A Universal Trend? Racial and Ethnic Diversity in American Communities Over Three Decades

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Abstract

The ongoing transformation of the United States into a more racially and ethnically diverse society is an undeniable demographic fact. Our objective here is to examine patterns of racial-ethnic diversity at the local level, where debates about the consequences of diversity are often most intense. We proceed in a theoretically informed manner, drawing hypotheses from the spatial assimilation, ethnic stratification, and ecological models commonly used in residential segregation and attainment research. Analysis of decennial census and American Community Survey data spanning the period 1980 through 2005-2009 indicates that nearly all metropolitan, micropolitan, and rural areas and their constituent places have experienced increases in diversity level (measured by the entropy index), consistent with what we term the convergence hypothesis. However, non-trivial variation across communities in racial-ethnic structure and in the pace of change is at least partially suggestive of divergence. We also find empirical support for the majority of our hypotheses about the antecedents of diversity. In general, more diverse communities have large populations, are located in coastal or southern border states, attract many immigrants, possess a range of housing tenure and occupational opportunities, and serve as centers of government and military employment. Lower diversity is associated with a higher minority-to-white income ratio and functional specialization in retirement or higher education. These results hold by type of community (area or place) and at both the beginning and end of the three-decade study period.

A Universal Trend? Racial and Ethnic Diversity in American Communities Over Three Decades

Arguably the most significant demographic trend underway in the contemporary United States is the dramatic growth of racial and ethnic diversity. If this trend continues at its current rate, African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, and other people of color are projected to equal non-Hispanic whites in number within three decades (Passel and Cohn 2008; U.S. Census Bureau 2004). The forces fueling minority gains include a steady immigration stream, high fertility rates, youthful age structures, intermarriage, and shifts in racial-ethnic identity. While such forces are impressive, the significance of growing diversity ultimately lies in its effects. For example, is the economy buoyed by immigrant consumers, entrepreneurs, and workers, or do immigrants displace natives from jobs and drive down wages? What are the implications of diversity for the educational system? Electoral politics? Race relations? The distribution of health problems and access to care?

The empirical record concerning these and similar issues is mixed, leading many scholars toward a positive or neutral assessment of diversity's overall impact (Bean and Stevens 2003; Smith and Edmonston 1997; White and Glick 2009) and some to favor policies that would slow the growth of diversity (Bouvier 1992; Clark 1998; Huntington 2004). Depending on the circumstances, increased numbers of native- and foreign-born minority residents can foster intergroup tolerance or conflict, community revitalization or disruption, and political mobilization or passivity (Horton 1995; Lindsay and Singer 2003; Massey 2008; Morawska 2001). Such disparate outcomes align well with public opinion data, which reflect Americans' ambivalent attitudes toward immigrants and, more generally, toward diversity (for reviews, see Lapinski et al. 1997; White and Glick 2009).

Despite the national nature of diversity-inspired debates, racial-ethnic diversity may or may not be changing in similar fashion throughout the country. According to current estimates, over half of all blacks still reside in the South and Hispanics and Asians remain over-represented in traditional gateway metropolises in California, Florida, New York, and Texas. Yet recent studies also trace the movement of minorities to a wider range of destinations, altering the composition of once-homogeneous cities, suburbs, and small towns (Berube 2003; Frey 2003, 2006; Lichter and Johnson 2006, 2009; Singer 2005; Wen et al. 2009).

In the present paper we ask whether increasing racial-ethnic diversity is a universal trend at the local level and, if not, how and why diversity patterns differ among communities. These issues are addressed with summary file data from the 1980, 1990, and 2000 decennial censuses and the 2005-2009 American Community Survey (ACS). Unlike past research, most of which is heavily metro-centric, our analysis examines diversity in metropolitan, micropolitan, and rural areas and their constituent places. We also refine the conceptualization and measurement of diversity, distinguishing between its overall level and its underlying racial-ethnic structure. Finally, rather than simply document patterns of diversity in a vacuum, we draw upon existing perspectives from the residential segregation and attainment literatures for theoretical framing and the formulation of hypotheses. One descriptive hypothesis predicts that communities have *converged* on a single path toward greater diversity; another, that some communities are following *divergent* trajectories (including diversity declines and stability). Additional hypotheses emphasize potential antecedents of diversity across areas and places.

Theoretical Framework

Prior investigations typically lack a theoretical backdrop against which to view racial and ethnic diversity. When theorizing does occur, diversity is cast more often as an independent than dependent variable, anticipated to influence social capital, trust, community attachment, and residential segregation (Defina and Hannon 2009; Hou and Wu 2009; Putnam 2007; Rice and Steele 2001). Only a handful of studies have accounted for variation in diversity or identified its correlates (Allen and Turner 1989; Farrell 2005; Hall and Lee 2010). What appears to be needed, then, is a coherent theoretical framework within which to embed the description and explanation of diversity patterns.

We propose that such a framework can be provided in part by perspectives or models used in research on racial segregation and residential attainment. The *spatial assimilation model* holds that as minorities become more socially and economically integrated, they will also become more residentially integrated. With upward mobility and—for immigrants—increasing acculturation, blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and American Indians are expected to pursue better-quality housing and communities (Alba and Logan 1991, 1993; Massey 1985; Rosenbaum and Friedman 2007; South et al. 2008; for background, see Alba and Nee 2003). Although much of the empirical focus has been on spatial integration and group dispersion across neighborhoods, the model is just as relevant to the residential options available to minority groups at higher geographic scales. Assimilation logic implies a future in which all groups are more widely and similarly distributed across metropolitan, micropolitan, and rural areas and places, thus elevating the racial-ethnic diversity of these units.

The *ethnic stratification model*, by contrast, cites significant barriers to assimilation across the board. Audit studies show that minority homeseekers still face significant housing market discrimination (Pager and Shepherd 2008; Turner and Ross 2005; Yinger 1995). At the jurisdictional level, land use policies such as density zoning can exacerbate residential segregation by making it difficult for minority households to gain a foothold in predominantly white communities (Rothwell and Massey 2009). The result is that urban and suburban muncipalities have become more racially fragmented from one another (Farrell 2008). Moreover, whites appear sufficiently averse to the presence of other races that they may exit communities or metropolitan areas in response (Frey 1995a). The stratification model also notes that own-group residential preferences, which are strong among newly arrived immigrants drawn to enclave-based resources and support, often persist over time. In short, the model casts doubt on the prospects for increasing diversity as long as external constraints and self-segregative processes operate. Its vision is of a landscape in which groups live largely apart from each other, concentrated in separate, relatively homogeneous communities.

Hypotheses

Both the spatial assimilation and ethnic stratification perspectives offer answers to the central descriptive question motivating our analysis: *how universal is the trend toward greater diversity?* According to the assimilation perspective, gains in diversity levels and changes toward similar racial-ethnic structures should be expected across all types of community units, in line with what we term the *convergence hypothesis*.

The stratification model, however, favors a *divergence hypothesis*, as epitomized in the early work of Frey (1995ab, 1996; but see 2006). He has argued that the network-guided movement of Hispanic and Asian immigrants to select destinations and the departure from those same destinations of less educated, lower-income whites—who perceive the new arrivals as threatening—could portend a future marked by "demographic balkanization rather than an even increase in racial and ethnic diversity across all regions and metropolitan areas" (Frey 1995a:755). Although Frey's view has not gone unchallenged (e.g., Lichter and Johnson 2006; Wright et al. 1997), the alleged importance of whites' out-group aversion makes the divergence hypothesis worth evaluating.

In a more explanatory vein, we ask *how well local differences in diversity are accounted for by the characteristics of racial-ethnic groups and their communities of residence*. Following spatial assimilation theory, the *group position hypothesis* holds that indicators of minority standing, such as the ratio of minority-to-white income, should be positively related to diversity insofar as they reflect successful incorporation. Similarly, a substantial share of immigrants in the local population could blur the traditional white-black divide, thus opening the door to a more balanced racial-ethnic composition. The ethnic stratification perspective, on the other hand, treats whites' aversion to 'outsiders' (especially economically ambitious ones from other countries) as a key dynamic in the *group threat hypothesis*. Consistent with this hypothesis, a negative relationship is predicted between the minority-to-white income ratio and diversity. And just as an economic threat (income parity) may diminish diversity, so should a cultural one: a high proportion of immigrants in a community is hypothesized to be linked to a lower diversity level.

Beyond group position and group threat, the assimilation and stratification models have little to say about the factors associated with community variation in racial-ethnic diversity. Greater payoff can be gleaned from a third, *ecological model* common in segregation research (Farley and Frey 1994; Iceland and Scopilliti 2008; Lee et al. 2008; Logan et al. 2004) but only occasionally applied to diversity (see, e.g., Allen and Turner 1989; Farrell 2005; Hall and Lee 2010). Many ecological characteristics represent *opportunity*, broadly construed. For example, we hypothesize that large areas and places should be more diverse than small ones, given the general appeal of the former and the access they provide to 'critical masses' of co-ethnics. Higher diversity is also predicted for communities in coastal and southern border states because of their favorable locations relative to immigrant countries of origin. Affordable rental housing and a varied occupational structure are likely to attract a wide range of racial and ethnic groups as well.

