

# The Changing Faces of America's Children and Youth

By *Kenneth M. Johnson and Daniel T. Lichter*<sup>1</sup>

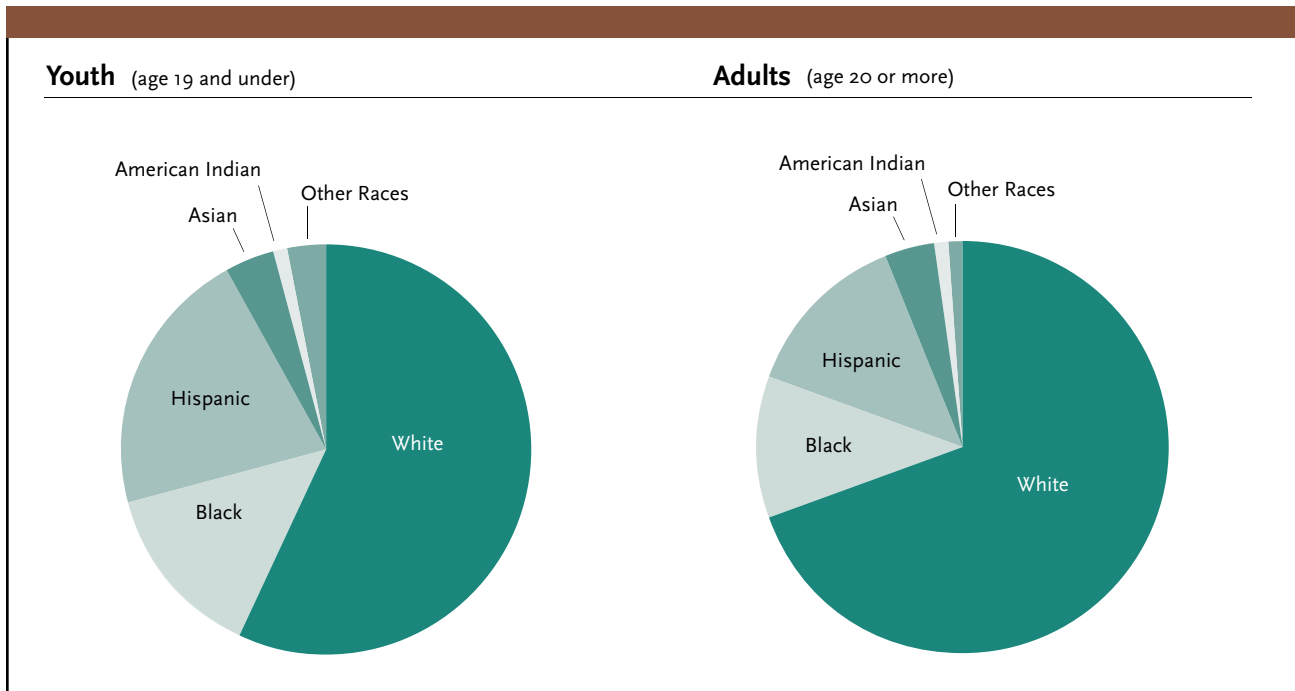
Recent U.S. Census Bureau projections indicate that by the middle of this century, non-Hispanic whites will cease to be a majority of the American population. In this article we document how for America's youngest residents, the future is already here. America's rapidly changing racial and ethnic composition has important implications for intergroup relations, ethnic identities, and electoral politics.<sup>2</sup>

## Growing Racial and Ethnic Diversity among America's Children

Roughly one-third of the U.S. population today belongs to a racial or ethnic minority group.<sup>3</sup> The rates are higher for the youth population (see Figure 1). In 2008, minorities represented 40 percent of the population among 15- and 19-year-olds and 47 percent of children under age 5. The growth of

America's minorities, coupled with recent declines in the white population, has placed young people in the vanguard of America's new diversity. Between 2000 and 2008, the number of minority children grew by 4.8 million (15.5 percent). Hispanics accounted for 3.9 million, or more than 80 percent of the increase. The number of young people in other minority groups (primarily Asian) also grew by 985,000 (18.2 percent). In contrast, the population of black young people declined (-0.9 percent) over the same period. Demographic changes in the white population also have been large. The number of young whites increased by only 54,000, or roughly 1 percent, during the 1990s. Since 2000, non-Hispanic white children and youth declined absolutely by 2.6 million (5.3 percent). As a result, the proportion of the young population that was non-Hispanic white declined from 61 to 57 percent between 2000 and 2008.

