

## DEMOGRAPHY IS DESTINY

# The Realignment of America

The native-born are leaving "hip" cities for the heartland.

**BY MICHAEL BARONE**

*Tuesday, May 8, 2007 12:01 a.m. EDT*

In 1950, when I was in kindergarten in Detroit, the city had a population of (rounded off) 1,850,000. Today the latest census estimate for Detroit is 886,000, less than half as many. In 1950, the population of the U.S. was 150 million. Today the latest census estimate for the nation is 301 million, more than twice as many. People in America move around. But not just randomly.

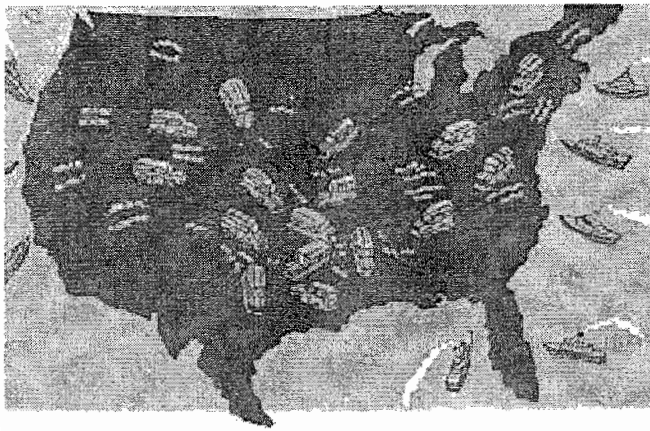
It has become a commonplace to say that population has been flowing from the Snow Belt to the Sun Belt, from an industrially ailing East and Midwest to an economically vibrant West and South. But the actual picture of recent growth, as measured by the 2000 Census and the census estimates for 2006, is more complicated. Recently I looked at the census estimates for 50 metropolitan areas with more than one million people in 2006, where 54% of Americans live. (I cheated a bit on definitions, adding Durham to Raleigh and combining San Francisco and San Jose.) What I found is that you can separate them into four different categories, with different degrees and different sources of population growth or decline. And I found some interesting surprises.

Start with the Coastal Megalopolises: New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Diego, Chicago (on the coast of Lake Michigan), Miami, Washington and Boston. Here is a pattern you don't find in other big cities: Americans moving out and immigrants moving in, in very large numbers, with low overall population growth. Los Angeles, defined by the Census Bureau as Los Angeles and Orange Counties, had a domestic outflow of 6% of 2000 population in six years--balanced by an immigrant inflow of 6%. The numbers are the same for these eight metro areas as a whole.

There are some variations. New York had a domestic outflow of 8% and an immigrant inflow of 6%; San Francisco a whopping domestic outflow of 10% (the bursting of the tech bubble hurt) and an immigrant inflow of 7%. Miami and Washington had domestic outflows of only 2%, overshadowed by immigrant inflows of 8% and 5%, respectively.

This is something few would have predicted 20 years ago. Americans are now moving out of, not into, coastal California and South Florida, and in very large numbers they're moving out of our largest metro areas. They're fleeing hip Boston and San Francisco, and after eight decades of moving to Washington they're moving out. The domestic outflow from these metro areas is 3.9 million people, 650,000 a year. High housing costs, high taxes, a distaste in some cases for the burgeoning immigrant populations--these are driving many Americans elsewhere.

The result is that these Coastal Megalopolises are increasingly a two-tiered society, with large affluent populations happily contemplating (at least until recently) their rapidly rising housing values, and a large, mostly immigrant working class working at low wages and struggling to move up the economic ladder. The economic divide in



New York and Los Angeles is starting to look like the economic divide in Mexico City and São Paulo.

---

Democratic politicians like to decry what they describe as a widening economic gap in the nation. But the part of the nation where it is widening most visibly is their home turf, the place where they win their biggest margins (these metro areas voted 61% for John Kerry) and where, in exquisitely decorated Park Avenue apartments and Beverly Hills mansions with immigrant servants passing the hors d'oeuvres, they raise most of their money.

The bad news for them is that the Coastal Megalopolises grew only 4% in 2000-06, while the nation grew 6%. Coastal Megalopolitan states--New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Illinois--are projected to lose five House seats in the 2010 Census, while California, which has gained seats in every census since it was admitted to the Union in 1850, is projected to pick up none.

You see an entirely different picture in the 16 metro areas I call the Interior Boomtowns (none touches the Atlantic or Pacific coasts). Their population has grown 18% in six years. They've had considerable immigrant inflow, 4%, but with the exceptions of Dallas and Houston, this immigrant inflow has been dwarfed by a much larger domestic inflow--three million to 1.5 million overall.

Domestic inflow has been a whopping 19% in Las Vegas, 15% in the Inland Empire (California's Riverside and San Bernardino Counties, where much of the outflow from Los Angeles has gone), 13% in Orlando and Charlotte, 12% in Phoenix, 10% in Tampa, 9% in Jacksonville. Domestic inflow was over 200,000 in the Inland Empire, Phoenix, Atlanta, Las Vegas and Orlando. These are economic dynamos that are driving much of America's growth. There's much less economic polarization here than in the Coastal Megalopolises, and a higher percentage of traditional families: Natural increase (the excess of births over deaths) in the Interior Boomtowns is 6%, well above the 4% in the Coastal Megalopolises.