In terms of functional (industrial) specialization, we expect diversity to be greater in communities dominated by diverse institutions that value racial and ethnic equality (e.g., higher education, government, the military). Yet some forms of specialization may discourage racial mixing rather than promote it. As an illustration, we anticipate that diversity will be lower in retirement-specialized communities where elderly whites' preferences for racial homogeneity, coupled with expensive living costs, presumably deter minority residence.

Methods

Measuring Diversity

Racial and ethnic diversity is sometimes confused with residential segregation. The latter concept reflects the extent to which members of two or more groups reside in different neighborhoods within a community. Diversity, by contrast, refers to the number of racial-ethnic groups that the community population comprises and the sizes of the groups relative to each other. Intuitively, a population marked by *evenness*—consisting of many groups of equal size—would be highly diverse.

To capture the magnitude of diversity, we rely on the *entropy index*, symbolized by *E* (see Massey and Denton 1988; Pielou 1977; Theil 1972; White 1986). This index gauges how evenly members of a community population are spread across categories or groups on some variable of interest. In our analysis, an *E* value of 0 signifies complete homogeneity or no diversity, with all population members belonging to the same racial-ethnic group. At the opposite extreme, a value of 100 indicates maximum heterogeneity, with all groups representing equal proportions of the population.[1]

Though useful, the entropy index stresses diversity level to the neglect of a community's *racial-ethnic structure*, i.e., the specific groups present. Taking structure into account becomes important when one realizes that, based on the evenness criterion alone, a hypothetical place with equal numbers (thirds) of white, Asian, and Hispanic residents would be considered identical to a place where Hispanics, blacks, and American Indians each constitute a third of the population. In short, the two places would have the same *E* scores despite very different compositions. To overcome this limitation, we supplement *E* with pie charts, bar graphs, and a 'majority rule' typology (described in a later section) for summarizing the group percentages that underlie its values.

How Many Groups?

A key step in our study is the decision about which racial-ethnic groups to include. The crosstabulation of race and Hispanic origin in the census and ACS summary files produces six broad panethnic categories that are comparable from 1980 through 2005-2009: (1) non-Hispanic whites, (2) non-Hispanic blacks, (3) non-Hispanic Asians and Pacific Islanders (hereafter Asians), (4) non-Hispanic American Indians and Alaska Natives (hereafter Native Americans), (5) non-Hispanics of other races (other and multi-race individuals), and (6) Hispanics of any race. Should all of these groups be considered or only the largest ones?

Inspecting the changing racial and ethnic diversity of the U.S. as a whole provides an illustration of how the number of groups influences diversity estimates. The top curve in Figure 1 shows that—based on the summed populations of the four largest panethnic groups (whites, blacks, Asians, and Hispanics)—the national diversity level has climbed steadily, from an *E* of 47.7 in 1980 to 68.8 in 2005-2009. When we successively add Native Americans and non-Hispanic persons of other races to the mix, the corresponding 5-group and 6-group curves parallel the 4-group curve but at lower magnitudes. Put differently, the *E* scores plotted in the figure indicate that U.S. residents have been more evenly distributed across four panethnic categories than across five or six categories for at least 30 years. The trend in diversity, however, remains the same regardless of the number of groups used in the calculation.

[Figure 1 about here]

The specific group shares on which these *E* scores rest can be compared using the two pie charts in Figure 2. The charts highlight major shifts during recent decades: Hispanics have replaced blacks as the second largest racial-ethnic group in the nation, and the proportion of Asians has tripled since 1980. Figure 2 also underscores how small the Native American and other-race 'slices of the pie' continue to be. For that reason, the rest of our analysis is limited to a total population consisting of the four major panethnic groups.

[Figure 2 about here]

Kinds of Communities

We investigate two classes of census geographic units that approximate the notion of local community. *Areas*—metropolitan, micropolitan, and rural—are of interest because they correspond to the housing and labor markets in which members of different racial-ethnic groups live and work. Many of these areas are governmental jurisdictions as well. We impose 2008 U.S. Office of Management and Budget spatial definitions on the areas, insuring comparable cases at all four time points. Specifically, there are 366 metro areas, 574 micro areas, and 1,357 rural areas in each year. In terms of census geography, metro areas contain at least one urbanized population of 50,000 or more, the central county or counties in which that population is located, and any surrounding counties that share strong commuting ties with the central county. Micro areas are similar to metro areas but have smaller total and urbanized populations (Frey et al. 2006). Rural areas are single counties that do not fall inside metropolitan or micropolitan boundaries.[2]

What the Census Bureau calls *places* represent another important kind of community. Three-fourths of all places are incorporated municipalities (e.g., cities, suburbs, towns), and many coincide with school districts and service delivery zones. Thus, they have primary fiscal and policy responsibility for any consequences of diversity inside their boundaries. In addition to these governmental jurisdictions, the Census Bureau designates some unincorporated communities as places.

Much of our analysis examines all places (incorporated and Census-designated[3]) in a given year that have at least 1,000 residents, 90% or more of whom are white, black, Hispanic, or Asian.[4] The sample of places meeting these size and compositional thresholds has grown from 11,645 in 1980 to 13,655 in 2005-2009. Places occupied by fewer than 5,000 residents make up about three-fifths of the sample. Given the potential of numerous small places to shape 'average' results, we occasionally focus on subsamples of larger places (e.g., with populations above 10,000) that better reflect the experiences of most Americans.

Results

Basic Patterns

Our initial empirical task is to describe mean diversity levels, structures, and changes for U.S. communities over three decades. Treating areas as communities, we find that metropolitan areas on average are the most racially and ethnically

diverse units and rural areas the least, with micro areas in between (Figure 3). Consistent with the convergence hypothesis, each type of area exhibits an upward trend in diversity from 1980 through 2005-2009. The largest percentage change in *E* over the entire period is evident for metro areas (45.7%) and the smallest for rural areas (39.8%). Since 2000, however, rural areas (11.9%) have diversified more rapidly than metro areas (10.4%) by a slight margin (see the last two columns in the top panel of Table 1). As a rule, similarities are stronger in the direction rather than the extent of diversification across metro, micro, and rural settings, providing partial support for both the convergence and divergence hypotheses. Specifically, 98.1% of all metro areas, 94.3% of all micro areas, and 86.6% of all rural counties have experienced increases in their *E* scores from 1980 through 2005-2009, but the increases range from negligible to extreme in magnitude.[5]

[Figure 3 about here]

Following the ecological model, diversity patterns differ by regional location as well as by type of area. Table 1 documents higher mean diversity levels in southern and western metropolitan and micropolitan areas than in their northeastern and midwestern counterparts. These differences hold throughout the study period, although the gaps appear to be narrowing a bit. Midwestern micro and rural areas, historically quite homogeneous, have recorded the biggest percentage gains in racial-ethnic diversity from both 1980 and 2000 to the present. Among metro areas, those in the Northeast have experienced the greatest diversity increases in percentage terms. Diversity also varies with the population size of metropolitan areas (Table 2). Depending on the year, mean *E* scores are between 54% and 61% higher in metropolises of 1 million or more residents than in metro areas with less than 250,000. No clear relationship between diversity and size exists for micropolitan or rural areas.

[Tables 1 and 2 about here]

The four-group racial-ethnic structures underlying these diversity levels continue to be dominated by whites, who currently make up roughly 75% of metropolitan populations, 80% of micropolitan populations, and 85% of rural populations. The most significant shift in composition since 1980 occurs for metro areas, where Hispanics have doubled their mean proportional representation (to 11.5%) and black and Asian shares have risen (Figure 4). Hispanic growth has also reshaped other kinds of communities, with Hispanics now constituting 9.2% and 7.0% of the average micropolitan and rural area, respectively. In short, some convergence toward a multi-group structure—and away from white homogeneity—is apparent.

[Figure 4 about here]

For places (as distinct from areas), the mean diversity level has climbed from 20.9 to 33.3 during the three-decade span. However, bigger places exhibit greater average diversity magnitudes and gains than their smaller counterparts. This is especially true for places in the second, third, and fourth size classes in Figure 5 (with populations between 25,000 and 250,000). Their *E* scores have increased by some 20 points since 1980 and now fall in the 50-65 range. Cities in the largest size class (250,000+) remain at the top of the diversity hierarchy, with a mean *E* that exceeds 70. The size advantage in diversity persists across regions. More generally, a place's population size and its entropy score exhibit a zero-order correlation of about .4 at each time point. This finding provides preliminary confirmation for the size hypothesis drawn from the ecological model.

