THE MONOCHROME SOCIETY
(The Limits of Diversity)

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Various demographers and other social scientists have been predicting for years that the end of the white majority in the United States is near, and that there will be a majority of minorities. CNN has broadcasted a special program on the forthcoming majority of people of color in America. President Clinton has called attention to this shift in an address at the U.C. San Diego campus on a renewed national dialogue about race relations. He argues that such a dialogue is especially needed as a preparation for the forthcoming end of the white majority, to occur somewhere in the middle of the next century. White House staffer Sylvia Mathews provides the figures as 53% white and 47% a mixture of other ethnic groups by 2050. Pointing to such figures, Clinton asks rhetorically if we should not act now to avoid America's division into "separate, unequal and isolated" camps.

Some have reacted to the expected demise of the white majority with alarm or distress. Arthur Schlesinger Jr. discusses the "cult of ethnicity," which has overtaken the concept of Americans as "one people." He writes, "Watching ethnic conflict tear one nation after another apart, one cannot look with complacency at proposals to divide the United States into distinct and immutable ethnic and racial communities, each taught to cherish its own apartness from the rest." He also criticizes diversity and multiculturalism, arguing that "the United States has to set a monocultural example in a world rent by savage ethnic conflict; the United States must demonstrate 'how a highly differentiated society holds itself together.'"
Dale Maharidge, a professor and journalist who has conducted hundreds of interviews concerning race, class, and ethnicity in California, has devoted a book to *The Coming White Minority: California’s Eruptions and America’s Future*. He reports that sometime between now and 2000, California’s population will be less than 50% white. As he writes, “‘Minorities’ will be in the majority,” a precursor to the 2050 state of racial composition nationwide, when “the nation will be almost half nonwhite.”

Maharidge comments that his interviews, observations, and research have shown that, especially in California,

> ... whites are scared. The depth of white fear is underestimated and misunderstood by progressive thinkers and the media. Whites dread the unknown and not-so-distant tomorrow when a statistical turning point will be reached that could have very bad consequences for them. They fear the change that seems to be transforming their state into something different from the rest of the United States. They fear losing not only their jobs but also their culture. Some feel that California will become a version of South Africa, in which whites will lose power when minorities are the majority.

Whites in California have demonstrated their fear of the ‘browning’ of America by forming residential “‘islands’ that are surrounded by vast ethnic or transitional communities, as well as deserts, mountain wilderness, and the ocean,” demonstrating, Maharidge predicts, “what the rest of America might become.” Whites and non-whites alike also passed the anti-immigrant Proposition 187, which Maharidge links to these same fears about the end of the white majority. Maharidge warns,

> California’s electoral discord has emanated from whites. There is ample evidence that white tension could escalate. What will California be like in 2010, when nonwhites make up 60 percent of the population? ... And how will California’s actions influence the rest of the nation as non-Hispanic whites fall from 76 percent of the U.S. populace to just over half in 2050?

In contrast, John Isbister, a professor of economics at the University of California at Santa Cruz, asks us to ponder whether America is too white. He contends, “The decline in the white
proportion is a healthy development for the country, since it will gradually replace a majority-minority confrontation with interactions between groups of more equal size and influence.\textsuperscript{12} He further notes, The principal case for a falling white proportion is simply this: it will be easier for us to transform a society of hostility and oppression into one of cooperation if we are dealing not with a majority versus several small minorities, but with groups of roughly equivalent size.\textsuperscript{13}

\textbf{One People}

As I see it, both views—that of alarm and that which celebrates the ending of the white majority and the rise of a majority of minorities—are fundamentally wrong because these positions are implicitly and inadvertently racist: they assume that people's pigmentation, or, more generally, racial attributes, determine their visions, values, and votes.\textsuperscript{14} Actually, I claim and will show that very often the opposite is true. The fact is that America is blessed with an economic and political system as well as culture and core values and much else that, while far from flawless, are embraced by most Americans of all races and ethnic groups. (To save breath, from here on, race is used to encompass ethnicity.) It is a grievous error to suggest that because American faces or skin tones may appear more diverse some fifty years from now, most Americans who hail from different social backgrounds will seek to follow a different agenda or hold a different creed than a white majority. While, of course, nobody can predict what people will believe or do fifty years hence, there is strong evidence that if they behave in any way that resembles current behavior of white, black, brown, yellow, red or other Americans, they will share the same basic aspirations, core values, and mores. Moreover, current trends in attitudes which currently reflect increases in the proportion of the non-white population further support the thesis that while the American society may well change, whites and non-whites will largely change together.
Some findings out of many that could be cited illustrate this point: A 1992 survey finds that most black and Hispanic Americans (86% and 85%, respectively) seek “fair treatment for all, without prejudice or discrimination.” One may expect that this value is of special concern to minorities, but white Americans feel the same way. As a result, the proportion of all Americans who agree with the quoted statement about the importance of fairness is a close 79%. 

A poll of New York residents shows that the vast majority of respondents consider teaching “the common heritage and values that we share as Americans” to be “very important.” One may expect this statement to reflect a white, majoritarian value. However, minorities endorse this position more strongly than whites: 88% of Hispanics and 89% of blacks, compared to 70% of whites agree.