Figure 1. U.S. Population by Race/Ethnicity, 2008



Source: U.S. Census Population Estimates (2009)  
Note: Child Population: 82,640,086 (43% minority), Adult Population: 221,419,638 (31% minority)

## Minority Births Up, White Births Down

Fertility has played an important role in these shifting patterns of racial change. In 1990, non-Hispanic whites accounted for nearly two-thirds of all births; blacks accounted for 17 percent; followed by Hispanics at approximately 15 percent. By 2008, non-Hispanic whites accounted for roughly half of all births, while Hispanics contributed 26 percent, and blacks were about 16 percent.

The cumulative impact of changes in the number of women of childbearing age has been considerable. By 2008, there were 5.6 million (19 percent) fewer non-Hispanic white women of prime childbearing age than there were in 1990. In contrast, there were 4.5 million (40 percent) more minority women in their prime childbearing years.

Fertility rates are also important. Hispanic women will have on average 2.99 children over their reproductive lives. Early childbearing also characterizes the Hispanic population; 44 percent of their childbearing occurs by age 25. In contrast, non-Hispanic white women have on average 1.87 children. They also tend to have them later with only about 30 percent of their children born by age 25. African American women also have their children earlier, but recent black fertility declines from 2.5 children per woman in 1990 to 2.13 in 2007 contributed to the reduction in

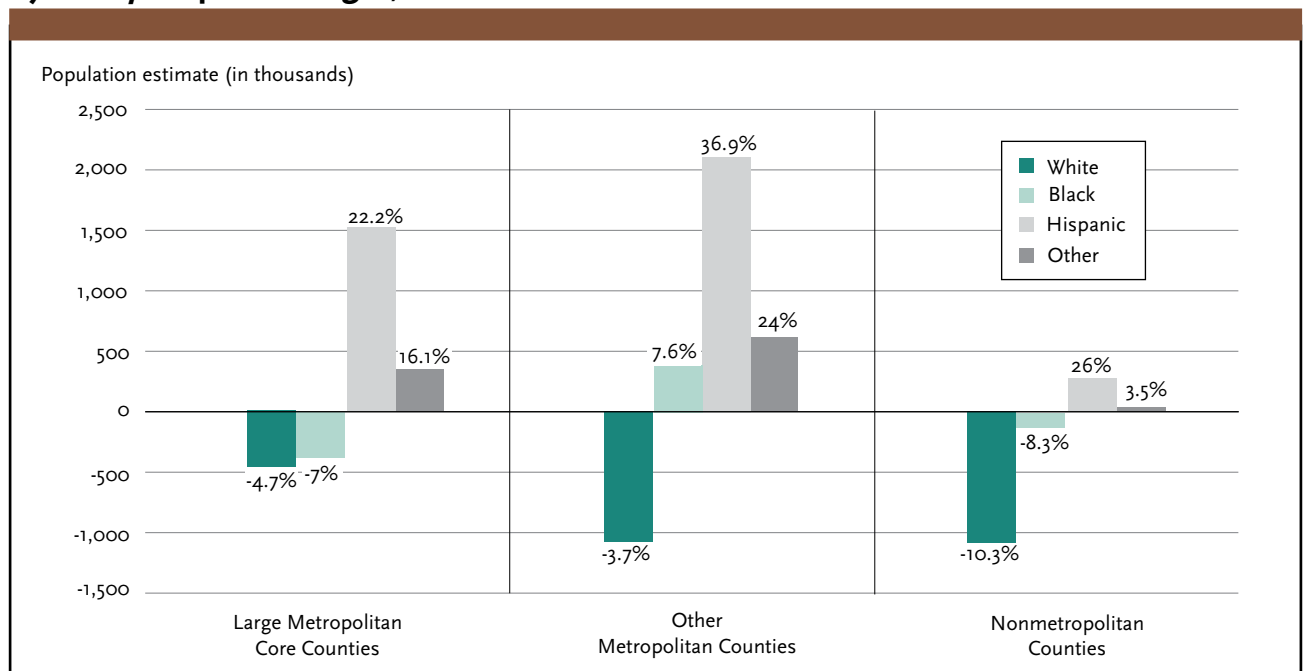
young black people. The groups that compose most of our “other” minority category (Asians and Native Americans) also have relatively low total fertility (2.04 and 1.86, respectively), so recent youth gains in these groups are due to the rising numbers of women of childbearing age (mostly due to Asian immigration) rather than to high fertility rates.

