

The Changing Face of America

MAIN IDEA

At the end of the 20th century, the U.S. population grew more diverse both in ethnic background and in age.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Americans of all backgrounds share common goals: the desire for equal rights and economic opportunity.

Terms & Names

- urban flight
- gentrification
- Proposition 187

One American's Story

Every ten years the United States conducts a census, or head count of its population. The results of the census determine, among other things, how billions of federal dollars are spent for housing, health care, and education over the coming decade. The Census Bureau estimates that the 1990 census undercounted Latinos by more than five percent. This undercount resulted in a loss of millions of dollars of aid to municipalities with large Latino populations, as well as denying Latinos political representation in all levels of government.

During the latest census conducted in 2000, Antonia Hernandez, President and General Counsel of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF), spearheaded the national *¡Hágase Contar!* Make Yourself Count! campaign. MALDEF workers canvassed neighborhoods urging residents to complete the census. They stressed that all information was confidential and discussed the high stakes of being counted.

A PERSONAL VOICE ANTONIA HERNANDEZ

“The census not only measures our growth and marks our place in the community, but it is the first and indispensable step toward fair political representation, equal distribution of resources, and enforcement of our civil rights.”

—Public statement for *¡Hágase Contar!* campaign, 2000

Data from the 2000 census revealed that the Hispanic population had grown by close to 58 percent since 1990, reaching 35.3 million. The 2000 census also confirmed a vast increase in what were once ethnic minorities.



Antonia Hernandez, MALDEF's president

Urban Flight

One of the most significant socio-cultural changes in American history has been the movement of Americans from the cities to the suburbs. The years after World War II through the 1980s saw a widespread pattern of **urban flight**, the process in which Americans left the cities and moved to the suburbs. At mid-century, the population of cities exceeded that of suburbs. By 1970, the ratio became even.



In the year 2000, after decades of decline, some major cities across the country had increased their populations while others slowed or halted declines. The transformation of the United States into a nation of suburbs had intensified the problems of the cities.

CAUSES OF URBAN CHANGE Several factors contributed to the movement of Americans out of the cities. Because of the continued movement of job-seeking Americans into urban areas in the 1950s and 1960s, many urban American neighborhoods became overcrowded. Overcrowding in turn contributed to such urban problems as increasing crime rates and decaying housing.

During the 1970s and early 1980s, city dwellers who could afford to do so moved to the suburbs for more space, privacy, and security. Often, families left the cities because suburbs offered newer, less crowded schools. As many middle-class Americans left cities for the suburbs, the economic base of many urban neighborhoods declined, and suburbs grew wealthy. Following the well-educated labor force, more industries relocated to suburban areas in the 1990s. The economic base that provided tax money and supported city services in large cities such as New York, Detroit, and Philadelphia continued to shrink as people and jobs moved outward.

In addition, many downtown districts fell into disrepair as suburban shoppers abandoned city stores for suburban shopping malls. According to the 1990 census, the 31 most impoverished communities in the United States were in cities. **A**

By the mid-1990s, however, as the property values in the nation's inner cities declined, many people returned to live there. In a process known as **gentrification**, they purchased and rehabilitated deteriorating urban property, oftentimes displacing lower income people. Old industrial sites and neighborhoods in locations convenient to downtown became popular, especially among young, single adults who preferred the excitement of city life and the uniqueness of urban neighborhoods to the often more uniform environment of the suburbs.

MAIN IDEA

Analyzing Causes

A List the factors that influenced middle-class residents to leave cities for suburbs.

History Through *Architecture*

REBUILDING THE RIVERFRONTS

As part of the effort to revitalize cities, a number of architects, landscape architects, and urban planners have focused on enhancing what for many urban centers had become a neglected eyesore—their waterfronts. In Pittsburgh, landscape architects turned a dreary strip of concrete and parking lot into Allegheny Riverfront Park, an inviting stretch of natural walkways and recreation areas.

SKILLBUILDER

Interpreting Visual Sources

1. Why might landscape architects consider improving riverfronts to be a key part of revitalizing cities?
2. In what other ways could architects and urban designers make city living more attractive?