A nationwide poll finds that equal proportions of blacks and whites—93%—concur that they would vote for a black presidential candidate. Another national poll finds that “over 80% of all respondents in every category—age, gender, race, location, education, and income—agree” with the statement that freedom must be tempered by personal responsibility.

Far from favoring placing stress on different heritages, approximately 85% of parents—85% of all parents; 83% of African American parents; 89% of Hispanic parents; and 88% of foreign-born parents—agree with the statement, “To graduate from high school, students should be required to understand the common history and ideas that tie all Americans together.”

And far from stressing differences in the living conditions and economic status of different groups, views about the nature of life in America are shared across racial lines. 70 percent of blacks and 60% of whites agree that "The way things are in America, people like me and my family have a good chance of improving our standard of living," according to the National Opinion Research Center’s (NORC) 1994 General Social Survey. Likewise, 81% of blacks and 79% of whites report
to NORC that "the quality of life is better in America than in most other advanced industrial
countries." And, roughly 80% of parents surveyed—80% of foreign-born parents, 87% of Hispanic
parents, 73% of African American parents, and 84% of all parents—agree, "The U.S. is a unique
country that stands for something special in the world."24

Close percentages of blacks (70%) and whites (65%) in a poll conducted in 1994 agree, "The
U.S. has made some or a lot of progress in easing black-white tensions in the past 10 years."25 In the
same poll, 70% of whites and 65% of blacks say that "racial integration has been good for society."26

Sociologist Alan Wolfe finds in his middle-class morality project, which surveyed whites, blacks, Hispanics, Asians, Native Americans, and “others,” that a striking majority of respondents
disagree or strongly disagree with the statement, “There are times when loyalty to an ethnic group
or to a race should be valued over loyalty to the country as a whole.”27

Even in response to a deliberately loaded question, a 1997 poll shows that similarities between
the races are much larger than differences. Asked, "Will race relations in this country ever get better?"
43% of blacks and 60% of whites reply in the affirmative.28 (Pollsters tend to focus on the 17% who
strike a different position rather than on the 43% who embrace the same one. The difference between
57% of blacks and 40% of whites who do not believe that race relations are going to get better is
also 17%.)

While Americans hold widely ranging opinions on what should be done about various matters
of social policy, people across racial and ethnic categories identify the same issues as important to
them, and to the country. For instance, in a 1996 survey whites, African Americans, Latinos, and
Asian Americans concur that education is "the most important issue facing [their] community
today."29 Similarly, more than 80% of blacks, Latinos, and whites share the belief that "it is extremely
important' to spend tax dollars on 'educational opportunities for children.' In another survey, 54% of blacks and 61% of whites rank "increased economic opportunity" as the most important goal for blacks. And 97% of blacks and 92% of whites rate violent crime a "very serious or most serious problem" in a 1994 poll.

As we can see in Table 1, Whites, African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans agree about areas of life that have gotten worse or harder for "people like [them]" between 1985 and 1995. Between 45% and 55% agree that public schools have worsened; 50% to 60% agree that getting a good job is more difficult; between 48% and 55% within each group agree that finding "decent, affordable housing" is tougher, and between 34% and 48% find it more challenging "for families like [theirs] to stay together."

Other problems that trouble America's communities highlight points of convergence among the views of members of various racial and ethnic groups. "Between 80 and 90% of black, white, and 'other' Americans agree that it is 'extremely important' to spend tax dollars on 'reducing crime' and 'reducing illegal drug use' among youth." In addition, some shared public policy preferences emerge. Among whites, African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans surveyed by the Washington Post/Kaiser Foundation/Harvard Survey Project, between 75% and 82% of each group feel "strongly" that Congress should balance the budget. Between 30% and 41% are convinced that Congress should instate limited tax breaks for business; between 46% and 55% concur that Congress should cut personal income taxes; between 53% and 58% agree that Congress should reform Medicare (see Table 2). 67% of all parents, 68% of African American parents, 66% of Hispanic parents, and 75% of foreign-born parents--close to 70% of each group—tell Public Agenda that the most important thing for public schools to do for new immigrant children is "to teach them English as quickly as
### Table 1

Are the Problems of People Like You Getting Worse?

"During the past ten years, has XXX gotten better, worse, or stayed the same (OR gotten easier or harder) for people like you (OR families like yours)?"

(\% saying “worse” or “harder”)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>White R’s</th>
<th>African Am. R’s</th>
<th>Latinos</th>
<th>Asian-Am. R’s</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N=802</td>
<td>N=252</td>
<td>N=353</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>To get good jobs</td>
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<td>To find decent, affordable housing</td>
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<td>48</td>
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<tr>
<td>For families like yours to stay together</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>34</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health care</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
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### Table 2

Policy Preferences for Congressional Action

"For each issue, please tell me if you think this is something Congress should do or should not do” (\% saying “strongly feel Congress should do”)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>White R’s</th>
<th>African Am. R’s</th>
<th>Latinos</th>
<th>Asian-Am. R’s</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N=802</td>
<td>N=252</td>
<td>N=353</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Limited tax breaks for business</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance the budget</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut personal income taxes</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reform the welfare system</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reform medicare</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Put more limits on abortion</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limit affirmative action</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
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</table>

thing for public schools to do for new immigrant children is "to teach them English as quickly as possible, even if this means they fall behind in other subjects."³⁶