## Hispanics Fuel Much of Minority Youth Growth

From a demographic standpoint, Hispanics are driving rapid increases in racial diversity among America’s children. In fact, 82 percent of the growth in the minority child population between 2000 and 2008 was due to Hispanic births. The initial impetus for these recent Hispanic child gains was immigration—between 2000 and 2008, 4.3 million Hispanics immigrated to the United States, supplementing the 7.7 million who arrived during the 1990s. Most new immigrants are young adults in their reproductive prime. This influx coupled with the large Hispanic population already in the United States produced the surge in Hispanic births.

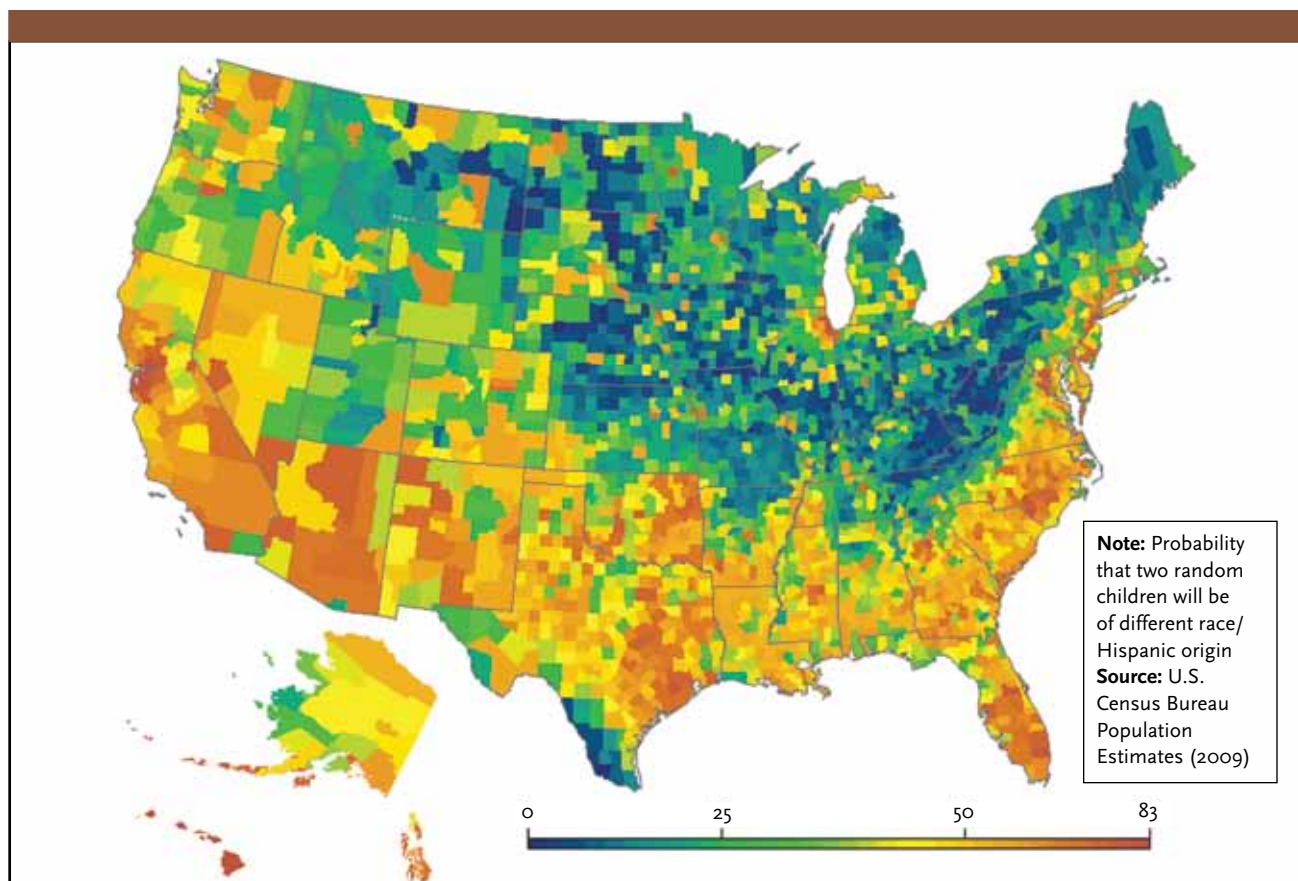
The growing importance of births is reflected in the fact that nearly two-thirds of the entire Hispanic population gain in the last year came from natural increase—the difference between births and deaths—rather than immigration. Native-born

