporation, involving large numbers of groups as diverse as Mexicans, Central Americans, Koreans, Indians, Vietnamese and others, will differ from one metropolitan area to another, depending on the mix of groups that reside in each. Still, the residential segregation of these new groups within port-of-entry regions, their entrenchment in well-defined occupational niches and for some groups extremely low levels of political clout will make their road to full economic and political incorporation challenging. However, the increasing levels of intermarriage which appear to be occurring within these metros, and evidence that second generation children are more likely to speak English well and identify as hyphenated Americans, suggests a potential for later assimilation, linked to both upward and outward movement from these "classic" immigrant destinations.

New Immigrant Destinations

We are now seeing evidence for the first time of some "spilling out" of the new immigrant minorities, specifically Asians and Hispanics, to metropolitan areas which previously have had small concentrations of such representation. For these minority groups, the "chains" of migration from the classic gateways, or from their home countries, are just beginning. Most of these metropolitan areas are showing substantial growth in their white and black populations as well. These cities and their surroundings tend to be job-generating magnets in the 1990s; the new immigrant minorities noted above are finding niches both at the high and low ends of the economic spectrum. In these areas, each group's population has increased by at least 40 percent over the first seven years of the 1990s, with at least 50,000 members of the group inhabiting the area in 1997.

As far as Hispanics are concerned, Las Vegas has increased its Latino population more than 100 percent during this decade. Close behind is Atlanta, the capital of the "New South," where Hispanics have had an extremely small presence until recently. As for the remaining metropolitan areas with strong Hispanic gains, they lie mostly in the U.S. Southeast and West. Portland (Oregon), Orlando and West Palm Beach (Florida), Salt Lake City (Utah), Seattle (Washington), Austin (Texas) and Phoenix (Arizona) each increased Hispanic population by more than 50 percent during the 1990s. Yakima (Washington), Tampa (Florida), Colorado Springs (Colorado), Minneapolis (Minnesota), Oklahoma City (Oklahoma), and Bakersfield and Modesto (California) increased their Hispanic populations by 40 percent or more.

Communities which already house substantial Hispanic populations include Austin, Phoenix, Yakima, Bakersfield and Modesto. Yet there are large metro areas where the Hispanic presence is small despite the recent growth surge (Atlanta, 3.2 percent; Seattle 4.2 percent; Minneapolis, 2.1 percent; Oklahoma City, 4.8 percent). The pioneering Hispanic movers into these areas will have less social infrastructure or capital to draw on but their arrival will likely pave the way for further movement in the decade ahead.

Prominent new Asian magnet metropolitan areas include Las Vegas and Atlanta — where the Asian population grew by 92 percent and 79 percent respectively. Phoenix, Dallas and Houston each increased its Asian population by more than half over the 1990s. Other new Asian magnets include Minneapolis, Portland, Boston, Seattle, Detroit (Michigan), Denver (Colorado) and Miami. The Asian presence in these metropolitan areas is not particularly large. With the exception of Seattle (7.6 percent) and Houston (4.6 percent) the Asian share of the remaining areas' populations is less than four percent, and generally considerably less. Yet most of these areas boast booming economies with rapid job growth. The Asian population is particularly attracted to regions strong in engineering and high-tech industries — a factor in a number of these metro magnets.

SUMMARY

Clearly, Asian and Hispanic immigrants are spilling over into regions of the United States with which they are not normally easily associated. Even more important, however, is the fact that they will likely continue to remain minorities in communities that are predominantly white. These ethnic "pioneers" are taking advantage of new opportunities but are also bearing the brunt of new challenges, similar to those borne by earlier immigrants to the United States. In years past, other pioneering groups migrated to the suburbs of New York, Chicago and San Francisco. Today's migration will carry the new minorities into labor markets in communities such as Salt Lake City, Minneapolis, Oklahoma City and Colorado Springs. As a result, these changes of direction within our "multiple melting pots," these new immigrant destinations, no doubt will shape the nature of both local and national race relations in the decades ahead. ■

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