

May 17, 2007

New Demographic Racial Gap Emerges

By [SAM ROBERTS](#)

With the number of nonwhite Americans above 100 million for the first time, demographers are identifying an emerging racial generation gap.

That development may portend a nation split between an older, whiter electorate and a younger overall population that is more Hispanic, black and Asian and that presses sometimes competing agendas and priorities.

“The new demographic divide has broader implications for social programs and education spending for youth,” said Mark Mather, deputy director of domestic programs for the Population Reference Bureau, a nonpartisan research group.

“There’s a fairly large homogenous population 60 and older that may not be sympathetic to the needs of a diverse youthful population,” Dr. Mather said.

The [Census Bureau](#) estimated yesterday that from July 1, 2005, to July 1, 2006, the nation’s minority population grew to 100.7 million from 98.3 million; that is about one in three of all Americans. The new figures also suggest that many states are growing more diverse as minorities disperse.

As a result of [immigration](#) and higher birthrates among many newcomers, the number of Hispanics grew by 3.4 percent nationwide and Asians by 3.2 percent. Meanwhile, the black population rose by 1.3 percent, and that of non-Hispanic whites by 0.3 percent. (The number of American Indians and Alaska Natives increased by 1 percent, and Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders by 1.7 percent.)

More than 20 percent of children in the United States either are foreign-born or have a parent who was born abroad. Nearly half the children under age 5 are Hispanic, black or Asian.

Over all, the median age of Americans reached 36.6 years, another record high. It ranged from 27.4 among Hispanics to 40.5 among non-Hispanic whites.

The census counted more than 73,000 centenarians (about 14,000 men and 59,000 women) and also 78 million baby boomers (those born from 1946 to 1964), who, as they turn 60, are helping to drive the racial generation gap.

While growth rates fluctuated, many states are becoming more racially and ethnically diverse.

“Hispanics are dispersing, especially from California,” said William H. Frey, a demographer with the [Brookings Institution](#). “Texas is gaining from all racial groups, a true multicultural magnet.”

The changes have potential implications for national politics. In Nevada, where the share of whites has declined to 59 percent from 66 percent since 2000, the voting-age population has soared 25 percent, with minorities accounting for 63 percent of that increase. Arkansas, Georgia and Tennessee have recorded the greatest percentage gains in their Hispanic population since 2000, with the biggest numerical gains, predictably, registered by California, Texas and Florida.

The biggest percentage increases in black residents were registered by Maine, South Dakota, New Hampshire and Idaho, and in Asian residents by Nevada, Arizona and New Hampshire.

In New York and Maryland, the departure of non-Hispanic whites has accelerated since 2005. (California has lost nearly 100,000, more than any other state). In the same period, New York and Michigan have recorded a loss in black residents. (Louisiana, in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, recorded losses across the board.)

The racial generation gap, Dr. Mather said, emerged relatively recently and may turn out to be temporary as the growing proportion of Hispanics, blacks and Asians gets older.

As recently as 1980, he said, the share of minorities in each generation varied by only five percentage points or less.

According to the latest figures, 80 percent of Americans over age 60 are non-Hispanic whites, compared with only 60 percent among those in their 20s and 30s, and 58 percent among people younger than 20.

Dr. Mather said the widest racial generation gaps were found in California, Texas, Arizona, Nevada, New Mexico and Texas. In Arizona, minorities account for more than half the people under the age of 20, but only one in six who are 60 and older.

The smallest gaps were found in Hawaii, Kentucky, Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont and

West Virginia.

Dr. Mather said the three most homogeneous states — Maine, Vermont and West Virginia — spent the highest proportion of their gross state product on public education.

“There does seem to be a correlation,” he said.

John B. Diamond, a professor of education at Harvard, said that “there are patterns of school funding that suggest that may be a problem down the line.” But he also said the impact might be mitigated by two factors. Because of persistent residential segregation, he said, elderly white voters do not necessarily live in the same school districts as young members of minorities. And, altruism aside, older voters may be persuaded that their pensions and other benefits depend on the income and taxes generated by a better-educated work force.

The census found that fully 21 percent of the nation’s minority population lives in California, and 12 percent in Texas.

Hispanic Americans, the largest minority, accounted for nearly half the nation’s population growth in the year ended last July 1.

The nation’s black population surpassed 40 million for the first time, the Census Bureau said, and the number of Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders topped one million.

Minorities constitute a majority in four states: Hawaii (75 percent), New Mexico (57 percent), California (57 percent) and Texas (52 percent).

[Copyright 2007 The New York Times Company](#)

[Privacy Policy](#) | [Search](#) | [Corrections](#) | [RSS](#) | [First Look](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Work for Us](#) | [Site Map](#)