[Figure 5 about here]

With respect to racial-ethnic structure, the average share that each minority group constitutes of a place's 2005-2009 population increases as one ascends the size ladder (Figure 6). Hispanics are always the largest minority, followed in order by African Americans and Asians. Hispanics enjoy their most substantial edge over blacks in places that have between 50,000 and 250,000 residents. At the same time, white representation decreases as the population of a place rises. Indeed, whites are only a plurality (47.3%, on average) rather than a majority in cities of 250,000 or more.

[Figure 6 about here]

These mean compositional patterns point to a notable trend in racial-ethnic structure since 1980: the decline of all-white residential environments (i.e., where whites make up 90% or more of the population). Several studies have documented this trend for urban neighborhoods, an expanding number of which are occupied by multiple racial and ethnic groups (Farrell and Lee 2011; Fasenfest et al. 2006; Logan and Zhang 2010). But it is also happening at the community level. A simple 'majority rule' typology allows us to show the shift away from all-white places in a transparent manner. In Table 3 we classify places into white, black, Hispanic, or Asian majority types depending on which group captures more than 50% of the population. We further divide white majority places into dominant (90%+ white) and shared (51-89% white) subtypes. Finally, in no-majority places three or four racial-ethnic groups are present but none achieves more than a plurality.

[Table 3 about here]

Several lessons are apparent from the top panel of the table, which includes all places that meet our population size and compositional criteria in 1980 and 2005-2009. First, white majority communities remain the norm, but white dominant (e.g., all-white) places are much less common now than in the past, decreasing from 68.1% to 46.1% of the total over the last three decades. Second, the percentages of white shared, black majority, and Hispanic majority places have grown significantly, and these places all display mean diversity levels in the medium range. Third, the share of no-majority places—the most diverse type of setting—has more than quadrupled. Altogether, minority-majority and no-majority communities exhibit substantial gains both absolutely (from 731 to 2,009 places) and proportionally (from 6.3% to 14.7% of the sample) during the study period.

The same changes take an exaggerated form when we focus on metropolitan places of 10,000 or more (bottom panel of Table 3). In this subsample, consisting of the principal cities and larger suburbs of metro areas, the percentage of white dominant places drops from roughly one-half to one-fifth between 1980 and 2005-2009. By contrast, places in which whites account for less than half the population (e.g., minority-majority and no-minority types) now constitute 23.1% of the metro subsample, up from 7.8% in 1980. Similar trends are observed for places in micropolitan and rural areas, which are headed in the same direction as their metropolitan counterparts but at a slower rate. Once again, the directional evidence supports the convergence scenario, with variations in the pace of change suggestive of divergence.

Which Communities Are Most and Least Diverse?

Aggregate diversity patterns are informative, but they mask the differences among specific communities that bear most directly on our explanatory hypotheses. These differences are initially explored here by comparing the top 25 and bottom 25 metropolitan areas based on their levels of racial-ethnic diversity in 2005-2009. Two Bay Area metropolises, Vallejo-Fairfield (E = 91.3) and San Francisco-Oakland-Fremont (88.9), head the top 25 list in Table 4; it also includes nine other metro areas located in California. Traditional immigrant gateways such as Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana, New York-Northern New Jersey-Long Island, Miami-Ft. Lauderdale-Pompano Beach, and Chicago-Naperville-Joliet are joined on the list by newer destinations (e.g., Washington DC-Alexandria-Arlington, Las Vegas-Paradise, Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Marietta). Metro areas in the top 25 tend to be large and heavily concentrated in the West and South. All have E scores above 70.

[Table 4 about here]

In line with ecological hypotheses about size and location, a contrasting picture emerges in Table 5, where smaller metropolitan areas in the Midwest and the Northeast dominate the bottom 25. Parkersburg-Marietta-Vienna (E = 9.5) and Bismarck (9.7) rank as the least diverse metro areas in the U.S. Not surprisingly, their populations are both over 97% white, and 22 of the remaining 23 areas are at least 94% white. Laredo constitutes the lone exception; its minimal

diversity reflects its overwhelmingly Hispanic character (94.7%). The Laredo case underscores the fact that similar levels of diversity may be due to very different racial-ethnic structures.

[Table 5 about here]

Despite mean patterns and popular perception, high levels of diversity are not unique to metropolitan America. The 25 most diverse micropolitan areas have *E* values in the 65-75 range and are more often found in the South. The 25 least diverse micro areas, with *E*s under 10, are almost all in the Midwest and the Northeast. Interestingly, Texas is home to the micro area (Bay City) that ranks #1 in diversity and to the area (Rio Grande City-Roma) that ranks #1 in homogeneity. Bay City comprises nontrivial proportions of whites (49.1%), Hispanics (37.1%), and blacks (11.4%). Rio Grande City-Roma, on the other hand, is entirely Hispanic (98.8%).

[Table 6 about here]

When we shift our focus from areas to places, population size appears less strongly linked with diversity toward the high end of the diversity scale. Among the 50 most diverse places listed in Table 6, just over half have populations in the 10,000 to 50,000 range, and another nine have fewer than 10,000 residents. What matters more than size for these places are the larger contexts in which they are embedded. All are suburbs or principal cities of metropolitan areas, and four-fifths can be found in the West or South. Vallejo and Jersey City, the two communities at the top of the table, offer illustrations of maximum racial-ethnic diversity. In both places, whites, blacks, Hispanics, and Asians each constitute roughly one-fourth of all residents as of 2005-2009 (Figure 7). Whites are a slight plurality in Vallejo and Hispanics in Jersey City, with all three minority groups far exceeding their national shares (compare Figures 7 and 2). At the opposite extreme, 388 places have an *E* score of zero, reflecting maximum homogeneity: their entire residential populations are drawn from a single racial-ethnic category.

[Figure 7 about here]

The places in Table 6 represent the upper portion of a hierarchy that has remained remarkably stable during recent decades. If we focus on those places that satisfy the size and compositional thresholds (1,000+ residents, 90% + white, black, Hispanic, or Asian) at all four time points, very little shifting is apparent between 2000 and 2005-2009 in where they rank with respect to the magnitude of racial-ethnic diversity (Spearman correlation = .92). A comparison of their 1980 and 2005-2009 diversity ranks reveals an impressive degree of stability as well (Spearman correlation = .80). Thus, while the vast majority of places have experienced absolute diversity increases over time, changes in their relative positions—how they stack up against each other—are minimal.[6]

Sources of Diversity Variation

As the presence of a hierarchy implies, nontrivial differences in diversity exist among communities. Our final analytic objective is to attempt to account for such differences, both at the end (2005-2009) and the beginning (1980) of the study period. Guided by the spatial assimilation perspective discussed earlier, we test the group position hypothesis using two independent variables: (a) the ratio of average minority income to average white income and (b) the percentage of residents who are immigrants (i.e., foreign born). The operationalization of the first variable is subject to data constraints: in 2005-2009, the denominator refers to non-Hispanic white household income and the numerator to the household income of everybody else; the 1980 measure incorporates white and non-white family income. Group position logic predicts a positive relationship between the income ratio and foreign-born variables and racial-ethnic diversity. Based on the ethnic stratification model, however, both of these independent variables should be negatively related to diversity, in line with the group threat hypothesis.

Antecedents drawn from the ecological model include community population size (hypothesized association with racial-ethnic diversity: positive), location in a coastal or southern border state (positive),[7] the percentage of occupied housing

units that are rented (positive), and occupational diversity, measured with the entropy index to capture how evenly employed persons are distributed across 13 census occupational categories (positive). In terms of functional specialization, we have identified the extent to which communities are government or military centers by summing the z scores of the proportion of the employed civilian population in government and the proportion of the labor force in the military. This variable, like our measure of educational specialization (percentage of the population aged 18-29 enrolled in college), is expected to be positively related to diversity. For retirement specialization (percentage of the population aged 65 and older), the relationship should be negative.

We regress racial and ethnic diversity (tapped by the entropy index *E*) on the nine variables just described, first for places of 10,000 or more residents (Table 7) and then for metropolitan areas (Table 8). Irrespective of whether 2005-2009 or 1980 data are used, the OLS equations summarized in the tables paint a clear picture. Diversity tends to be greater in communities that have large populations, are located in coastal or border states, and attract many immigrants. More diverse communities are also marked by a mix of housing options and types of work, as reflected in higher rental occupancy and occupational diversity. Functional specialization as a center of government and military employment is another community characteristic positively associated with diversity. These results all conform to hypotheses, suggesting that accessible contexts rich in opportunity hold appeal for members of multiple racial-ethnic groups.