**Figure 2. Population Change for Population Under Age 20 by Race/Hispanic Origin, 2000-2008**



Source: U.S. Census Population Estimates (2009)

Figure 3. Racial Diversity of Young People in U.S. Counties, 2008



children accounted for at least 97 percent of all children under age 5 for each of the major minority groups considered here. Of course, a substantial share of Native-born minorities was born to foreign-born parents, some of whom are undocumented aliens. In 2008, only 39 percent of Hispanic children age 4 and younger had two native-born parents. An additional 17 percent had one native-born parent, and the remaining 44 percent had two foreign-born parents. The Pew Center estimates that 40 percent of native-born Hispanics under age 18 with at least one foreign-born parent has at least one undocumented parent. However, the oldest U.S.-born children of the Hispanic immigrant streams that arrived in large numbers in the 1980s and 1990s now are having children of their own. The proportion of Hispanic children with U.S.-born parents is expected to grow over the foreseeable future. In fact, the Pew Center estimates that the share of Hispanic youth who are the children of immigrants will soon peak.<sup>4</sup>

### Geographic Distribution Remains Uneven

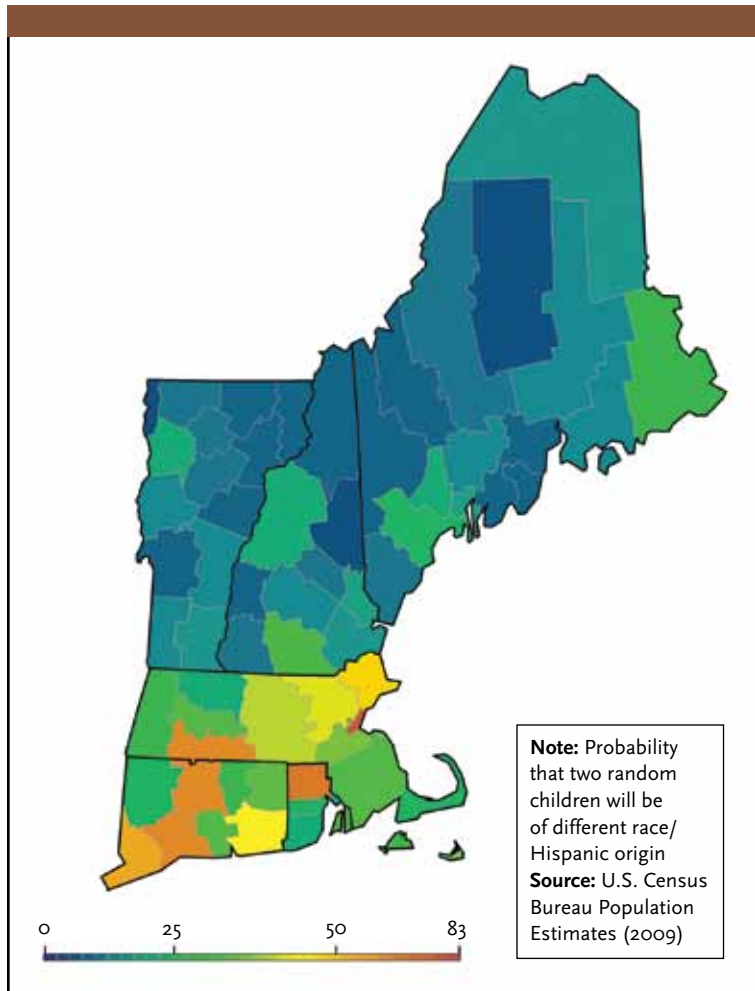
The new growth of minority children is spatially broad based (see Figure 2). The suburban and smaller