 **SEE SKILLBUILDER HANDBOOK, PAGE R23.**



▲ Allegheny Riverfront Park in 1999

◀ The Allegheny River waterfront in 1984





SUBURBAN LIVING While many suburbanites continued to commute to city jobs during the 1990s, increasing numbers of workers began to telecommute, or use new communications technology, such as computers, modems, and fax machines, to work from their homes. Another notable trend was the movement of minority populations to the suburbs. Nationwide, by the early 1990s, about 43 percent of the Latino population and more than half of the Asian-American population lived in suburbs.

Suburban growth led to intense competition between suburbs and cities, and among the suburbs themselves, for business and industry. Since low-rise suburban homes yielded low tax revenues, tax-hungry suburbs offered tax incentives for companies to locate within their borders. These incentives resulted in lower tax revenues for local governments—meaning that less funds were available for schools, libraries, and police departments. Consequently, taxes were often increased to fund these community services as well as to build the additional roads and other infrastructure necessary to support the new businesses.

The shift of populations from cities to suburbs was not the only significant change in American life in the 1990s. The American public was also growing older, and its aging raised complex issues for American policymakers.

Vocabulary

infrastructure:

the basic facilities, services, and installations needed for the functioning of a community or society

The Graying of America, 1990–2030

Year	Number of Americans 65 and older*	Percent of U.S. population
1990	31,081	12.4
2000	34,837	12.7
2010	37,385**	13.2**
2020	53,733**	16.5**
2030	70,319**	20**

*numbers in thousands

**projected totals

Source: U.S. Census Bureau; *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2000*

SKILLBUILDER Interpreting Charts

1. Between what years is America's elderly population expected to grow the most?
2. By roughly what percentage is America's elderly population expected to increase between 1990 and 2030?

The Aging of America

The 2000 census documents that Americans were older than ever before, with a median age of 35.3—two years older than a decade prior. Increased longevity and the aging of the baby boom generation were the primary reasons for the rising median age.

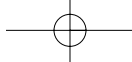
Behind the rising median age lie several broad trends. The country's birthrate has slowed slightly, and the number of seniors has increased as Americans live longer because of advances in medical care and living healthier lifestyles. The number of people over 85 has increased at a faster rate than any other segment of the population, to 4.3 million in the year 2000.

The graying of America has placed new demands on the country's programs that provide care for the elderly. These programs accounted for only 6 percent of the national budget in 1955. It was projected that the programs would consume about 39 percent of the budget by 2005.

The major programs that provide care for elderly and disabled people are Medicare and Social Security. Medicare, which pays medical expenses for senior citizens, began in 1965, when most Americans had lower life expectancies. By 2000, the costs of this program exceeded \$200 billion.



Senior athletes compete at the first U.S. National Senior Olympics held in St. Louis, Missouri, in 2000.



Social Security, which pays benefits to retired Americans, was designed to rely on continued funding from a vast number of younger workers who would contribute taxes to support a small number of retired workers. That system worked well when younger workers far outnumbered retirees and when most workers didn't live long after retirement.

In 1996, it took Social Security contributions from three workers to support every retiree. By 2030, however, with an increase in the number of elderly persons and an expected decline in the birthrate, there will be only two workers' contributions available to support each senior citizen. Few issues loomed as large in the 2000 presidential election as what to do about Social Security. If President Bush and Congress do not restructure the system, Social Security will eventually pay out more money than it will take in. Some people suggest that the system be reformed by raising deductions for workers, taxing the benefits paid to wealthier Americans, and raising the age at which retirees can collect benefits. **B**

MAIN IDEA

Predicting Effects

B What are the factors that will force an eventual restructuring of Social Security?

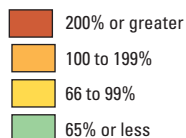
The Shifting Population

In addition to becoming increasingly suburban and elderly, the population of the United States has also been transformed by immigration. Between 1970 and 2000, the country's population swelled from 204 million to more than 284 million. Immigration accounted for much of that growth. As the nation's newest residents yearned for U.S. citizenship, however, other Americans debated the effects of immigration on American life.