[Tables 7 and 8 about here]

Under what conditions is diversity less likely? The significant coefficient for the minority-to-white income ratio in three of the four equations in Tables 7 and 8 would seem to support the group threat hypothesis: when people of color are economically successful, whites elect to exit the community rather than compete, rendering the local racial-ethnic composition more homogeneous. But an alternative interpretation is possible as well: that predominantly white places and metro areas attract fewer but higher-status minority households than do their more diverse counterparts. Similar reasoning could apply to the unanticipated negative coefficient for educational specialization. Instead of an abstract commitment to equal opportunity, what may really matter about college towns is that their institutions of higher learning remain out of reach for many African Americans and Hispanics, with reduced diversity the consequence. Finally, retirement-oriented communities exhibit the expected lower levels of diversity, presumably because of the challenges posed to minorities by elderly whites' racial attitudes and the elevated cost of living in such settings.

These regressions do not constitute the final word on the antecedents of racial-ethnic diversity. Yet given the dearth of attention to the issue in past work, we believe that the nine variables included in the place and metro area equations provide a promising starting point. Together they pack substantial statistical punch, explaining between 40% and 65% of the variance in diversity. They also operate largely as hypothesized, with coefficients that remain significant in magnitude and consistent in sign across years and community types.[8] Such properties lend credence to the generality and robustness of the explanatory model evaluated here.

Conclusion

Our research documents a notable increase in racial and ethnic diversity at the local level during the past 30 years. This trend is pervasive, affecting nearly all metropolitan, micropolitan, and rural areas and places. At the same time, considerable variation occurs in the pace or extent of change and in the compositional structures toward which communities are evolving. We conclude from such results that the convergence hypothesis (based on spatial assimilation logic) receives the most support and the divergence hypothesis (derived from the ethnic stratification model) receives a secondary amount. Put another way, shifts in diversity may approximate a universal trend with respect to direction but less so with respect to magnitude or composition.

The guiding theoretical perspectives—especially the ecological model—also yield a series of explanatory hypotheses about community characteristics that should be linked to racial-ethnic diversity. Most of these characteristics are indeed related to diversity, and in the manner predicted. For both 1980 and 2005-2009, the profile of high-diversity areas and

places includes large population size, a coastal or southern border location, plentiful immigrant residents, a mix of housing and occupational options, functional specialization in government and military employment (but not in retirement or higher education), and a low minority-to-white income ratio.

What larger, society-wide forces account for the ubiquitous trend toward greater diversity? Any macro narrative must begin with sustained immigration to the U.S. accompanied by the growing geographic dispersion of minority groups—especially Hispanics—beyond their traditional destinations. Even if the immigration 'faucet' could be turned off tomorrow, however, community diversity would continue to climb for decades, thanks to the momentum inherent in the higher fertility rates and younger age structures of many immigrant-rich groups. Intermarriage will also help prolong diversity's rise, through the creation of multiracial offspring. Although it represents a minor fraction of the national population to date, and hence is not emphasized here, the multiracial population has achieved prominence in a handful of smaller places concentrated in Hawaii and other western states.

The operation of these demographic forces does not mean that most communities will soon resemble Vallejo and Jersey City in racial-ethnic structure. Nevertheless, our analysis shows that a decline in all-white cities, suburbs, and small towns is clearly underway. More Americans are residing in places where whites or Hispanics or blacks represent a modest majority and two or three other groups each enjoy a significant presence. No-majority communities, which constitute the most diverse type of setting, are increasing as well.

As diversity spreads, its consequences attract the lion's share of public attention. Incumbent residents often express concerns about whether newcomers of a different race or nativity will influence local institutions (the economy, schools, social services, politics) and cultural cohesion, as reflected in common values, religious traditions, and language. Ideally, both newcomers and incumbents should be flexible, supporting policies that facilitate the incorporation of all groups into the fabric of community life. Which policies are best able to accomplish that goal remain uncertain, given the mixed evidence cited in the introduction about the impacts of racial-ethnic diversity across settings. The lack of federal or state guidelines for dealing with diversity further complicates matters.

Diversity-related issues in a community ultimately affect everyone who dwells there. Of course, sharing the same community may or may not translate into members of different groups living side by side. Some of the more diverse urban centers in the U.S. (New York, Chicago, Miami, Los Angeles) still register high levels of segregation, with whites, blacks, Hispanics, and Asians divided into separate residential niches (Iceland et al. 2010; Logan and Stults 2011). In a segregated landscape, the neighborhood experiences of these groups (e.g., their access to educational and employment opportunities and proximity to hazardous conditions) frequently contrast in dramatic fashion. Whites who associate the presence of minorities with a reduced quality of life are prone either to exit diverse neighborhoods or not to move into them at all (Charles 2006; Ellen 2000; Krysan et al. 2009)

Could this type of white avoidance, exacerbated by continued minority growth, portend a bleak future for the racial and ethnic diversity of entire communities, not just neighborhoods? Some places did in fact reach their diversity peak in 1980 or 1990 and have subsequently become more homogeneous, shifting from white shared or no-majority to white dominant or minority-majority standing. The increase in black and Hispanic majority communities between 1980 and 2005-2009 (see Table 3) likewise hints at potential departures from, or reversals of, the diversity master trend.

More optimistically, scholars who subscribe to the 'contact hypothesis' argue that prolonged exposure to diversity will weaken stereotypes and improve attitudes toward groups other than one's own (Pettigrew and Tropp 2000). The sort of tolerance predicted by the hypothesis is apparent in a recent Pew Research Center survey finding that two-thirds of all Americans would "prefer to live in a place where there are many different racial and ethnic groups" rather than "in a place where most people are of the same race as you" (Taylor et al. 2008). The long-term fate of community diversity hinges on the extent to which people's actual residential choices and circumstances align with such stated preferences.

Notes

1. The entropy index is formally defined as follows:

$$E = \sum_{r=1}^{n} p_r \ln\left(\frac{1}{p_r}\right)$$

where p_r refers to racial-ethnic group r's proportion of the population in a geographic unit and n indicates the number of groups under consideration. The maximum value of E (the natural log of n) occurs only when all groups are of equal size. Since there is no fixed upper bound, a population consisting of more equal-sized groups will produce a higher E score than one consisting of fewer equal-sized groups. An E of 0 (complete homogeneity) means that the population comprises a single group. Dividing E by its maximum value standardizes it to a 0-1 range. We have multiplied the standardized scores by 100 so that 0 equals the lowest level of diversity and 100 the highest.

2. Micropolitan areas comprise at least one urban cluster with between 10,000 and 50,000 residents, the host core county, and any contiguous counties linked to the core via commuting. What we refer to as rural areas—officially nonmetropolitan, nonmicropolitan counties—are not identified as such in census terminology.

3. The fact that most places are incorporated has prompted us to rely on the boundaries current at each time point rather than to hold them constant. Allowing boundaries to vary can be justified with an example. If a municipality annexes new land, any shifts in diversity would matter throughout the unit (in terms of policies, demand for services, budget, etc.), not just inside its old or new territory.

4. The volatility of E scores and group percentages in sparse populations provides a rationale for the 1,000-resident minimum. The second criterion—that 90% or more of those residents must belong to the four major panethnic groups of interest—deletes communities hosting sizeable shares of excluded minorities (Native Americans, other and multi-race individuals). It thus guards against the possibility of results being distorted by places that appear highly diverse due to relatively equal but trivial numbers of whites, blacks, Hispanics, and Asians.

A total of 500 places in the 1,000+ size range (out of 14,155 nationally) have been dropped because they fail to satisfy the 90% criterion. Roughly half (52.6%) of these places are located in Hawaii and the rest of the West; another third are in southern states. They tend to be small, with three-fourths falling below the 5,000 mark in population. (Honolulu and Anchorage constitute the main exceptions to the size rule.)
The average 5-group E score (with Native American and multiracial/other race individuals combined in the fifth group) is 50.3 for the 500 deleted places, about 10 points higher than the comparable E for other places in the West and South.

5. Leading the way among larger metropolises, Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington has seen its diversity level grow by 187% over the three decades, and diversity has more than doubled in Providence-New Bedford-Fall River, Portland-Vancouver-Beaverton, Salt Lake City, Boston-Cambridge-Quincy, and Miami-Ft. Lauderdale-Pompano Beach. Aside from Miami, these areas were disproportionately white at the beginning of the period.

6. The same generalization about stability can be applied to areas. For all metro areas, the Spearman correlation between their diversity ranks in 1980 and 2005-2009 is .90; for micro areas, the corresponding correlation is .80; and for rural areas, the correlation is .86.

7. The coastal-border category consists of the Pacific rim states (including Hawaii and Alaska), those that 'touch' Mexico or the Gulf of Mexico, and those extending northward along the Atlantic seaboard from Florida to Massachusetts.

8. Separate regression analyses for micropolitan areas and rural counties (not shown) yield the same basic pattern of findings.

