

Opportunities—and some challenges—face more racially diverse United States

February 26 2015, by Susan Rosegrant

The United States is becoming racially diverse more quickly than at any time in its history, and current projections show that by 2050 nonwhites will outnumber whites in this country for the first time, according to a University of Michigan demographer.

The groups most responsible for this profound change are the "new immigrants"—Hispanics, Asians and multiracial populations, says William Frey, a researcher at U-M's Institute for Social Research and a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution.

"The United States is in the midst of a pivotal period ushering in extraordinary shifts in the nation's racial demographic makeup," Frey said. "With the right planning, these demographic changes will let the country face the future with growth and vitality as it reinvents the American melting pot for a new era."

Some observers might be alarmed by this rapid demographic shift, Frey says. But in his recently published book, "Diversity Explosion: How New Racial Demographics Are Remaking America," Frey argues that the transition is both inevitable and a much needed tonic for a nation otherwise limited by its aging white population.

Immigrants will help maintain the nation's birth rate, pay taxes that support the surge of retiring baby boomers, and keep the country relevant, he says.

"Rather than being feared, this new diversity can reinvigorate the country at a time when many other developed nations with lower immigration rates—like Japan, Italy and France—are facing advanced aging and population loss," Frey said. "Immigration and diversity will keep us dynamic, and that's a change to be celebrated."

Drawing on the 2010 U.S. Census and related sources, Frey predicts that:

- The country's white [population](#) will begin declining in 10 years and will continue to age.
- New minorities will each more than double during the next 40 years. In the process, they will integrate and assimilate across the country, rather than clustering in traditional "melting pot" states.
- Economic opportunities for blacks will increase, and there will be pervasive reductions in black-white segregation.
- Multiracial marriages will continue to rise. Already about one in seven new marriages is multiracial, including nearly half of those involving Hispanics or Asians, and black-white marriages compose one-eighth of marriages involving blacks.
- At some point soon after 2040 there will be no racial majority.

While Frey is optimistic about America's changing demography, he cautioned that as immigrants settle in predominantly white areas of the country, existing residents must accommodate the newcomers through schools, social services, employment assistance and civic engagement.

The nation also will have to negotiate tensions between aging white populations, worried about retirement incomes and medical costs, and younger Hispanic and other minority groups, whose priorities will include good schools, jobs and affordable housing.

And education and job training for all minority children must be improved, Frey says, in order for the next generation to reach its

potential.

"Improved access to education is tied to the future well-being of minorities and, in fact, to the well-being of the nation," he said.

Provided by University of Michigan

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