metropolitan counties (comprising the “other metro counties” in Figure 2) are home to 44.6 million (54 percent) of the nation’s 82.6 million young people. Minority gains are most heavily concentrated in the suburbs and smaller metros. Currently, a significant majority of young people in suburban and smaller metropolitan counties are non-Hispanic white (63 percent). This is despite a decline in non-Hispanic white youth of more than one million (-3.7 percent) since 2000. In contrast, each minority population of children and youths grew rapidly here. The number of Hispanics has swelled by 2.1 million (37 percent) since 2000; this is the largest gain of any minority population in any area during this period.

In the large urban cores, where minority populations have traditionally clustered, 63 percent of the 25.2 million children and youth are minority. The population of minority children has grown by more than one million in these areas since 2000. Declines among blacks and whites have been largely offset by large Hispanic population gains.

Compared with metropolitan areas, minority children constitute a considerably smaller proportion of all nonmetropolitan children (26 percent versus 45 percent). Rural areas actually had 900,000 fewer young people in 2008 than 2000 because there were

**Figure 4. Racial Diversity of Population under Age 20 in New England, 2008**



one million (-10.3 percent) fewer non-Hispanic white youth in 2008 than in 2000. The population loss among young black people was nearly as large as whites in percentage terms (-8.3 percent). Significant gains in Hispanic young people (26.5 percent) were insufficient to offset overall population losses. As a result, the rural youth population declined by 6.5 percent after 2000.

National trends may mask geographic variation in America’s racial and ethnic makeup. Indeed, 504 counties now have a majority of minority young people (that is, majority-minority counties), and another 286 are “near” majority-minority with between 40 and 50 percent minority youth populations. Even in regions where minorities are not approaching majority status, there is growing diversity. To illustrate this, we calculate a diversity index, which indicates the probability that two randomly selected young people in a county will be of a different race or ethnicity (Hispanic origin or not). For example, a diversity index of .50 means that a young person residing in that county has roughly a

50 percent chance of random exposure to a young county resident who is different from themselves. Nearly all of the Southeast and Southwest have at least moderate levels of diversity, and that diversity extends to the large sprawling metropolitan regions of the Midwest and the East (see Figure 3). However, large areas of the country show little if any racial and ethnic diversity. This includes the vast agriculture heartland in the upper Midwest, with the exception of scattered counties in the Great Plains (Native American reservations and new Hispanic destinations with meat packing plants). Diversity is also modest in the Northeast in areas outside the coastal urban agglomeration.

### New England Data

New England is less diverse than the rest of the nation. Non-Hispanic whites represent 81 percent of New England’s population compared with 66 percent of the U.S. total. New England’s youth population is more diverse than the adult population, a trend consistent with larger national trends. In 2008, 83.4 percent of the population over the age of 20 in New England was non-Hispanic white compared with 73.6 percent of those under 20. Hispanics accounted for 47 percent of the minority youth population in 2008 and 12 percent of the total youth population in the region. Blacks are the next largest minority at 6.6 percent of the total, followed by Asians (3.9 percent) and all others.

Consistent with national trends, the non-Hispanic white youth population diminished in New England between 2000 and 2008. The loss was 261,000 (-8.9 percent). The minority child population grew by 126,000 (15.8 percent). Hispanics accounted for 62 percent of the minority child gain: a smaller share than they accounted for at the national level. However, the minority youth gain was not sufficient to offset the non-Hispanic white loss. Thus, while the number of young people in the United States grew thanks to minority gains, in New England the youth population declined by 134,000 between 2000 and 2008.

Within New England, there is considerable variation in youth diversity. The proportion of minority children is greatest in Connecticut (34.4 percent) and lowest in Vermont (7.5 percent). Youth diversity has increased in each state between 2000 and 2008. Consistent with national trends, diversity is greatest in the urban cores of the region’s large metropolitan areas and in the suburban areas in close proximity

to those cores (see Figure 4). The probability that two randomly selected young people will be from different racial/Hispanic origin groups is greatest in Suffolk County, Massachusetts. In contrast, the youth population is much less diverse in nonmetropolitan counties, particularly in northern New England.