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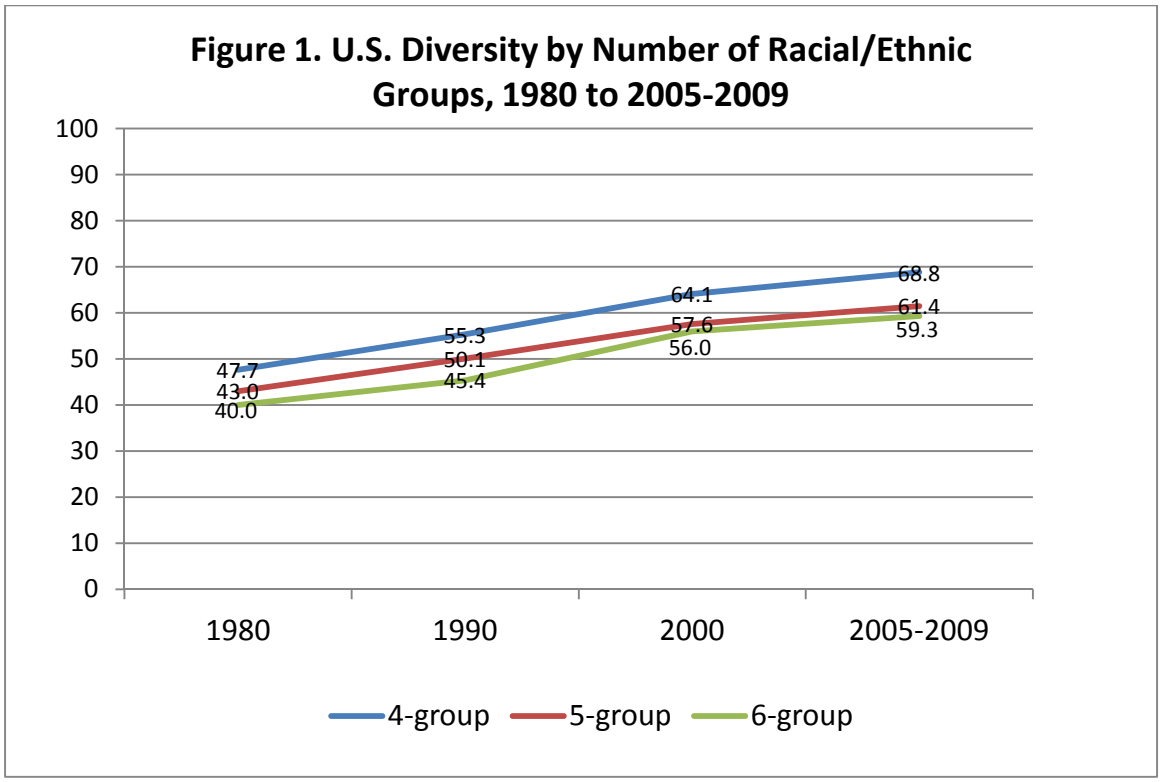
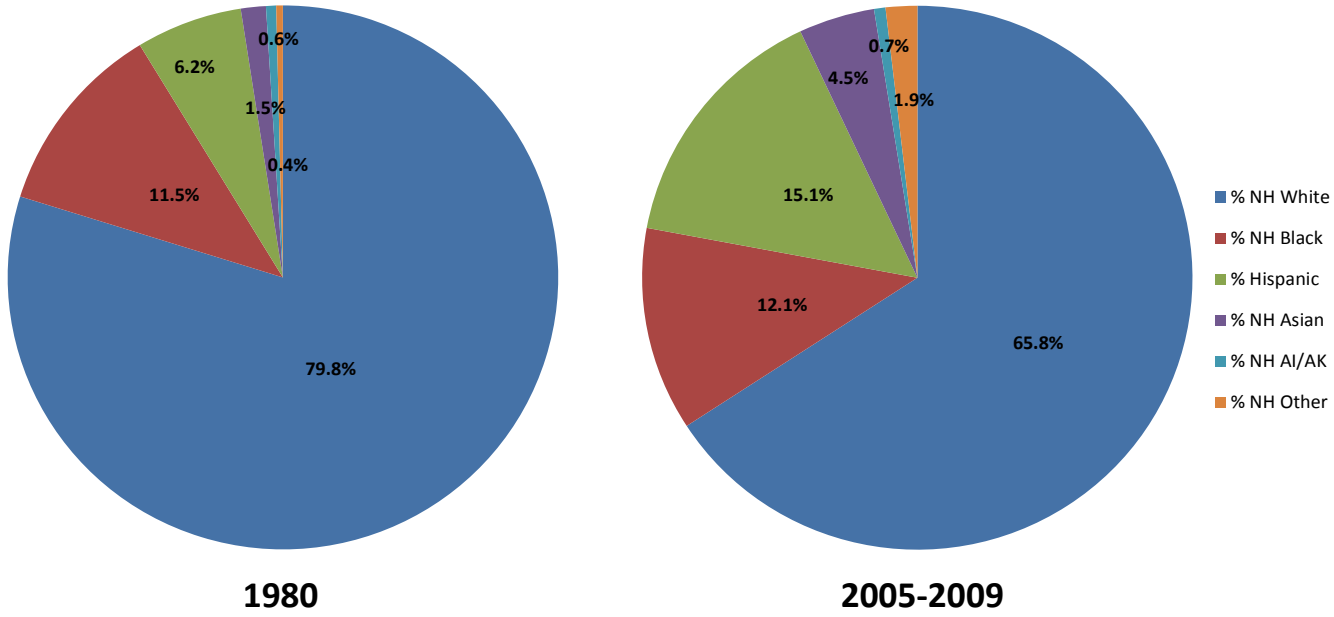


Figure 1. U.S. Diversity by Number of Racial/Ethnic Groups, 1980 to 2005-2009
100
90
80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
1980
1990
2000
2005-2009
47.7
43.0
40.0
55.3
50.1
45.4
64.1
57.6
56.0
68.8
61.4
59.3
4-group
5-group
6-group