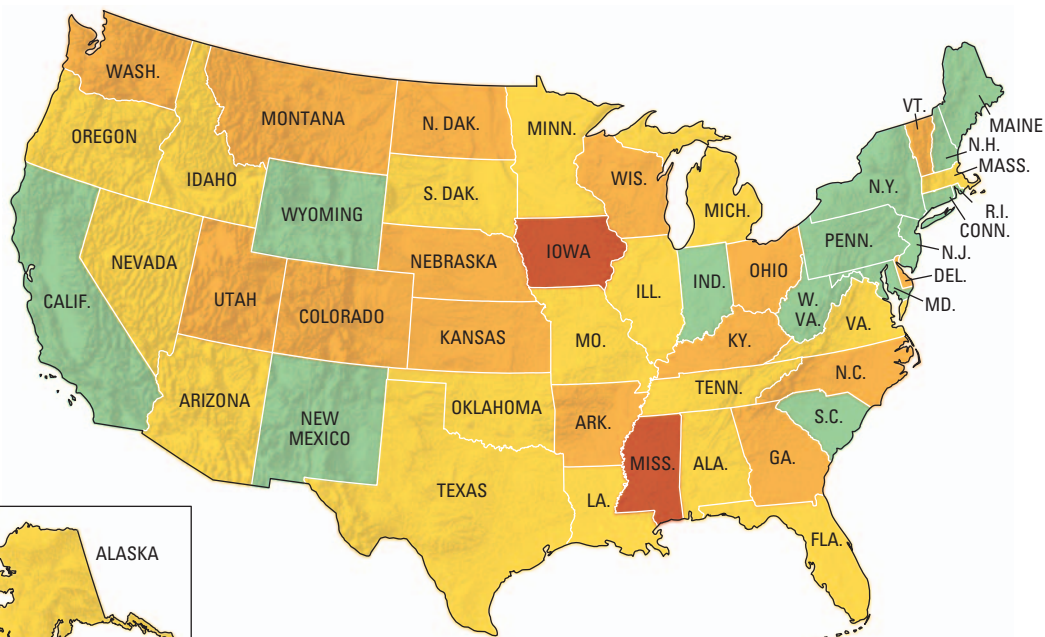
A CHANGING IMMIGRANT POPULATION The most recent immigrants to the United States differ from immigrants of earlier years. The large numbers of immigrants who entered the country before and just after 1900 came from Europe.

Change in U.S. Immigration, 2000

Increase in Number of Immigrants



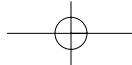
Immigrant population increased nationally by 65%.



GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER

- 1. Movement** Which states show the greatest rise in numbers of immigrants?
- 2. Movement** In the past, immigrants settled in the U.S. along borders and coastlines. Has this changed in 2000? Explain.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau



▲ **Lowe Shee Miu, of Oakland, California, stands in front of a monument commemorating Chinese immigrants at Angel Island—the Ellis Island of the West.**

racial makeup. By 2001, for example, California had become a majority minority state, with Asian Americans, Latinos, African Americans, and Native Americans making up more than half its population. The 2000 census indicated that if current trends continue, by the year 2050 Latinos will become the nation's largest minority community overall.

DEBATES OVER IMMIGRATION POLICY The presence of such a large number of immigrants has also added to the continuing debate over U.S. immigration policies. Many Americans believe that their country can't absorb more immigrants. By the early 1990s, an estimated 3.2 million illegal immigrants from Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Haiti had made their way to the United States. Many illegal immigrants also arrived from Canada, Poland, China, and Ireland. They took jobs many Americans turned down, as farm workers and domestic servants—often receiving the minimum wage or less and no benefits. By 2001, between 5 and 6 million illegal immigrants resided in the United States.

Hostility toward illegal immigration peaked in California and Florida, two states with high percentages of immigrants. In 1994, Florida Governor Lawton Chiles filed suit against the U.S. government for "its continuing failure to enforce or rationally administer its own immigration laws." That same year, California passed **Proposition 187**, which cut all education and nonemergency health benefits to illegal immigrants. By March 1998, Proposition 187 was ruled unconstitutional. Although never implemented, the law inspired political participation among Hispanic voters, who saw themselves as targets.