All this is not to suggest that there are no significant differences of opinion along social lines, especially when matters directly concern race relations. For instance, many whites and many blacks (although by no means all of either group) take rather different views of the guilt of O.J. Simpson. One survey will stand for many with similar findings that could be cited: 62% of whites believe Simpson was guilty of the murder of which he was accused and acquitted, in contrast to 55% of African Americans who believe he was not-guilty.³⁷ Likewise, concerning affirmative action, 51% of blacks in a 1997 poll “favor programs which give preferential treatment to racial minorities,” a much higher percentage than the 21% of whites who favor such programs.³⁸ And a very large difference appears when one examines voting patterns. For instance, in 1998, 55% of whites versus 11% African Americans voted for Republican Congressional candidates.³⁹

Still, if one considers attitudes toward the basic tenets of the American creed, the overwhelming majority of blacks are surprisingly accepting of them. A Public Perspective poll from 1998 finds that: “In the United States today, anyone who works hard enough can make it economically,” with 54% blacks and 66% whites affirming. A 1994 national survey reports that: “A basic American belief has been that if you work hard you can get ahead--reach your goals and get more.” Sixty-seven percent of blacks respond “Yes, still true,” an affirmative response rate only ten percent less than whites. Most blacks (77%) say they prefer equality of opportunity to equality of results (compared to 89% of whites). When it comes to “Do you see yourself as traditional or old fashioned on things such as sex, morality, family life, and religion, or not.” the difference between
blacks and whites is only 5%, and when asked whether values in America are seriously declining, the
difference is down to one point.

A question from an extensive national survey conducted at the University of Virginia, by
James Davison Hunter and Carl Bowman, asks: "How strong would you say the U.S. decline or
improvement is in its moral and ethical standards?" 23% of blacks and 33% of whites said there was
a strong decline, but 29% of blacks and 24% of whites said the standards were holding steady, and
40% of blacks and 38% of whites said there was a moderate decline. 40 When asked "How strong
would you say the U.S. decline or improvement is in the area of family life?" 18% of blacks and 26%
of whites said there was a strong decline while 42% of blacks and 40% of whites saw a moderate
decline and 31% of blacks and 25% of whites said family life was holding steady. 41 Roughly the same
percentages of blacks and whites strongly advocate balancing the budget, cutting personal income
taxes, reforming the welfare system, and reforming Medicare. 42 Percentages are also nearly even in
responses to questions on abortion and marijuana. 43

Hunter and Bowman found that "the majority of Americans do not . . . engage in identity
politics—a politics that insists that opinion is mainly a function of racial, ethnic, or gender identity
or identities rooted in sexual preference." 44 While there are some disagreements on specific issues and
policies, this study finds more similarities than discrepancies. Even when asked about such divisive
issues as the direction of changes in race and ethnic relations, the similarities across lines are
considerable. Thirty-two percent of blacks, 37% of Hispanics, and 40% of whites feel these relations
are holding steady: 46%, 53%, and 44%, respectively, feel they have declined (The rest feel that they
have improved). 45 That is, on most issues, four out of five—or more—agreed with one another, while
those who differed amounted to less than 20% of all Americans. There is no antiAnything majority here, nor is there likely to be one in the future.

Similarly, 81% of blacks, like 71% of all Americans, in a 1998 survey think that blacks and whites "generally get along fairly well."46 When asked in 1994, "When today's/your children reach your age do you expect that race relations will have improved, will have worsened, or will be about the same as today?" a close 48% of blacks and 51% of whites concur that relations will be better.47 The Gallup Organization finds in 1998 a similar position among whites and blacks (60% of whites and 54% of blacks agree) that only a few white people dislike blacks. Only 5% of blacks and 2% of whites say that "almost all white people dislike blacks."48

Notably, nearly half of both blacks and whites want to set racial questions aside as much as possible. In a 1995 survey for Newsweek, Princeton Survey Research Associates finds that 48% of blacks and 47% of whites agree that the Census Bureau should stop collecting information on race and ethnicity "in an effort to move toward a more color-blind society--even if it becomes more difficult to measure progress on civil rights and poverty programs."49

Pollsters—and those who write about their findings—tend to play up small differences and downplay large similarities. It should hence be stressed that in most of the figures cited above the differences among the races are much smaller than the similarities. On most issues there are no findings that could be considered, even by a far-fetched interpretation, to show a "white" versus a "black" position, nor a single position of any group of people of other colors. That is, none of these findings suggest—in fact, they directly counter-suggest—that race determines a person's views, values or votes.
Most interestingly, differences among social groups that include both blacks and whites are often larger than differences among races. For instance, sociologist Janet Saltzman Chafetz concludes her study with the statement that “in any dimension one wishes to examine—income, education, occupation, political and social attitudes, etc.—the range of difference within one race or gender group is almost as great as that between various groups.” 50 A 1994 Kansas City study shows that “income differences between age groups in a given race are greater than income differences between entire races.” 51