Figure 2. U.S. Racial/Ethnic Composition, 1980 and 2005-2009



1980 2005-2009

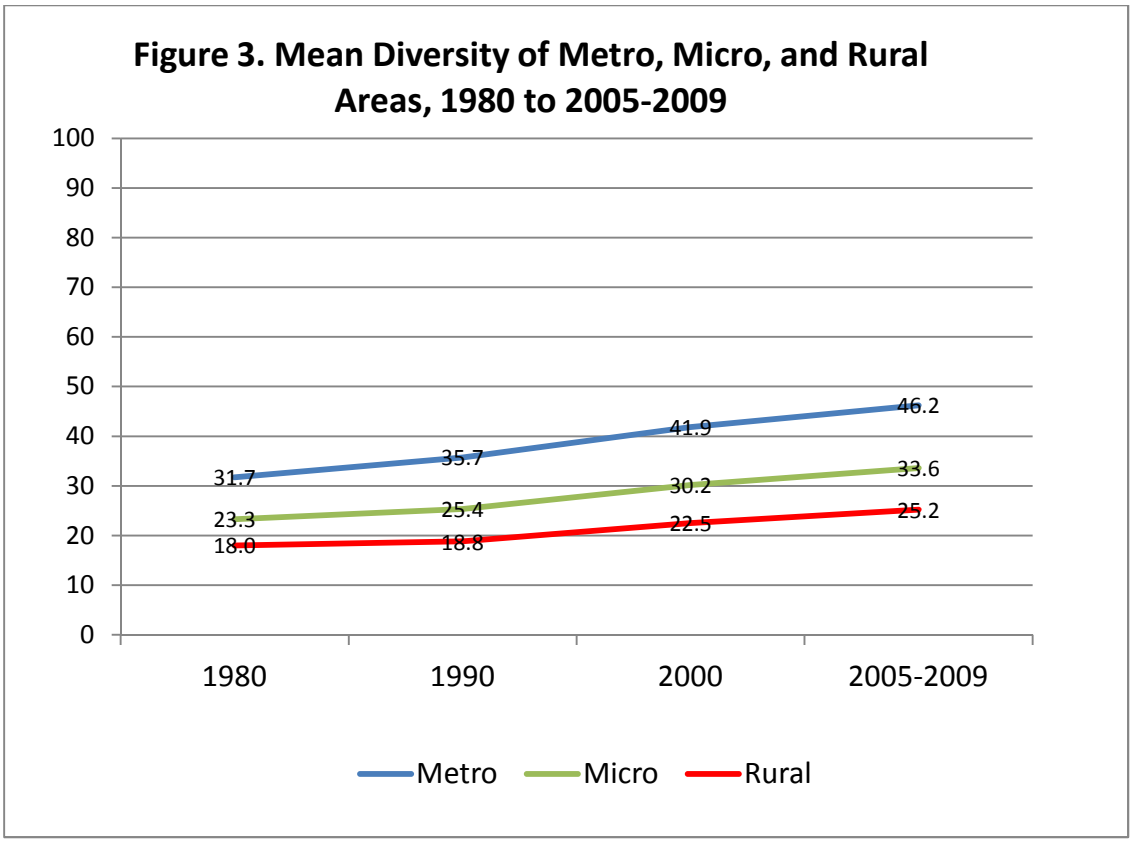
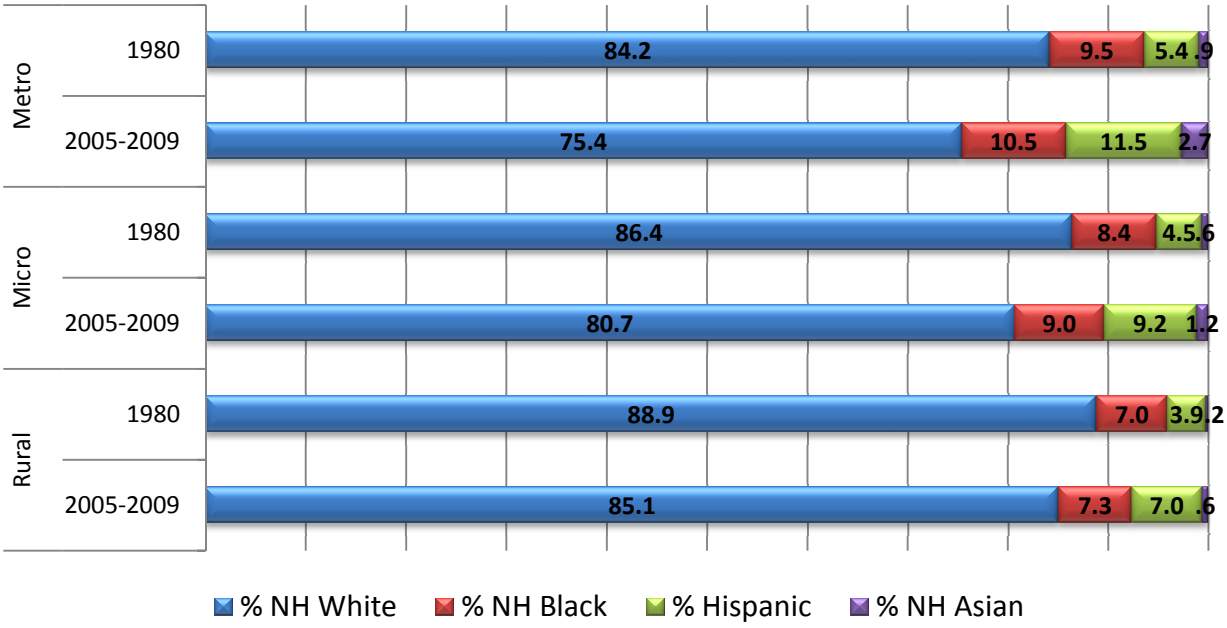


Figure 3. Mean Diversity of Metro, Micro, and Rural Areas, 1980 to 2005-2009
100
90
80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
1980
1990
2000
2005-2009
31.7
35.7
41.9
46.2
23.3
25.4
30.2
33.6
18.0
18.8
22.5
25.2
Metro
Micro
Rural

Figure 4. Mean Racial/Ethnic Composition of Metro, Micro, and Rural Areas, 1980 and 2005-2009



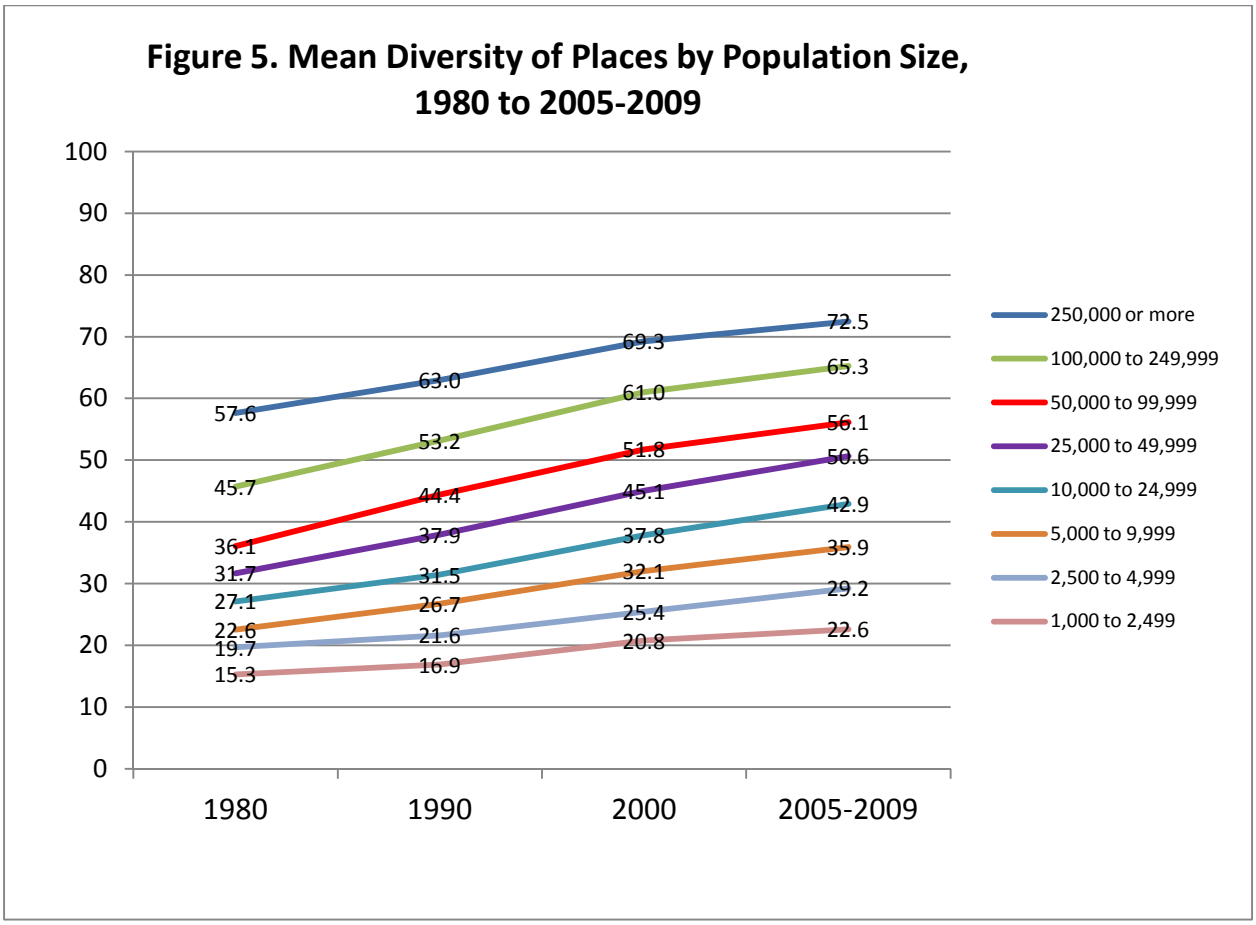


Figure 5. Mean Diversity of Places by Population Size, 1980 to 2005-2009
100
90
80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
1980
1990
2000
2005-2009
57.6
63.0
69.3
72.5
45.7
53.2
61.0
65.3
36.1
44.4
51.8
56.1
31.7
37.9
45.1
50.6
27.1
31.5
37.8
42.9
22.6
26.7
32.1
35.9
19.7
21.6
25.4
29.2
15.3
16.9
20.8
22.6
250,000 or more
100,000 to 249,999
50,000 to 99,999
25,000 to 49,999
10,000 to 24,999
5,000 to 9,999
2,500 to 4,999
1,000 to 2,499