As more immigrants make their way to the U.S. and the nation's ethnic composition changes, debates about immigration will continue. Those who favor tighter restrictions argue that immigrants take desired jobs. Others, however, point to America's historical diversity and the new ideas and energy immigrants bring. **C**

In contrast, about 45 percent of immigrants since the 1960s have come from the Western Hemisphere, primarily Mexico, and 30 percent from Asia.

In Mexico, for example, during three months in 1994–1995, the Mexican peso was devalued by 73 percent. The devaluation made the Mexican economy decline. As a result, almost a million Mexicans lost their jobs. Many of the unemployed headed north in search of jobs in the United States.

This search for a better opportunity continues today as thousands of immigrants and refugees—more than 2,000 legal and 4,000–10,000 illegal—arrive each day. About 4,000 of those who enter illegally are deported to Mexico shortly after crossing the U.S.-Mexico border. To help those seeking more opportunity in America, in July 2001, President Bush's administration proposed a temporary guest worker program for the 3 million Mexicans residing illegally in the United States.

Based on the 2000 census, it was reported that patterns of immigration are changing the country's ethnic and

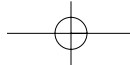
Background

The U.S. Census has asked a race question on every census since the first survey in 1790. Since 1890, the categories and definitions have changed with nearly every census.

MAIN IDEA

Comparing

C How are current arguments against immigration similar to those used in the past?



NATIVE AMERICANS CONTINUE LEGAL BATTLES As the nation debated its immigrant policies, the ancestors of America's original inhabitants continued to struggle. The end of the 20th century found most members of this minority enduring extremely difficult lives. In 2001, about 32 percent of Native Americans lived below the poverty line, more than three times the poverty rate for white Americans. Furthermore, Native Americans endured a suicide rate that was 72 percent higher than that of the general population and an alcoholism rate seven times greater.

In the face of such hardships, Native Americans strived to improve their lives. Throughout the 1990s, dozens of tribes attained greater economic independence by establishing thriving gaming resorts. Although controversial for promoting gambling, reservation gaming—a nearly \$10 billion a year industry by 2000—provided Native Americans with much-needed money for jobs, education, social services, and infrastructure. Over the past decades, Native Americans have used the courts to attain greater recognition of their tribal ancestry and land rights. In 1999, for example, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the Chippewa Indians of Minnesota retained fishing and hunting rights on some 13 million acres of land that were guaranteed to them in an 1837 treaty. Across the nation, a number of other tribes have had similar land rights affirmed.

America in a New Millennium

As the 21st century begins, Americans face both new problems and old ones. Environmental concerns have become a global issue and have moved to center stage. Furthermore, poverty remains a problem for many Americans in the late 20th century, as does the increasing threat that terrorist acts pose to Americans at home and abroad.

It is clear that the new century America faces will bring changes, but those changes need not deepen divisions among Americans. With effort and cooperation, the change could foster growth and tolerance. The 20th century brought new ways of both destroying and enriching lives. What will the 21st bring? Much will depend on you—the dreamers, the decision makers, and the voters of the future.



ASSESSMENT

1. TERMS & NAMES For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

•urban flight

•gentrification

•Proposition 187

MAIN IDEA

2. TAKING NOTES

Demography is the study of statistics about human populations. Use a table like the one below to summarize the demographic changes occurring in the United States.

Demographic Changes	
Urban distribution	
Age	
Ethnic and racial makeup	

CRITICAL THINKING

3. HYPOTHESIZING

As urban problems become more common in the suburbs, how might the residents of suburbs respond? Base your answer on existing behavior patterns. **Think About:**

- the spread of suburbs farther and farther from the city
- the new ability to telecommute
- the tax problems that suburbs face

4. COMPARING AND CONTRASTING

How was the immigration that occurred in the years 1990–2000 similar to and different from earlier waves of immigration?

5. DRAWING CONCLUSIONS

How do disagreements over immigration policy reflect the benefits and challenges of a diverse population?