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# Early observations on the 2000 Census

The 281.4 million residents of our country counted in 2000 exceeded census estimates of 274.5 by nearly seven million. The increase from 248.7 in 1990, a gain of 32.7 million and 13.2 percent, was the largest numeric gain for a decade in the history of census taking, dating back to 1790 when the first one was taken. Swelled by immigrant numbers and holding a steady birth rate, this increase topped the previously highest increase of 28 million of the baby boom years of the 1950s.

With one of every 20 persons in the world now living in this country, we rank as third largest in the world but still a long way from reaching each of the two countries with over one billion population, China and India.

This largest population in-

crease also provided another unusual feature: for the first time in the past century every state recorded a population increase. The three states of North Dakota, Connecticut and Rhode Island were all projected to have lost population in the '90s, with our own state projected to record the largest loss of 1.6 percent, yet all came in with an increase, with Rhode Island recording the largest increase of the three at 4.5 percent. Listed separately because it is not a state, Washington D.C., our nation's capital, recorded a loss of 5.7 percent.

The other characteristic of the 2000 census that has garnered all of the media attention is the increasing diversity of

our people. The White, not Hispanic, population was 75.6 percent in 1990 and has dropped to 69.1 percent in 2000. Expressed another way, our minority population has gone from one quarter to nearly one third in the last 10 years. Rhode Island is also experiencing this change: our White, not Hispanic, population has dropped from 89.3 percent in 1990 to 81.9 percent in 2000.

None of this should come as a surprise because this is the direction of our changing population that the Census Bureau has recognized. Their projections of our population 50 years from now, at which time there will be a population of 394 million, claim that 47 percent of our population will be minority. Already, three of our states now have a minority majority population. California - 53.3 percent; New Mexico - 55.3 percent; and Hawaii - 77.1 percent. This trend will continue, with 2,200 legals and 1,000 illegals currently being added daily to the population.

One in eight people in this country is now Hispanic and in 50 years that proportion will be one in four. Spanish will likely be our second language and, as we now learn about the Black experience through study such as Black History Month, we will learn more about our Spanish heritage.

In Rhode Island Hispanics almost doubled in numbers over the past ten years to 90,820 and made Providence and Central Falls minority majority cities. These demographic changes mean that as the Yankees, Irish and Italians came in large numbers in the past and increasingly took over political control in our cities and state, in time, with their increasing numbers and influence, Hispanics will also get their day in the sun. This is the American way. A question to ponder for the future is whether different groups will stay apart and retain their own cultural traditions or will they mix and become more homogenized over time.

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## Commentary

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