Rather little attention has been paid in this context to the fact that while African Americans are the least mainstreamed group, there is a growing black middle class, many members of which have adopted lifestyles and aspirations similar to those of other middle-class Americans—and which diverge from those of other black Americans. For instance, a 1998 Wall Street Journal public opinion poll shows differences within distinct classes of a single race to be greater than differences among those races, on several, albeit not on all, key issues. For instance, 82% of middle class whites and 70% of non-middle class whites report satisfaction with their personal finances (a disparity of 12%), while 74% of middle class blacks and 56% of non-middle class blacks report such satisfaction (a difference of 18%). The differences of 12% and 18% respectively, are higher than the differences in opinion between the races (8% difference between middle class whites and blacks, and 14% difference between non-middle class whites and blacks). 52 (William J. Wilson is among the scholars who have pointed out the significance of class differences when studying racial differences.)

I am not suggesting that race makes no difference in a person’s position, feelings, or thinking. And one can find polls, especially in response to single questions, that show strong racial influence. However, race does not determine a person’s response and often, on all important matters, Americans
of different social backgrounds share many convictions, hopes, and goals, even in recent years, as we see the beginning of the decline of the white majority. Moreover, each racial group is far from being homogeneous in itself. Differences within each group abound, further contradicting any notion of a non-white united majority facing a unanimous white group.

**Race: A Social Construction**

Many social scientists call into question the very category of race drawn on by those who foresee increasing racial diversity. Alain Corcos, author of several books on genetics, race, and racism, notes that “race is a slippery word,” one that is understood in varying manners at various times, one without a single definition we may readily grasp. He writes

> Race is a slippery word because it is a biological term, but we use it every day as a social term. . . Social, political, and religious views are added to what are seen as biological differences. . . Race also has been equated with national origin. . . with religion. . . with language.53

The diversity of characteristics by which race is and has been defined points to its unsatisfactory quality as a tool for categorizing human beings. Even anthropological and genetic definitions of race prove inadequate, because while each describes divisions among the human population, each fails to provide reliable criteria for making such divisions. As Corcos notes, they “are vague. They do not tell us how large divisions between populations must be in order to label them races, nor do they tell us how many there are.”54 Importantly, “[t]hese things are, of course, all matters of choice for the classifier.”55

Considering the biology of race, Corcos notes that biological divisions do not hold up. “Geographical and social barriers have never been great enough to prevent members of one population from breeding with members of another. Therefore, any characteristic which may have arisen in one population at one time will be transferred later to other populations through mating.”56
Corcos further chronicles scientific and social scientific attempts to categorize humans into races by such sundry methods as craniology and evaluating skin coloring, nose size and shape, and other physical characteristics. Despite these efforts, “[s]cientists have been unable to classify humanity into races using physical characteristics such as skin color, shape of nose or hair, eye color, brain size, etc. They also have been unable to use characteristics such as blood type or other genetic markers.”

Social anthropologist Audrey Smedley, professor at Virginia Commonwealth University, shares these observations. She admits there are apparent biophysical differences among humans, but reminds us that “race originated as the imposition of an arbitrary value system on the facts of biological (phenotypic) variations in the human species.” That is, she suggests race is imposed from without, not generated from within. Race “was the cultural invention of arbitrary meanings applied to what appeared to be natural divisions within the human species. The meanings had social value but no intrinsic relationship to the biological diversity itself.”

Racial categories are learned rather than innate. Like other cultural traditions such as food, clothing, and musical preferences, racial categories are passed from generation to generation. Psychological anthropologist Lawrence Hirschfeld finds “that children as young as three have a complex understanding of society’s construction of racial categories. Children do not sort people into different races based only on physical differences. . . . [S]ociety’s ‘racial’ assignments provide more of a signature of ‘other’ than do physical differences. For children, race does not define the person.”

To put these concepts in plainer language: at first it seems obvious that there are black, brown, yellow, and white people. But upon second thought, we realize that there are great differences within each group, even if we choose to focus on, for example, skin color rather than on, say, manners. And, these differences do not parallel one another. That is, persons with darker skin are not
necessarily short (or tall), and so on. Race, which has been magnified in recent decades by identity politics, is but one imprecise social category, one that does not define human conduct any more than numerous other social attributes (especially income), and often to a much lesser extent.

"Asian Americans" and "Latinos"?

The very notion that there are social groups called "Asian Americans" or "Latinos" is largely a statistical artifact (reflecting the way social data are coded and reported), promoted by some ethnic leaders, and a shorthand the media finds convenient. Most so-called Asian Americans do not see themselves, well, as Asian Americans and many resent being labeled this way. Many Japanese Americans do not feel a particular affinity to Filipino- or Pakistani Americans, or to Korean Americans. And the feeling is rather reciprocal. As Professor Paul Watanabe, from the University of Massachusetts, an expert on Asian Americans and himself an American of Japanese descent, puts it: "There's this concept that all Asians are alike, that they have the same history, the same language, the same background. Nothing could be more incorrect."'

William Westerman of the International Institute of New Jersey complains about Americans who tend to ignore the cultural differences among Asian nations, which reflect thousands of years of tradition. He wonders how the citizens of the United States, Canada, and Mexico would feel if they were all treated as indistinguishable "North Americans."

