

# ZOOMing in on Diversity

**Decades-old patterns distinguish immigrant arrivals from domestic movers, but closer analysis reveals how dispersal melts the pot quicker in some places than others.**

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America's changing racial and ethnic makeup will profoundly transform the nation's regional landscape for at least the next four decades. Consumer markets, politics and day-to-day personal transactions simply will not go on as they have up to now as this change sweeps the nation. By 2050, only half the population will be non-Hispanic white, the Census Bureau projects. The Hispanic and Asian populations will both triple, the black population will almost double and the white population will barely hold its own.

Yet, what looks to the naked eye like a diversified melting pot at the national level takes on a dramatically different look if you zoom in on specific regions and metropolitan areas. Why? Mostly because people moving to the United States from other countries pick certain places to settle, whereas people who already live within national borders choose others. The lion's share of immigrating Hispanics and Asians tends to cluster in gateway locales, while domestic migration networks of whites and blacks often follow different paths. And there are reasons for this.

Diverging migration patterns have unevenly distributed racial and ethnic diversity into America's regions. Three states—New Mexico, Hawaii and California—already stand out as the nation's first nonwhite majority states. At the same time, there are the 15 states, where minorities account for less than 15 percent of the population. Each minority group, including Hispanics, Asians and blacks, has tended to cluster in geographic patterns that begin to suggest staying power.

Exactly what is the role of race and ethnicity in ingrained and emerging patterns of migration? How rapidly are Hispanics and Asians dispersing away from the traditional gateway regions? And to what extent is their migration converging with the mainstream? New answers to these questions can be drawn from census migration statistics for 2000–2003, and freshly compiled Census 2000 race migration statistics for 1995–2000. After analysis, we might assert that while America may not become a true national melting pot anytime soon, there is a measure of “simmering” going on.

## Immigrant Magnets, Domestic Migrant Magnets

Arriving immigrant minorities tend to cluster geographically because destination communities provide them with a comfort zone of familiarity, while others require greater acclimatization for new residents to survive and thrive. Ethnic enclaves in gateway metropolises like Los Angeles and New York contain already established institutions—churches, community centers, stores, neighbors—that make new arrivals feel at home, and give them social and economic support. Immigration laws also foster clustering. Since family reunification is regarded as a priority in legal immigration, family-related migrant “chains” direct many new arrivals to the nation's gateway cities.

If immigrants choose a U.S. destination based on familiarity and cultural support to get started, domestic migrants tend to move for more pragmatic, hardheaded reasons. Most times, it's economic opportunity in the labor market. What's more, whites and blacks are better represented among domestic migrants. The places in which they choose to resettle are less constrained than those of immigrants, for whom a familiar language and the presence of family mean more than the local unemployment rate in selecting a destination.

A distinction between immigration and domestic migration—not a new phenomenon—still holds (see Table 1). Among the nine leading “magnet metro areas” for immigrants, only one—Dallas—is on the list of the largest metro destinations of domestic migrants. Traditional gateways, New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, Miami and Washington, D.C. attract the greatest number of immigrants. These six areas have led all others since the mid-1960s, when current immigration laws came into effect. They've become permanent beacons for newcomers, despite the fact that geographic labor markets have shifted through the years.

But even as the welcome mat cities stay the same, domestic migrant magnets come and go and change as the pushes and

**Table 1** Metropolitan(\*) Magnets for Immigrants and Domestic Migrants [1995–2003]

Immigrant Magnet Metros			Domestic Migration Magnets		
	Immigrants from Abroad	Net Domestic Migration		Immigrants from Abroad	Net Domestic Migration
1 New York	1,605,530	-1,511,765	1 Phoenix	224,305	387,482
2 Los Angeles	1,196,359	-676,213	2 Las Vegas	98,813	368,434
3 San Francisco	613,037	-556,777	3 Atlanta	258,889	338,015
4 Chicago	527,651	-525,974	4 Dallas-Fort Worth	386,647	212,758
5 Miami	493,056	-162,715	5 Tampa-St. Petersburg	99,097	206,223
6 Washington, D.C.	451,546	-22,018	6 Orlando	112,061	188,480
7 Dallas-Fort Worth	386,647	212,758	7 Sacramento	89,368	155,167
8 Houston	353,738	22,794	8 Austin	83,113	146,412
9 Boston	301,915	-141,665	9 Charlotte	66,159	143,406