Figure 6. Mean Racial/Ethnic Composition of Places by Population Size, 2005-2009

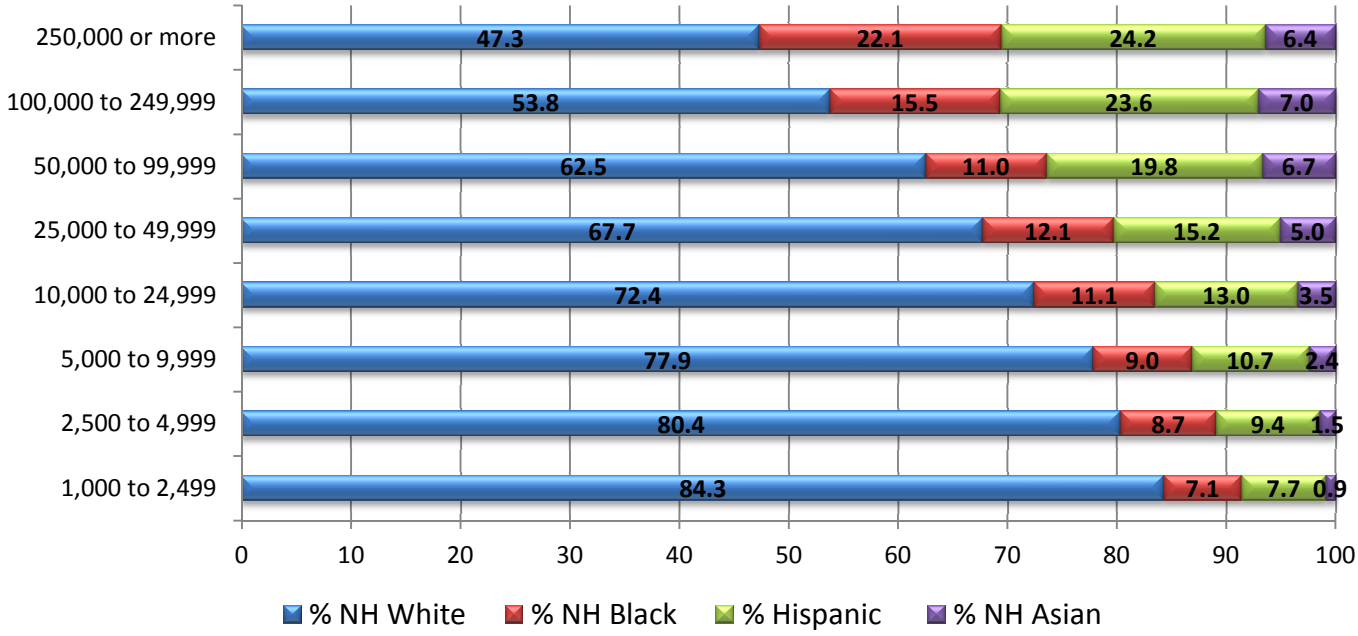
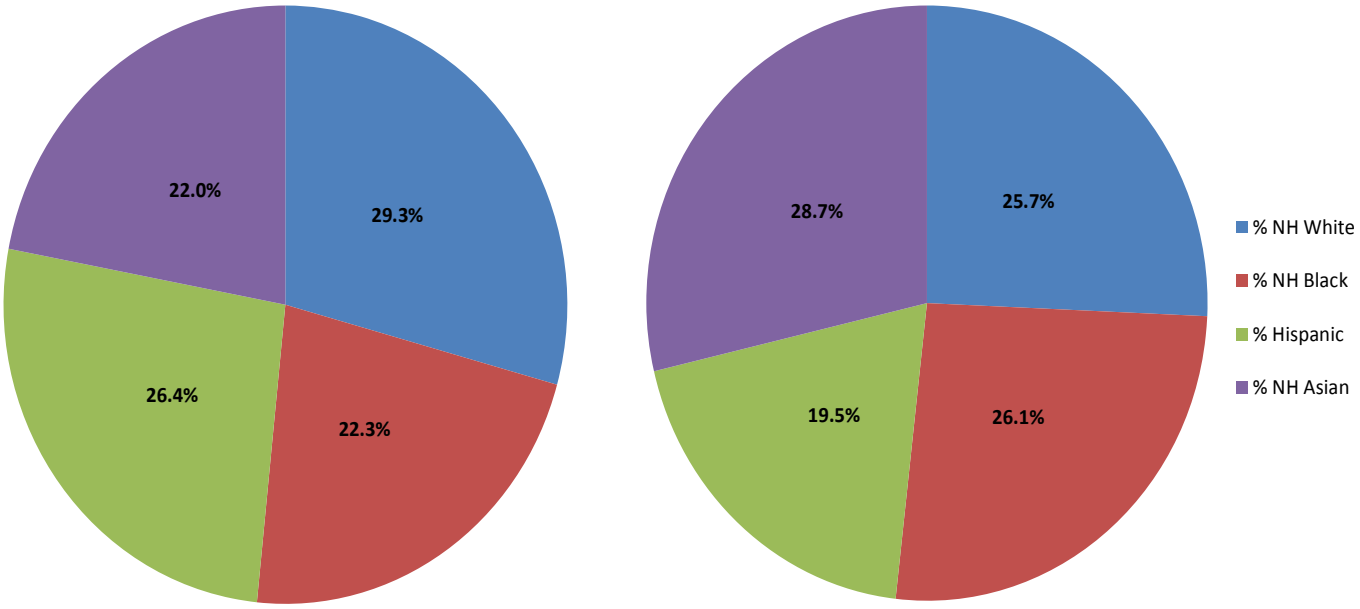


Figure 7. Racial/Ethnic Composition of Vallejo and Jersey City, 2005-2009



Vallejo
***E* = 99.5**

Jersey City
***E* = 99.3**

Table 1. Mean Diversity of Metro, Micro, and Rural Areas by Region, 1980 to 2005-2009

	1980	1990	2000	2005-2009	% Change 2000-2009	% Change 1980-2009
Total						
Metro	31.7	35.7	41.9	46.2	10.4	45.7
Micro	23.3	25.4	30.2	33.6	11.5	44.4
Rural	18.0	18.8	22.5	25.2	11.9	39.8
Northeast						
Metro	21.1	27.1	33.6	39.0	15.8	84.4
Micro	23.3	25.4	30.2	33.6	11.5	44.4
Rural	18.0	18.8	22.5	25.2	11.9	39.8
Midwest						
Metro	21.4	25.2	31.4	35.5	13.2	65.9
Micro	9.8	12.2	17.1	20.8	21.3	112.3
Rural	5.1	6.0	9.8	12.6	28.6	146.1
South						
Metro	39.7	41.9	48.2	52.4	8.9	32.1
Micro	36.4	36.9	41.8	44.8	7.3	23.4
Rural	31.7	31.5	35.2	37.6	6.7	18.7
West						
Metro	34.7	41.1	46.9	51.0	8.8	46.9
Micro	25.0	29.7	34.5	38.6	11.9	54.7
Rural	15.6	18.9	22.3	25.4	13.8	62.4

Table 2. Mean Diversity of Metro, Micro, and Rural Areas by Population Size, 1980 to 2005-2009

	1980	1990	2000	2005-09	% Change 2000-2009	% Change 1980-2009
Metro Areas						
1 million or more	44.0	50.1	58.8	63.4	7.8	44.2
500,000 to 999,999	36.3	42.9	47.0	50.1	6.6	38.0
250,000 to 499,999	33.2	36.5	42.4	47.5	12.0	43.0
Less than 250,000	28.5	31.2	36.4	40.1	10.0	40.8
Micro Areas						
50,000 or more	22.1	25.0	29.9	33.2	11.1	50.2
25,000 to 49,999	23.1	24.8	29.8	33.4	11.9	44.6
Less than 25,000	25.8	27.9	32.4	36.0	11.2	39.9
Rural Areas (Counties)						
20,000 or more	18.9	19.8	23.9	26.7	11.9	41.0
10,000 to 19,999	19.8	19.9	24.1	27.5	14.0	39.0
5,000 to 9,999	16.4	18.6	21.9	24.5	11.8	49.6
Less than 5,000	15.7	16.4	18.8	20.6	9.3	30.9

Table 3. Distribution and Diversity of Places by Racial-Ethnic Structure, 1980 and 2005-2009

	% of Places		Mean Diversity	
	1980	2005-2009	1980	2005-2009
All Places				
White Majority	93.7	85.3	19.0	29.3
Dominant	68.1	46.1	9.3	13.2
Shared	25.7	39.2	44.6	48.3
Black Majority	2.9	5.0	47.2	49.1
Hispanic Majority	2.0	5.1	43.8	44.1
Asian Majority	.4	.2	58.9	68.1
No Majority	1.0	4.4	69.0	78.3
N of Places	11,645	13,655		
Metro Places 10K+				
White Majority	92.2	76.9	28.9	44.7
Dominant	51.7	19.6	14.9	20.5
Shared	40.6	57.3	46.7	53.1
Black Majority	2.6	4.9	51.7	53.2
Hispanic Majority	2.7	7.5	50.4	52.0
Asian Majority	.4	.5	65.1	69.6
No Majority	2.1	10.2	74.8	81.8
N of Places	2,197	3,189		