The same holds for the so-called Latinos, including three of my sons. Americans of Hispanic origin trace their origins to many different countries and cultures. Eduardo Diaz, a social service administrator, puts it this way: "...there is no place called Hispanica. I think it's degrading to be called something that doesn't exist. Even Latino is a misnomer. We don't speak Latin." A Mexican American office worker remarked that when she is called Latina it makes her think "about some kind
of island." Many Americans from Central America think of themselves as "mestizo," a term that refers to a mixture of Indian and European ancestry. Among those surveyed in the National Latino Political Survey in 1989, the greatest number of respondents choose to be labeled by their country of origin, as opposed to "pan-ethnic" terms such as "hispanic" or "latino."

The significance of these and other such data is that far from seeing a country divided into two or three hardened minority camps, we are witnessing an extension of a traditional American picture: Americans of different origins identifying with groups of other Americans from the same country, at least for a while, but not with any large or more lasting group.

Far from there being a new coalition of non-white minorities soon to gain majority status (something President Clinton points to and Jesse Jackson dreams about as a rainbow, one that contains all colors but white), the groups differ greatly from each other—and within themselves.

To reiterate, on numerous issues, the differences among various minority groups are as big or bigger than those between these groups and "Anglo" Americans. For instance, while fewer Cuban Americans agree with the statement that U.S. citizens should be hired over noncitizens than Anglos (42% of Cubans compared to 51% of Anglos), other Hispanic groups agree more strongly than Anglos (55% of Puerto Ricans and 54% of Mexican Americans). Quotas for jobs and college admissions are favored only by a minority of any of these four groups studied, but Cubans differ from Mexicans and Puerto Ricans more (by 14%) than from Anglos (by 12%).

The fact that various minorities do not share a uniform view, which could lead them to march lock-step with other minorities to a new America (as some on the left fantasize), is also reflected in elections. Cuban Americans tend to vote Republican, while other Americans of Hispanic origin are more likely to vote Democratic. Americans of Asian origin cannot be counted on to vote one way
or another, either. First generation Vietnamese Americans tend to be strong anti-Communists and favor the Republican party, while older Japanese- and Chinese Americans are more often Democrats, and Filipino Americans are more or less equally divided between the parties. (Of the Filipino Americans registered to vote, 40% list themselves as Democrats, 38% as Republicans, and 17% as independent.)

The Lessons of "Non-white" States and Cities

Some social scientists argue that we can learn about the future, in which non-white majorities will prevail, by examining the states and cities in which minorities already comprise the majorities. For instance, Peter Morrison, former head of the Population Research Center at RAND, suggests that one can see the future in cities that have a majority composed of minorities.

One clear way to examine the impact of the rise of non-white majorities is to study election results. They show, as did the survey data cited above, that people of a given racial background often do not vote for a candidate of their color—and above all, that non-white groups often do not jointly support any one candidate of any one color or racial background. Any suggestion that race or ethnicity determines for whom one casts one's vote is belied by the facts. For example, Peter Skerry notes that “when first elected to the San Antonio City Council in 1975, [the popular Henry] Cisneros was the candidate of the Anglo establishment and received a higher proportion of Anglo than Mexican votes cast.”

We often encounter the future first in California. In a 1991 Los Angeles election for the California State Assembly, Korean American, Filipino American, and Japanese American groups each ran their own candidate, thus splitting the so called “Asian American” vote, not deterred by the fact that they thereby ensured the election of a white candidate.
In some cities that contain non-white majorities, we find white, black, and Hispanic mayors alternating, despite only relatively small changes in the composition of the city population. For instance, in Los Angeles, which is roughly 64% non-white (specifically, nearly 40% Hispanic, 14% black, nearly 10% Asian, and .5% American Indian according to the 1990 census), Tom Bradley, an African American, served as mayor for 20 years, until 1993, when the citizens elected Richard Riordan, a white politician. New York City and San Francisco also have in recent years alternated between white and black mayors without witnessing any dramatic changes in the racial and ethnic backgrounds of those who inhabit those cities.

New York City, comprising approximately 29% blacks, 24% Hispanics, and 7% Asians and Pacific Islanders, (nearly 60% non-whites), elected the white Ed Koch, then chose the African American David Dinkins, followed by a white mayor, Rudolph Giuliani. The roughly 55% minority city San Francisco (approximately 11% black, 30% Asian, 14% Hispanic, and .5% American Indian), was served by three white mayors from 1976 through 1995, but elected the African American Willie Brown in 1996. Dallas, which is about 30% black, 21 percent Hispanic, and 2% Asian had no African American mayor until 1995. Philadelphia, long served by white mayors, elected Wilson Goode to serve between 1984 and 1992, the city’s first African American mayor. Goode was followed by the white Edward Rendell in this city of nearly 40% blacks, 6 percent Hispanics, and 3% Asians. The fact that cities like D.C. (nearly 66% black) and Detroit (nearly 76% black) tend to elect black mayors is beside the point, because neither comprises a coalition of minorities but one minority, and the only one that usually envisions itself as a single group.