\*Metro Areas are defined as CMSAs, MSAs and NECMAs. Names are abbreviated.  
Source: William H. Frey analysis of Census 2000 and U.S. Census Bureau Population Estimates, 2000–2003

pulls of metro economies shift opportunity from place to place over time. Clearly the past decade has brought population and jobs to western areas such as Phoenix and Las Vegas, in addition to longstanding southern juggernauts, Atlanta and Dallas. Increased appeal among metros in Florida (Tampa, Orlando, West Palm Beach) and North Carolina (Charlotte and Raleigh) is also evident.

A striking fact to take note of: if a place appeals to immigrants, it tends to have the opposite effect on people who choose to move domestically. Seven of nine leading immigrant magnets lose domestic migrants to the rest of the country. New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Chicago lose the most domestic migrants among all metros in the U.S. Domestic migrants are leaving immigrant magnets, not as a response to immigrants per se, but because of the increasing congestion and high costs of living in highly urbanized metro areas. The numbers show that recent immigrants, and by extension, immigrant minorities will continue to dominate these areas' population gains.

While migration patterns among immigrants and domestic movers tend to mirror those reported in the 1990s (see "Immigrant and Native Migrant Magnets" *American Demographics*, November 1996), the gravitational pull among areas that attract immigrants does appear to be losing some power. The nine immigrant magnet areas represent 51 percent of all U.S. destinations among recent arrivals, compared with 57 percent in the late 1980s.

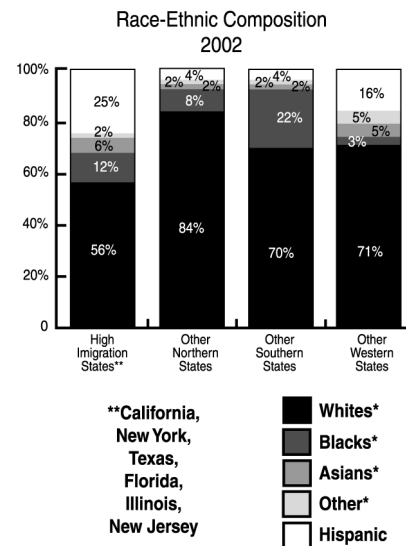
The new data also reveals that immigrants play a significantly larger role in the gains of domestic migrant magnets. Domestic in-migrants create jobs in construction and other services that attract immigrants as well. The greater the dispersal among domestic migrants, the speedier the dispersal of immigrant minorities across the country.

The parallel immigration and domestic migration patterns that characterize metropolitan areas also play out at the state level. Again, six immigrant magnet states, California, Texas, New York, Florida, Illinois and New Jersey attract nearly 3 in 5 migrants from abroad, a slight drop from 3 in 4 in the 1980s.

Still, high immigration states house more racially and ethnically diverse populations than the entire rest of the country (see Figure 1). However, especially in the West, a significant dispersal of Hispanics and Asians has begun to develop in states such as Nevada, Arizona and Colorado.