Table 4. Most Diverse Metro Areas, 2005-2009

	Metro Area	Diversity	Region	Pop Size
1	Vallejo-Fairfield, CA	91.3	West	250-499K
2	San Francisco-Oakland-Fremont, CA	88.9	West	1 million+
3	Stockton, CA	86.7	West	500-999K
4	Houston-Sugar Land-Baytown, TX	86.2	South	1 million+
5	Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana, CA	85.9	West	1 million+
6	New York-Northern New Jersey-Long Island, NY-NJ-PA	85.8	Northeast	1 million+
7	San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara, CA	84.7	West	1 million+
8	Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV	83.7	South	1 million+
9	Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach, FL	82.0	South	1 million+
10	Las Vegas-Paradise, NV	80.8	West	1 million+
11	Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, TX	80.2	South	1 million+
12	Chicago-Naperville-Joliet, IL-IN-WI	79.2	Midwest	1 million+
13	Trenton-Ewing, NJ	79.0	Northeast	250-499K
14	San Diego-Carlsbad-San Marcos, CA	78.6	West	1 million+
15	Fresno, CA	78.2	West	500-999K
16	Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario, CA	77.9	West	1 million+
17	Sacramento--Arden-Arcade--Roseville, CA	76.8	West	1 million+
18	Orlando-Kissimmee, FL	76.2	South	1 million+
19	Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Marietta, GA	75.8	South	1 million+
20	Killeen-Temple-Fort Hood, TX	75.6	South	250-499K
21	Atlantic City-Hammonton, NJ	75.6	Northeast	250-499K
22	Vineland-Millville-Bridgeton, NJ	75.5	Northeast	< 250K
23	Hanford-Corcoran, CA	74.0	West	< 250K
24	Durham-Chapel Hill, NC	73.6	South	250-499K
25	Merced, CA	72.9	West	< 250K

Table 5. Least Diverse Metro Areas, 2005-2009

	Metro Area	Diversity	Region	Pop Size
1	Parkersburg-Marietta-Vienna, WV-OH	9.5	South	< 250K
2	Bismarck, ND	9.7	Midwest	< 250K
3	Altoona, PA	11.0	Northeast	< 250K
4	Bangor, ME	11.5	Northeast	< 250K
5	Duluth, MN-WI	12.8	Midwest	250-499K
6	Kingsport-Bristol-Bristol, TN-VA	13.3	South	250-499K
7	Lewiston, ID-WA	14.2	West	< 250K
8	Dubuque, IA	14.5	Midwest	< 250K
9	Coeur dAlene, ID	14.6	West	< 250K
10	Huntington-Ashland, WV-KY-OH	14.8	South	250-499K
11	Eau Claire, WI	15.3	Midwest	< 250K
12	Wheeling, WV-OH	15.5	South	< 250K
13	Missoula, MT	16.4	West	< 250K
14	Glens Falls, NY	16.6	Northeast	< 250K
15	Laredo, TX	16.8	South	< 250K
16	Portland-South Portland-Biddeford, ME	16.8	Northeast	500-999K
17	Barnstable Town, MA	17.3	Northeast	< 250K
18	Weirton-Steubenville, WV-OH	17.4	South	< 250K
19	Burlington-South Burlington, VT	17.6	Northeast	< 250K
20	Johnstown, PA	17.8	Northeast	< 250K
21	Fond du Lac, WI	18.1	Midwest	< 250K
22	St. Cloud, MN	18.3	Midwest	< 250K
23	La Crosse, WI-MN	18.6	Midwest	< 250K
24	Monroe, MI	19.0	Midwest	< 250K
25	Great Falls, MT	19.0	West	< 250K

Table 6. Most Diverse Places, 2005-2009

Place	Diversity	Region	Type	Pop Size	Place	Diversity	Region	Type	Pop Size
1 Vallejo, CA	99.5	West	Metro	100-249K	26 Bryn Mawr-Skyway, WA	94.7	West	Metro	10-24.9K
2 Jersey, NJ	99.3	Northeast	Metro	100-249K	27 Hybla Valley, VA	94.6	South	Metro	10-24.9K
3 Woodlynne borough, NJ	99.2	Northeast	Metro	2.5-4.9K	28 Stockton, CA	94.5	West	Metro	250K+
4 Suisun, CA	99.0	West	Metro	25-49K	29 Conley, GA	94.4	South	Metro	5-9.9K
5 Oakland, CA	98.5	West	Metro	250K+	30 Fairfield, CA	94.3	West	Metro	100-249K
6 Stafford, TX	98.3	South	Metro	10-24.9K	31 Lincolnia, VA	94.3	South	Metro	10-24.9K
7 Four Corners, TX	97.8	South	Metro	5-9.9K	32 Lake City, GA	94.2	South	Metro	1-2.4K
8 Elmsford village, NY	97.6	Northeast	Metro	2.5-4.9K	33 Gardena, CA	94.1	West	Metro	50-99K
9 San Leandro, CA	96.8	West	Metro	50-99K	34 Parkway-South Sacramento, CA	94.0	West	Metro	25-49K
10 Richmond, CA	96.4	West	Metro	100-249K	35 Germantown, MD	93.8	South	Metro	50-99K
11 Mission Bend, TX	96.2	South	Metro	25-49K	36 Redland, MD	93.8	South	Metro	10-24.9K
12 Florin, CA	96.0	West	Metro	25-49K	37 Somerset, NJ	93.5	Northeast	Metro	10-24.9K
13 West Carson, CA	95.9	West	Metro	10-24.9K	38 Elmont, NY	93.5	Northeast	Metro	25-49K
14 Rodeo, CA	95.8	West	Metro	5-9.9K	39 Bailey's Crossroads, VA	93.3	South	Metro	10-24.9K
15 Lorton, VA	95.7	South	Metro	25-49K	40 North Brunswick Township, NJ	93.1	Northeast	Metro	25-49K
16 Norcross, GA	95.7	South	Metro	10-24.9K	41 White Oak, MD	93.1	South	Metro	10-24.9K
17 Springfield, VA	95.6	South	Metro	25-49K	42 Orlovista, FL	93.0	South	Metro	5-9.9K
18 Signal Hill, CA	95.4	West	Metro	10-24.9K	43 Fairview, CA	92.9	West	Metro	5-9.9K
19 Atlantic City, NJ	95.4	Northeast	Metro	25-49K	44 Beltsville, MD	92.9	South	Metro	10-24.9K
20 Ashland, CA	95.2	West	Metro	10-24.9K	45 Missouri City, TX	92.5	South	Metro	50-99K
21 Sacramento, CA	95.2	West	Metro	250K+	46 Woodbridge, VA	92.3	South	Metro	25-49K
22 New York, NY	95.1	Northeast	Metro	250K+	47 Carteret borough, NJ	92.3	Northeast	Metro	10-24.9K
23 Pittsburg, CA	95.1	West	Metro	50-99K	48 Montgomery Village, MD	92.3	South	Metro	25-49K
24 Wheaton-Glenmont, MD	94.8	South	Metro	50-99K	49 American Canyon, CA	92.3	West	Metro	10-24.9K
25 Hayward, CA	94.8	West	Metro	100-249K	50 Colmar Manor, MD	92.2	South	Metro	1-2.4K

Table 7. Antecedents of Place Diversity, 2005-2009 and 1980

	2005-2009		1980	
	B	SE	B	SE
Minority/white income[a]	-6.379 ***	.879	.385	.214
Foreign born[a]	10.887 ***	.312	2.955 ***	.396
Population size[a]	3.817 ***	.323	4.772 ***	.405
Coastal-border state	4.726 ***	.589	11.536 ***	.687
Rental occupancy	20.536 ***	1.918	33.770 ***	2.196
Occupational diversity[a]	20.767 ***	4.036	93.073 ***	8.669
Government-military[a]	5.384 ***	.423	1.735 ***	.439
Higher education[b]	-3.714 *	1.870	-2.315 ***	.645
Retirement[a]	-5.831 ***	.565	-4.991 ***	.496
Intercept	-80.684 ***	18.265	-457.885 ***	37.852
R^2 (adjusted)	.505		.389	
N of cases	3684		2649	

Notes: Limited to places of 10,000 or more. ***p < .001; **p < .01; *p < .05. a = logged for both years; b = logged for 1980 only.

Table 8. Antecedents of Metro Area Diversity, 2005-2009 and 1980

	2005-2009		1980	
	B	SE	B	SE
Minority/white income[a]	-33.724 ***	4.634	-31.177 ***	3.070
Foreign born[a]	7.302 ***	.969	1.659	.959
Population size[a]	4.627 ***	.666	5.082 ***	.623
Coastal-border state	5.375 ***	1.393	8.140 ***	1.317
Rental occupancy	62.947 ***	14.994	61.254 ***	14.579
Occupational diversity	.038	.323	1.811 ***	.428
Government-military[a]	5.769 ***	1.422	2.998 **	1.059
Higher education[b]	-23.712 ***	6.849	-7.715 ***	1.555
Retirement[a]	-6.327	3.233	-12.169 ***	2.486
Intercept	-2.800	36.202	-263.221 ***	42.008
R^2 (adjusted)	.644		.604	
N of cases	366		366	

Notes: ***p < .001; **p < .01; *p < .05. a = logged for both years; b = logged for 1980 only.