Additionally, Virginia, in which whites outnumber minorities significantly (1.5 million minorities and 4.8 million whites), has elected a black governor. L. Douglas Wilder served from 1989
to January, 1994. In the rural and conservative Second District of Georgia, a two-thirds white voter majority reelected Sanford D. Bishop Jr., an African American Democrat, to serve as their representative. Washington state, comprising only 4.5% Asian Americans, elected Gary Locke in 1996, putting in office the first Asian American governor in the mainland United States. While one can find counter examples, the examples listed here indicate that the majority of minorities does not necessarily elect people of color, nor does the white majority necessarily elect white officials. Moreover, I expect more blurring in the future rather than less, given all the various vectors discussed in this analysis.

**Interrace and the Rise of “Others”**

Last but not least, the figures used by those who project a majority of minorities or the end of a white majority are misleading. These figures are based on a simplistic projection of past trends, ignoring the rapidly rising category of racially mixed Americans, the result of the rising number of cross-racial marriages and a rejection of monoracial categories by some others, especially Hispanic Americans. One out of 12 marriages in 1995 (8.4%) were interracial/ethnic marriages. Intermarriage between Asian Americans and whites are particularly common; marriages between Hispanic Americans and whites are also rather frequent, while such marriages with African Americans are the least common. About half of third-generation Mexican Americans marry non-Hispanic whites; even higher numbers of Asian Americans do the same.

Interrac marriage between black and other Americans is less common, but also rising. "In 1990, 84% of all married black people over the age of 65 were in both-black marriages, but only 53% of married blacks under 25 were," according to the Statistical Assessment Service. And the Census Bureau finds that over the past 20 years, the number of marriages between blacks and whites has
more than quadrupled, increasing from 65,000 in 1970 to 296,000 in 1994. Similarly, researchers Douglas Besharov and Timothy Sullivan found that the number of black-white marriages constituted 1.7 percent of all marriages in 1960, but represented 6 percent of all marriages in 1990. A study from the University of Michigan reports that while in the 1940s about 2% of black men married white women, whereas by the 1980s about 8% did so. And while in the 1940s about 1% of married black women had married interracially, in the 1980s that figure had reached nearly 3%.

All together, since 1970, the proportion of marriages among people of different racial or ethnic origin increased by 72%. The 1990 Census notes 1.5 million interracial marriages. Some put the number of children of mixed-race parents at 3 million, not including Hispanic mestizos and black Americans who have European or Indian ancestry.

Another indication of some blurring of the lines among the races in American society can be gleaned from the fact that in the 1990 Census, 4%, or 9.8 million Americans, chose to classify themselves as "others," i.e., not members of any particular racial group. Even if the trends already cited do not accelerate and continue only at the present pace, the figures for 2050 may read something like the following: 51% white; 14% multiracial; 35% minorities. Far from dividing the country still further, the rise of the "others," along with the fact that more and more Americans will be of mixed heritage, with divergent backgrounds, will serve to blur the racial lines. That is, while there may well be more Americans of non-European origin, a growing number of the American white majority will have an Hispanic daughter- or son-in-law, an Asian stepfather or mother, and a whole rainbow of cousins. If one must find a simple image for the future of America, Tiger Woods, or Hawaii, as I see it, seems more appropriate than a view of a country in which Louis Farrakahn and his followers and the Aryan Nation are threatening one another.
Regrettably, identity politics led the U.S. Census Bureau to drop the category of "other" from its 2000 Census. This in turn makes it more difficult for Americans of mixed background, or those who wish to forgo racial labels, from declaring themselves as what I would like to call "All Americans." Because the way the Census constructs its categories affects the way many others do—for instance, those overseeing admissions to colleges—the category of other or multiracial Americans may well not be gaining as fast as it would if the Census followed its 1990 format. This in effect forces at least 10 million Americans into racial categories they seek to shed or modify, and makes American society seem more divided along racial lines than it actually is.

Multiculturalism or American Creed?

All this suggests that foreseeable changes in America’s demography do not imply that the American creed is being or will be replaced by something called “multiculturalism.” Roberto Suro reminds us that we do not need to divest ourselves of plurality in order to achieve harmony.

Americans have never thought of themselves as a single people as the Germans do. Although white, English-speaking Christians of European ancestry have set most of the norms for American society, there is still no sense of a Volk (a group that shares a common ancestry and culture and that embodies the national identity.) Ideas, not biology, are what generate oneness and homogeneity in the United States, and so long as faith in those ideas has remained strong, the country has shown an extraordinary capacity to absorb people of many nationalities.

The American creed always has had room for pluralism of sub-cultures, of people upholding some of the traditions and values of their countries of origin, from praying to playing in their own way. But American pluralism is, and best will continue to be, bound by a shared framework if America is to be spared the kind of ethnic tribalism of the kind that—when driven to extremes—tears apart countries as different as Yugoslavia and Rwanda, and has even raised its ugly head in well-established democracies such as Canada and the United Kingdom (where Scottish separatism is on the rise).
The social, cultural, and legal elements that constitute the framework that holds together the diverse mosaic are well known. They include a commitment by all parties to the democratic way of life, to the Constitution and its Bill of Rights, and to mutual tolerance. The mosaic is further fortified by a strong conviction that one's station in life is determined by hard work and saving, by taking responsibility for one's self and one's family. And, most Americans still share a strong sense that while we are different in some ways, in more ways we are joined by the shared responsibilities of providing a good society for our children and ourselves, one free of racial and ethnic strife, and providing the world with a model of a country whose economy and polity are thriving.