In sum, demographic patterns among the youth population in New England are generally consistent with national trends, though both the extent of diversity and the rapidity of change are less. The overall effect of racial and Hispanic origin change has been to increase the diversity of New England's young population. Without these minority youth gains, the region would have suffered even greater reductions in its youth population between 2000 and 2008.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The influx of roughly one million immigrants annually—mostly from Latin America and Asia—has fueled debates about multiculturalism and social, economic, and cultural fragmentation. We argue here that the seeds of racial and ethnic multiculturalism are also being sown by recent fertility patterns, which is revealed in the rapidly growing racial and ethnic diversity among America's children and youth.

Some 48.6 percent of the babies born last year were minority compared with 35 percent of the 40- to 45-year-olds and less than 20 percent of those 65 and older. This raises important questions about intergenerational support for social programs.<sup>5</sup> For example, will America's older, largely white population—through the ballot box and collective self-interest—support young people who are now much different culturally from themselves and their own children? Some evidence suggests that the presence of large fractions of elderly residents in a jurisdiction was associated with significantly less per-child educational spending, especially if the elderly and children were of different races.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, it is also likely that an increasing share of America's seniors will have children and grandchildren who are in or are the products of interracial marriages, a fact that binds generations rather than separates them.

Race relations and cultural boundaries, both now and in the future, will be influenced by whether children are growing up in multiracial and multi-ethnic communities where opportunities for mutual understanding and acceptance are greater or instead living in isolation from one another. The post-2000

period ushered in a new pattern of accelerated spatial dispersion among minority children and youth. Yet, there are broad geographic regions that still provide few opportunities for daily interaction between young people with different racial and cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, our findings of increasing youth racial diversity at the county level do not necessarily demonstrate that such diverse communities exist at the town or neighborhood level.<sup>7</sup> The geographic landscape of race suggests the emergence of two Americas—an increasingly racially diverse one and a largely white one.

In a policy environment usually fixated on immigration, recognizing the rising importance of other demographic factors is no small achievement. Natural increase—especially fertility—will continue to reshape the racial and ethnic mix of the country, and this change will be reflected first among the nation's youngest residents.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> This report is based on the authors' recent articles "The Changing Faces of America's Children and Youth," which appeared in the Carsey Institute's *Issue Brief* 15, Spring 2010 and "Growing Diversity Among America's Children and Youth: Spatial and Temporal Dimensions," which appeared in *Population and Development Review* 36, No. 1 (March 2010): 151–176.

<sup>2</sup> Anthony Daniel Perez and Charles Hirschman, "The Changing Racial and Ethnic Composition of the U.S. Population: Emerging American Identities," *Population and Development Review* 35, No. 1 (2009): 1–51.

<sup>3</sup> For notes on data and methods, see Johnston and Lichter, "The Changing Faces of America's Children and Youth" [http://www.carseyinstitute.unh.edu/publications/IB\\_Johnson\\_ChangingFaces.pdf](http://www.carseyinstitute.unh.edu/publications/IB_Johnson_ChangingFaces.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Richard Fry and Jeffrey S. Passel, "Latino Children: A Majority Are U.S.-Born Offspring of Immigrants," Washington, D.C.: Pew Hispanic Center, May 28, 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Samuel H. Preston, "Children and the Elderly: Divergent Paths for America's Dependents," *Demography* 21, No. 4 (November 1984): 435–457.

<sup>6</sup> James M. Poterba, "Demographic Structure and the Political Economy of Public Education," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 16 (January 1997): 48–66.

<sup>7</sup> It is unclear whether diversity and residential integration are increasing within counties (that is, across neighborhoods or cities and suburbs). Indeed, it may be that the growth of minorities in some counties is occurring in tandem with a new kind of racial balkanization at the sub-county level. See Daniel T. Lichter, Domenico Parisi, Michael C. Taquino, and Steven Michael Grice, "Residential Segregation in New Hispanic Destinations: Cities, Suburbs, and Rural Communities Compared," *Social Science Research* 39, No. 2 (March 2010): 215–230.