**A CLOSER LOOK  Cities and Towns with the Greatest Ethnic Diversity**

Most Americans are interested in how the local areas they know are like or unlike other areas, and the rating of cities as to their quality of life has been popular topic for conversation and news reporting. One characteristic of places is their ethnic composition. Because different ethnic groups have long been concentrated in certain regions and cities and because migrations have elaborated older settlement patterns, ethnic variety has become especially intensified in certain cities and towns. Let’s ask the question: Where in the United States are the most ethnic diversity? My colleague, Professor Eugene Turner, and I have studied this matter, and our statistical analyses permit some fairly precise answers.*

In modern America there appear to be five basic ethnic groupings: white, black, American Indian, Asian, and Hispanic. Although elsewhere we have examined patterns of diversity when ethnicity is defined in terms of more detailed groupings like Asian Indian and Mexican, here we focus on only the five categories. Diversity can be measured by a statistic called the entropy index, which calculates the relative evenness of ethnic group sizes and gives the highest possible value when all groups are present in equal numbers. (However, the index tells us nothing about the social status of the groups or how much the different groups mix socially or occupy the same neighborhoods.) Computer tapes from the U.S. Census of 1980 contain detailed information of the ethnic identities of local populations. Because cities and towns are the most basic local units with which people easily identify, this research analyzes the diversity in all the 2903 urban places with over 10,000 inhabitants. The accompanying map shows those 60 places that ranked highest (Fig. 4-c).


Perhaps most Americans would say that ethnic diversity is greatest in the largest cities, and indeed, some of the most diverse urban places are those largest cities (shown in bold type on the map). Los Angeles and San Francisco rank 8th and 10th in diversity among all places, and New York City ranks 27th, although two cities of over a million people each—Philadelphia and Detroit—are much less diverse than one might expect from their size.

If we next look at the locations of the highly diverse places, the map shows that over half are in California, with many of the rest in Texas, Florida, and New Jersey. These states (together with New York City) have been the leading destinations for immigrants in recent years, with California alone receiving about a quarter of all immigrants to this country. Because Asians and Latin Americans make up such a large portion of our recent immigrants, places that become homes to immigrants obviously become more diverse.

Our research demonstrated that highly diverse urban places are often not large and typically represent several different types of places: older industrial cities, cities in metropolitan areas (including newer suburban cities), farm labor towns, and military installations.

The older industrial cities include Hartford, Chicago and East Chicago; all five New Jersey cities; and Lynwood, Richmond, San Pablo, and Pittsburg in California. These places were once prominent manufacturing centers, and those cities still provide homes for many workers and former workers, both whites and blacks, as well as Puerto Ricans and Mexicans depending on the region of the country. For example, Chicago and East Chicago first received large numbers of black workers from the South and Mexican workers from Texas when jobs in steel mills, oil refineries, etc., opened as the United States geared up for World War I and the supply of European immigrant laborers was cut off by German submarine attacks in the Atlantic Ocean. Hartford’s ethnic diversity is particularly due to the many Puerto Ricans and Jamaicans who began to settle there in the 1940s; and more recently Cubans, Filipinos, and Asian Indians have moved into New Jersey cities.

Most of the highly diverse California places are independent cities in either the San Francisco or Los Angeles areas, just as the most diverse places in Florida are part of the greater Miami area. In California these places have received many Asians in recent decades, as well as whites, blacks and people of Mexican origin, while in Florida there have been fewer Asians and Mexicans but more blacks, Cubans, and Puerto Ricans. For example, Daly City, California, was the first suburban destination for Chinese from San Francisco’s Chinatown, and the Japanese in Gardena originally worked on farms and operated nurseries in what was formerly an agricultural area but is now home to many workers with jobs in nearby industries. Cerritos is a new independent suburb in the Los Angeles area, unusual in having by far the highest median income of all the 60 highly diverse places. In Florida the populations of Carol City and Pinewood have approximately equal numbers of blacks and whites in addition to many Puerto Ricans and Cubans.

Two places—Immokalee in Florida and Delano in California—are diverse primarily because so many inhabitants counted in the Census were agricultural laborers, and in both Oxnard and Stockton former or current farm workers accentuate the ethnic diversity. Farm workers represent a racially varied group, with people of Mexican origin predominating in California and often in Florida but with blacks typically numerous among East Coast migratory workers and Filipinos often retired from or occasionally still part of California crews.

The last group of highly diverse places are military installations and areas associated with them. Army
posts are often especially diverse because blacks usually represent over 30 percent of the population, soldiers of Mexican or Puerto Rican origin make up another minority, and some soldiers have married Asian women while overseas. Navy bases are also sometimes highly diverse, typically with attached Filipino communities because the U.S. Navy has long provided a special avenue of advancement and immigration for young men who first sign up in the Philippines as stewards.

Army posts are evident on the map as forts, such as Fort Gordon and Fort Bragg, but other places are not so readily identified as being connected with the military. In California, many people stationed at Fort Ord live in adjacent Marina and Seaside. Also, National City is integrally tied to the large San Diego navy base, Oxnard has two navy installations, and Vallejo is associated with a major naval shipyard.

Altogether, this research has shown that several different types of places, including many small cities and towns, often exhibit a high degree of ethnic diversity. However, there are no data to indicate whether interethnic relations in any place are relatively harmonious or whether there are substantial tensions between groups because of cultural or social class differences or economic competition between groups for jobs and homes. Perhaps you could suggest some hypotheses concerning what local situations might tend to produce interethnic harmony as opposed to tensions and suspicions in a town or city. Do you think that a list of most ethnically diverse places will have changed much during the 1980s, or do immigrants and minorities tend to settle in places that are already diverse?

** At the other end of the scale, the least diverse places in the United States tend to be small in size, nearly all white, and often nonmetropolitan. The 10 least diverse urban places are Berlin, N.H.; Saco, Me.; Swampscott, Mass., Nanticoke, Shamokin, Warren, and Whitehall, Penn.; Morton, Ill.; Monroe, Wisc.; and Sun City, Ariz.

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