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Appendix


There are strong sociological reasons to argue that the US Census should introduce a new racial category, All-American, into its next count. Others have suggested that this category be named “multi-racial.” Inclusion of such a category would allow millions of Americans who are not, and do not see themselves, as members of any one race to be recognized as people with a blended heritage, reflecting the mixed heritage of America itself. While the actual census is still more than two years away, the decision how Americans may define themselves is going to be made by the Office of Management and Budget and the Department of Commerce later this year. The importance of the decision ranges well beyond changing the check-off boxes on the new Census forms.

In the 1990 Census the government required Americans to define their race using one of 16 categories. The main groupings are white and black, which in 1990 accounted for 92% of all Americans. (The remaining racially defined categories are Native American, Aleut, Eskimo, and ten variations of Asian or Pacific Islanders.) And, for the first time, the Census recognized that a growing number of Americans are of mixed racial background. For instance, Asian and white Americans intermarry at a high rate and have children who compose a rapidly growing race of blended Americans. Since 1990, the number of interracial children has quadrupled -- now reaching the two-million mark. Millions of other Americans are viewed as members of one race but see themselves as members of another. The 1990 Census allowed these Americans to select the marginalizing label of "other." Despite the unattractiveness of this characterization, which smacks of outsider, about 9.8 million, 4% of the total population, chose this designation rather than be defined according to the established mono-racial categories.

Enter Politics

The question now is if future censuses should allow people to select a multi-racial category. Suggestions to include the multi-racial category send some African American leaders ballistic. Abraham K. Sundiata, chairman of the Afro-American studies Department of Brandeis, sees here a drive to undermine black solidarity. He fears that in cities where blacks now hold majorities, the new category will divide them and undermine their dominance. All this will happen, he implies, because some African Americans will somehow be forced into the new multi-racial category. He disregards that people will still be free to check the box of their choice, even if the new category is added.

Another reason several African American leaders object to a multi-racial category is that race data is used for the enforcement of civil rights legislation in employment, voting rights, housing and mortgage lending, health care services, and educational opportunities. They fear that the category could decrease the number of blacks in official statistics, and thus undermine efforts to enforce anti-discrimination statutes and undercut numerous social programs based on racial quotas.
This fear was rather explicitly stated during a recent Congressional hearing by Representative Carrie Meek who stated:

I understand how Tiger Woods and the rest of them feel. But no matter how they feel from a personal standpoint, we're thinking about the census and reporting accuracy . . . The multi-racial category would cloud the count of [the] discrete minorities who are assigned to a lower track in public schools, . . . kept out of certain occupations and whose progress toward seniority or promotion has been skewed . . . Lastly, Mr. Chairman, multi-racial categories will reduce the level of political representation for minorities. ²

What is a Race Anyhow?

One may wonder if the number of Americans involved is large enough to justify what at first seems like a tempest in a tea pot. The underlying reason is that one tends to underestimate the number of Americans who might qualify for the new category because one assumes that only those of a mixed racial heritage may fall into the All-American box. Actually there are considerable differences in color and other racial features within all racial groups, which makes the question of who is in versus out much more flexible than often seems. For instance, many dark-skinned Hispanics who do not see themselves as black, and many light-skinned African Americans who do not wish to pass as white, would be free to choose the new category.

One should also note that those who study race professionally, especially physical and cultural anthropologists, strongly object to the concept of racial categorization. They point out that no single gene can be used to differentiate one race from another; moreover, indicators from blood types to texture of hair vary a great deal both among and within groups considered to be of one race. Indeed, the American Anthropological Association passed a resolution stating that "differentiating species into biologically defined 'race' has proven meaningless and unscientific."

The Merits of a New Category

Dropping the whole social construction of race does not seem in the cards, even if the most far-reaching arguments against Affirmative Action and for a "color blind" society, win the day. However, there are strong sociological reasons to favor the inclusion of a multi-racial category in the 2000 Census.

Introducing a multi-racial category has the potential to soften racial lines that now divide America by rendering them more like economic differences and less like caste lines. Sociologists have long observed that a major reason the United States experiences relatively few confrontations along class lines is that Americans believe they can move from one economic strata to another. (For instance, workers become foremen, and foremen become small businessmen, who are considered middle class.) Moreover, there are not sharp class demarcation lines as there are in Britain; in America many workers consider themselves middle class, dress up to go to work, and hide their tools and lunches in briefcases, while middle class super-liberal professors join labor unions. A major reason
confrontations in America occur more often along racial lines is that color lines currently seem rigidly unchangeable.

If the new category is allowed, if more and more Americans will choose this category in future decades, as there is every reason to expect given the high rates of intermarriage and a desire by millions of Americans to avoid being racially boxed in, the new Census category may go a long way in determining if America in the next century will be less caste-like and more class-like, a society in which differences are blurred.