The nation's center of gravity is shifting: Dallas is now larger than San Francisco, Houston is now larger than Detroit, Atlanta is now larger than Boston, Charlotte is now larger than Milwaukee. State capitals that were just medium-sized cities dominated by government employees in the 1950s--Sacramento, Austin, Raleigh, Nashville, Richmond--are now booming centers of high-tech and other growing private-sector businesses. San Antonio has more domestic than immigrant inflow even though the border is only three hours' drive away. The Interior Boomtowns generated 38% of the nation's population growth in 2000-06.

---

This is another political world from the Coastal Megalopolises: the Interior Boomtowns voted 56% for George W. Bush in 2004. Texas, Arizona, Florida, Georgia and Nevada--states dominated by Interior Boomtowns--are projected to pick up 10 House seats in the 2010 Census.

What about the old Rust Belt, which suffered so in the 1980s? The six metro areas here--Detroit, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Milwaukee, Buffalo, Rochester--have lost population since 2000. Their domestic outflow of 4% has been only partially offset by an immigrant inflow of 1%. If the outflow seems smaller than in the 1980s, it's because so many young people have already left. Natural increase is only 2%, lower than in Orlando or Jacksonville in supposedly elderly Florida. Their economies are ailing, more of a drag on, than an engine for, the nation. They're not the source of dynamism they were 80 or 100 years ago. They continue to vote Democratic, but their 54% for John Kerry was much lower than the Coastal Megalopolis's 61%. Their states are projected to lose six House seats in the 2010 Census.

The fourth category is what I call the Static Cities. These are 18 metropolitan areas with immigrant inflow between zero and 4%, with domestic inflow up to 3% and domestic outflow no higher than 1%. They seem to be holding their own economically, but are not surging ahead and some are in danger of falling back. Philadelphia makes the list, and so do Baltimore, Hartford and Providence in the East.

Surprisingly, some Western cities that boomed in the 1990s are in this category too: Seattle (the tech bust again), Denver, Portland. In the Midwest, Minneapolis, St. Louis, Cincinnati, Kansas City, Columbus and Indianapolis are doing better than their Rust Belt neighbors and make the list. In the South, Norfolk, Memphis, Louisville, Oklahoma City and Birmingham are lagging enough behind the Interior Boomtowns to do so. Overall the Static Cities had a domestic inflow of just 18,000 people (.048%) and an immigrant inflow of 2%. Politically, they're a mixed bag, a bit more Democratic than the nation as a whole: 52% for Kerry, 47% for Bush.

I have left two atypical metro areas out, because they stand alone. One is New Orleans, with a 25% domestic outflow; it was already losing population and attracting almost no immigrants before Katrina. The other is Salt Lake City, which demographically looks a lot like the America of the 1950s. In 2000-2006 its population grew a robust 10%. But it had a domestic outflow of 4% (young Mormons going off on their missions?), balanced by an immigrant inflow of 4%. The chief driver of population growth there is kids: Salt Lake City's natural increase was 9%, the largest of any of our metro areas, hugely greater than San Francisco's 3% or Pittsburgh's minus 1%. Politically, New Orleans was split down the middle in 2004, with Bush leading 50% to 49%, while Salt Lake City, the least Republican part of Utah, was still 60% for Bush.

What of the rest of the nation? You can find a few smaller metro areas that look like the Coastal Megalopolises (Santa Barbara, university towns like Iowa City), many that resemble the Interior Boomtowns (Fort Myers, Tucson) and the Rust Belt (Canton, Muncie). You can find rural counties that are losing population (as are most counties in North Dakota) and, even amid them, towns that have solid growth (Fargo, Bismarck).

But overall the nation beyond these 49 metro areas looks like the Static Cities: 1% domestic inflow, 1% immigrant inflow, 4% population growth. But politically it is more Republican, taking in as it does large swathes of the South, Great Plains and Rocky Mountains, and in line with the historical record of non-metropolitan areas being less Democratic than metro areas: 56% for Bush, 42% for Kerry.



Twenty years ago political analysts grasped the implications of the vast movement from Rust Belt to Sun Belt, a tilting of the table on balance toward Republicans; but with California leaning heavily to Democrats, that paradigm seems obsolete. What's now in store is a shifting of political weight from a small Rust Belt which leans Democratic and from the much larger Coastal Megalopolises, where both secular top earners and immigrant low earners vote heavily Democratic, toward the Interior Megalopolises, where most voters are private-sector religious Republicans but where significant immigrant populations lean to the Democrats. House seats and electoral votes will shift from New York, New Jersey and Illinois to Texas, Florida, Georgia, Arizona and Nevada; within California, House seats will shift from the Democratic coast to the Republican Inland Empire and Central Valley.

Demography is destiny. When I was in kindergarten in 1950, Detroit was the nation's fifth largest metro area, with 3,170,000 people. Now it ranks 11th and is soon to be overtaken by Phoenix, which had 331,000 people in 1950. In the close 1960 election, in which electoral votes were based on the 1950 Census, Michigan cast 20 votes for John Kennedy and Arizona cast four votes for Richard Nixon; New York cast 45 votes for Kennedy and Florida cast 10 votes for Nixon. In 2012, Michigan will likely have 16 electoral votes and Arizona 12; New York will have 29 votes and Florida 29. That's the kind of political change demographics makes over the years.

*Mr. Barone is a senior writer at U.S. News & World Report and author of "Our First Revolution: The Remarkable British Upheaval That Inspired America's Founding Fathers," published this month by Crown.*