

Report Describes Immigrants as Younger and More Diverse

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WASHINGTON, June 9 - New Census Bureau figures released on Thursday show that the immigrant population in the United States is becoming younger, a shift likely to foster more tolerance for diversity and perhaps accelerate assimilation, demographers and immigration experts say.

The figures show that immigration trends are forming a unique generational divide: those immigrants over 40 are largely white, while those under 40 are increasingly Hispanic, Asian and from other minority groups.

"The older, white-dominated society is thinning out into the past," William H. Frey, a demographer at the Brookings Institution, said. "It is being replaced by the broad diversity of a younger generation." Mr. Frey added: "We will become a more tolerant society as these young people move toward adulthood and a blurring occurs of the sharp racial distinctions of the previous decades."

The increase in younger immigrants is particularly noticeable among the nation's largest minority group, Hispanics, half of whom are under age 27. One of every five children under age 18 in the United States is Hispanic, the census figures show.

Hispanics accounted for about half of the overall population growth of 2.9 million people from 2003 to 2004, according to the census report. One of every seven people in the United States is Hispanic, a record number that experts say will keep increasing because of continued immigration and a birth rate that outpaces that of non-Hispanic blacks and whites.

The Hispanic growth rate of 3.6 percent in the period looked at was more than three times the 1 percent rate for the total population. (The rate was 3.4 percent for Asians, 1.9 percent for Pacific Islanders, 1.2 percent for American Indians, 1.1 percent for blacks and 0.3 percent for whites.)

The Census Bureau said that in July 2004, there were 41.3 million Hispanics out of a national population of nearly 294 million.

Political scientists and immigration experts debate whether Hispanics will achieve the success of the Greeks, Italians and other Europeans of the last century who were often assimilated after two or three generations.

Hispanic immigrants generally enter the country with a low level of education and take up low-paying jobs, and often struggle economically. But Rodolfo O. de la Garza, a political science professor at Columbia University, said he was encouraged by the census figures, saying that the growing Hispanic population reflected a "powerful cultural transformation."

Mr. de la Garza said most of the immigrants who arrived in the United States were part of a working population of relatively young people. As their children begin to attend school and learn English, he said, they will become part of a blended culture that is "influencing and being influenced more openly" by mainstream American mores and attitudes.

Mr. de la Garza, who is 60, said that when he was young the idea of a Mexican-American riding the waves was ridiculous. "Now there are Chicano surfers," he said. "It is indicative of cultural incorporation."

The relatively youthful immigrants will also likely lead to a geographic expansion beyond traditionally ethnic areas around the country, Mr. de la Garza said.

"The Mexicans are never going to all get out of California and the Latinos are not all going to leave Florida," he said. "But there probably will be more movement. With success and education, there is naturally more mobility."

Jeffrey S. Passel, a demographer for the Pew Hispanic Center here, said that since 2000 Hispanic births had outnumbered Hispanic immigrants.

"It is the beginning of this process," Mr. Passel said. "A large share of Hispanic immigrants have been here a short time. The concept of what it means to be Hispanic in America will change as the population matures, and a greater percentage of American-born Hispanics increases."

Mr. Passel and Mr. Frey, of Brookings, both said the changing dynamic of the immigrant population in the United States would help it prosper in a global economy.

While Japan and some European countries have taken restrictive stances toward immigration and endangered their own productivity as a result, they said, the United States will benefit from a work force that is evolving into a more diverse group.