Skeptics may suggest that how one marks a tiny box on the 2000 Census form is between ones' self and the keepers of statistics. But, as this sociologist sees it, if the multi-racial concept is allowed into the national statistics, it will also enter the social vocabulary. It will make the American society less stratified along racial lines, less rigidly divided, and thus more communitarian.

Beyond the Census

The best indication that changes in the Census may lead to more encompassing changes in our social categories and thinking is supported by the fact that these processes already have begun to unfold. In California, where our future is often previewed, there is already an Association for Multi-Ethnic Americans, and in several states, legislation has been introduced to allow the multi-racial category on school forms. Two states, Georgia and Indiana, have required the multi-racial category to be used by their government agencies.

The Ultimate Question

At stake is the question of what kind of America we envision for the longer run. Some see a complete blur of racial lines with Americans constituting some kind of new hybrid race. *Time* ran a cover story on the subject, led by a computer composite of a future American with some features of each race, a new rather handsome breed (almond shaped eyes, straight but dark hair, milk chocolate skin). This would take much more than a change in racial nomenclature, but it could serve as a step in that direction.

Others are keen to maintain strict racial lines and oppose intermarriage; these same people often seek to maintain the races as separate "nations." (The term nation is significant because it indicates a high degree of tribalism.) In a world full of interracial strife, this attitude -- however understandable its defensive nature in response to racial prejudice and discrimination -- leaves at least this communitarian greatly troubled. The more communitarian view seems to be one in which those who seek to uphold their separate group identities will do so (hopefully viewing themselves and being viewed as subgroups of a more encompassing community rather than as separate nations) but those who seek to redefine themselves will be enabled to do so, leading to an ever larger group that is free from racial categorization.

If a multi-racial category is included in the 2000 Census, further down the road, maybe as early as the 2010 Census, we may wish to add one more category, that of "multi-ethnic" origin, one
which most Americans might wish to check. Then we would live to recognize the full importance of my favorite African American saying: We came in many ships but we now ride in the same boat.

**Endnotes:**


ENDNOTES


4. Speech by President Clinton, Federal News Service.


14. Donald Gabard and Terry Cooper problematize such determinism, specifically common understandings of race based on the existence of genetic differences among the races. They note, "No discrete package of gene differences has ever been described between two races, only relative frequencies of one or another trait," and, "It is reported today that there are more genetic variations within the separate races than between them." Donald L. Gabard and Terry L. Cooper, "Race: Constructs and Dilemmas," Administration & Society, September 1998. (Citing R. Cooper and R. David, "The Biological Concept of Race and Its Application to Public Health and Epidemiology," Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law 2 (1986): 97-116 at 101 and D.R. Williams, "The Concept of Race in Health Services Research: 1966 to 1990," Health Services Research 29 (1994): 262-74).


16. ibid.

18. ibid.


26. ibid.


More specifically, the following percentages said that each area was "worse" or "harder":
- Public schools—whites 55%, African Americans 57%, Latinos 45%, Asian Americans 47%.
- Getting good jobs—whites 56%, African Americans 60%, Latinos 50%, Asian Americans 56%.
- Finding decent, affordable housing—whites 55%, African Americans 49%, Latinos 55%, Asian Americans 48%.
- For families like theirs to stay together—whites 45%, African Americans 48%, Latinos 40%, Asian Americans 34%.


More specifically, the following percentages of each group felt "strongly" that Congress should take action on each item:
- Balance the budget—whites 82%, African Americans 79%, Latinos 75%, Asian Americans 75%.
- Limited tax breaks for business—whites 39%, African Americans 41%, Latinos 41%.
- Asian Americans 30%, cut personal income taxes—whites 52%, African Americans 50%, Latinos 55%.
- Asian Americans 46%; reform Medicare—whites 53%, African Americans 58%, Latinos 59%, Asian Americans 58%.


41. Hunter and Bowman, *The State of Disunion*, Table 4.C.


48. Survey by the Gallup Organization, 5-7 October 1995. Cited in "Thinking About Ethnicity," Public Perspective, February/March 1998, 58. 31% of blacks and 33% of whites stated that many whites "dislike blacks."


55. ibid.


57. ibid.


59. ibid.


66. ibid.


70. de la Garza, "Researchers Must Heed New Realities When They Study Latinos in the U.S.," B1-3.


77. ibid.


83. 1992 data from Statistical Compendia Branch, Data User Services Division, Bureau of the Census, *1994 County & City Data Book*, 2-3. Minorities in the *Data Book* are categorized as black, Hispanic, Asian, and Eskimo or Aleut.


86. Linda Chavez, "Response to *Is America Too White?*" in "What, Then, is the American, This New Man?" Center for Immigration Studies Center Paper 13, August 1998, 35.


89. ibid.


95. Peter I. Rose gives us an important understanding of cultural pluralism as first substantially presented by philosopher Horace Kallen in the early 1900s: "The basic premise was that there is strength in diversity, that being proud of one's past and appreciating where one came from complements rather than compromises membership in an ever more heterogeneous society. . .. Kallen saw the orchestra—that is, the society—as consisting of groups of instruments (nationalities) playing their separate parts while together making beautiful music resonant with harmony and good feeling." Peter I. Rose, *Tempest-Tost: Race, Immigration, and the Dilemmas of Diversity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 65.

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