## Whites and Blacks

It is whites and blacks who largely define and delineate domestic migration patterns in the U.S. And as you might imagine, there are marked differences in the destinations each gravitates toward. White migration tends to run consistent with overall domestic migration patterns observed earlier. Most whites exit



**Figure 1** High Immigration States Are Melting Pots, Others Are Simmering.  
Source: William H. Frey analysis of U.S. Census Bureau Estimates, 2002

**Table 2** Largest Domestic Migration Gainers & Decliners Whites and Blacks, [1995–2000]

Greatest Gainers				Greatest Decliners			
Whites		Blacks		Whites		Blacks	
Metro*	Size	Metro*	Size	Metro*	Size	Metro*	Size
1 Phoenix	169,220	Atlanta	114,478	1 New York	–470,685	New York	–193,344
2 Las Vegas	121,908	Dallas	39,360	2 Chicago	–219,449	Chicago	–59,282
3 Tampa	74,657	Charlotte	23,313	3 Los Angeles	–199,048	Los Angeles	–38,833
4 Austin	70,032	Orlando	20,222	4 San Francisco	–121,180	San Francisco	–30,613
5 Atlanta	66,911	Las Vegas	18,912	5 Detroit	–111,211	Detroit	–15,955

\*Metro Areas are defined as CMSAs, MSAs and NECMAs. Names are abbreviated.

Source: William H. Frey analysis of Census 2000

congested urbanized metropolises such as New York, Chicago, Los Angeles and San Francisco, and several Rust Belt metros. Their destinations tend to be Phoenix and Las Vegas and other Sun Belt “hot spots” (see Table 2).

Blacks have a preference for southern destinations. In fact, the 1990s was the decade in which a surge in a black “return to the South” began, representing a wholesale reversal of the South-to-North migration of earlier decades. For the first time, the South gained blacks in its migration exchanges with each of the other regions of the country. The culture and heritage in the South appear to have a strong appeal among blacks, along with a strong economy. African American Gen Xers and Gen Ys tend to be less concerned by the region’s history of racial discrimination, than with available jobs and the chance to network with other middle-class blacks. Young black college graduates lead the way among this group of movers. However, the South is gaining blacks from almost every demographic group, including seniors.

So, while white domestic migrants head to the Sun Belt destinations in both the West and the South, southern destinations are more dominant among black migrants. The top ranking black destination is Atlanta, followed by Orlando, Charlotte and Dallas. At the state level, blacks’ preferences are apparent, compared with whites. Georgia, North Carolina, Florida, Maryland and Texas received the largest black gains; while whites show a greater preference for Arizona and Nevada. Still, both racial groups are departing from the same places. Four of the top immigration states, New York, California, Illinois and New Jersey, show the greatest out-migration of both African Americans and Anglos, mirroring the overall domestic migration flight from these areas.

Both the black and white movement patterns help to reinforce the distinct racial and ethnic structures of their destination regions. The out-migration of whites, in particular, serves to increase the minority profiles of the big immigration states. At the same time, the white movement to the “non-California” West tends to give their states and metros a more suburban feel. And the black migration back to the South tends to reinforce the regions longstanding largely white-black demographic profile.

## Hispanics and Asians

There are two ways that Hispanic and Asian movements affect metro areas and states. As we’ve said, destinations among recent immigrants tend to focus on traditional gateways. However, there is an increasing tendency for both groups to participate in the domestic migration. This seems to be the primary vehicle for their dispersion beyond the gateways.

The greatest destinations for Hispanic immigrants include the traditional gateways, led by Los Angeles, New York and Miami. Only two non-immigrant magnet metros—Phoenix and Atlanta—rank in the top 10 recent Hispanic immigrant destinations. Domestic migration among Hispanics contrasts with the destinations of recent immigrants (see Table 3). To a large degree, these Hispanic domestic migration patterns mirror those for whites. Las Vegas and Phoenix represent the top destinations. Similarly, many domestic migrant Hispanics are leaving the traditional immigrant magnet areas of Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco and Chicago. To be sure, the latter metros are gaining many more Hispanics from immigration than are lost through domestic out-migration; but a pattern of dispersal is apparent.

The same pattern is shown at the state level where California, Texas, Florida, New York, Illinois and New Jersey lead all others in gaining Hispanic immigrants.

Yet, four of them are losing Hispanic domestic migrants to a broader swath of states across the country. This dispersion of Hispanic domestic migrants reflects smaller numbers than those of the more concentrated immigrant flows, but the numbers are trending to increase over time.

The Asian patterns are similar to those of Hispanics, wherein immigrant destinations are losing Asians through domestic migration dispersal. However, compared with Hispanics, the dispersion of Asians away from the gateways is much lighter, reflecting their recency of arrival. The exception to this pattern is San Francisco, which draws Asians from both immigration and domestic migration (see Table 4).

**Table 3** Hispanic Immigrant Destinations & Domestic Migrant Magnets, [1995–2000]

Greatest Immigrant Destinations		Greatest Domestic Net IN-Migration		Greatest Domestic Net OUT-Migration	
Metro*	Size	Metro*	Size	Metro*	Size
1 Los Angeles	378,858	1 Las Vegas	57,926	Los Angeles	–272,712
2 New York	338,878	2 Phoenix	51,838	New York	–162,246
3 Miami	198,350	3 Dallas	42,853	San Francisco	–60,994
4 Dallas	145,132	4 Orlando	38,173	Chicago	–32,278
5 Chicago	140,069	5 Atlanta	32,831	El Paso	–26,165

\* Metro Areas are defined as CMSAs, MSAs and NECMAs. Names are abbreviated.

Source: Census 2000

**Table 4** Asian Immigrant Destinations & Domestic Migrant Magnets, [1995–2000]

Greatest Immigrant Destinations		Greatest Domestic Net IN-Migration		Greatest Domestic Net OUT-Migration	
Metro*	Size	Metro*	Size	Metro*	Size
1 New York	221,132	1 San Francisco	17,881	New York	–36,351
2 Los Angeles	171,806	2 Las Vegas	17,562	Los Angeles	–28,323
3 San Francisco	151,151	3 Dallas	13,605	Honolulu	–12,486
4 Washington, D.C.	64,687	4 Atlanta	13,522	Fresno, CA	–9,266
5 Chicago	58,117	5 Seattle	11,727	Merced, CA	–2,952

\* Metro Areas are defined as CMSAs, MSAs and NECMAs. Names are abbreviated.

Source: Census 2000

## Multicultural Flight

Ten years ago, I wrote an article called “The New White Flight:” (*American Demographics*, April 1994) to highlight the fact that most of the domestic migrants leaving immigrant gateways were non-Hispanic whites. That movement did, and still does, reflect a kind of suburbanization across metropolitan areas and state boundaries toward places that offer affordable housing and improving employment prospects. The difference now is that this domestic out-migration from Los Angeles, New York and other high immigration metros is much more multicultural. There are more Hispanics than whites leaving Los Angeles as a result of domestic migration. In New York, while whites still dominate the exodus, Hispanics and blacks account for a larger share of out-migrants in the late 1990s than 10 years prior. It appears now that blacks and immigrant minorities are responding to the same middle-class crunch as whites, in leaving high immigration metropolitan areas.

The other side of the coin is what is happening in domestic migration magnets. Phoenix and Atlanta provide good examples. In both of these metros, domestic migrating whites and blacks tend to lead the overall gains. But noteworthy in both metros is a phenomenon in the increasing domestic in-migration

of Hispanics and, to a lesser degree, Asians. While the overall demographic profiles of these areas do not have nearly the melting pot character of immigrant magnets like Los Angeles or New York, their strong domestic migration flows are creating employment opportunities for new immigrants.

## Conclusion

Recent race-ethnic migration patterns show that America still has a long way to go before it becomes a coast-to-coast melting pot, where racial and ethnic groups spread evenly across the land. High immigration gateway states and metros continue to stand out as the most racially and ethnically diverse in the nation. They are not, by and large, magnets for white and black domestic migrants who tend to flow to ever-changing constellations of domestic migration magnets. Yet, this analysis also confirms, with migration data from the census, that there exists a true dispersion of Hispanics and Asians as part of a new multicultural flight away from several immigrant gateways. Gradually, these migration patterns will accelerate as they lead to further simmering among our diverse peoples toward a more integrated society.

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