Growing up in Chicago, Illinois, Titus Dockery, 14, has friends of all different races and ethnicities, but their skin color and family backgrounds are not things he really thinks about.

“They’re just cool people that I hang with because I’ve got respect for everybody,” the eighth-grader at Darwin School tells JS.

Titus, who is African-American, says he doesn’t think of himself as an outsider. At his school, more than 95 percent of the students are minorities.

“In my community, there’s a lot of different races—more than you’d probably think,” he says. “It’s nothing major.”

Titus’s story represents a major demographic shift under way in the United States. The Census Bureau announced last spring that minority births—Hispanic, black, Asian, American Indian, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, and Alaska Native—now outnumber those of non-Hispanic whites.

The shift is huge for a nation founded by white Europeans that has long wrestled with issues of race, ethnicity, and immigration. It
Titus Dockery and Jarissa Vega are eighth-graders in Chicago, Illinois.

MCÁGO

what does that mean for the nation’s identity?

also has broad implications for the country’s economy, its political life, and its identity.

“This is an important tipping point,” says William H. Frey. He is a population expert at the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C. He describes the change as a “transformation from a mostly white . . . culture to the more globalized multi-ethnic country that we are becoming.”

Majority-Minority

Minorities already make up the majority of the population in four states plus Washington, D.C. The same is true in some big U.S. cities, including New York and Las Vegas. But unlike in decades past, minority populations are no longer concentrated in major urban centers. Minorities now outnumber whites in 348 of the more than 3,000 counties across the country.

Whites still make up the majority (63 percent) of the U.S. population.

But minorities are on pace to outnumber whites by 2042, according to Census Bureau estimates. And the change is happening even faster among younger Americans. By 2020, whites will likely make up less than half of the under-18 population.

Several factors have contributed to the shift. First, in the past three decades, immigration to the U.S. has been highest from countries like Mexico, China, and India. This is a result of the 1965 Immigration Act. That law opened the doors more widely to immigrants from countries outside Europe.

Second, non-whites have higher birth rates than whites. And finally, the average age of the white population in the U.S. is higher than that of minorities, and older people tend to have fewer children.

Social changes are also driving the shift. The number of mixed-race marriages—and, as a result, mixed-race children—is on the rise. Multi-racial and multi-ethnic Americans are among the fastest-growing demographic groups in the U.S. Nine million people identified

continued on p. 8→
WHERE MINORITIES ARE A MAJORITY

In four states plus Washington, D.C., non-whites make up more than 50 percent of the population.

California 60%
Hawaii 77%
New Mexico 60%
Texas 55%
Washington, D.C. 65%

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau

In four states plus Washington, D.C., non-whites make up more than 50 percent of the population. Alaska and Hawaii are not drawn to scale or placed in their proper geographic positions.

No country in the world has ever experienced such a quick and dramatic racial and ethnic change. So it’s still unclear what it will mean for the U.S. to become a “majority-minority” nation with a large generational divide. (That is, a younger generation that’s more diverse than older generations.)

Marcelo Suarez-Orozco is an immigration expert at New York University. He says the question is whether a unified society is still possible “when the generations don’t look like one another.”

The country’s changing demographics have also put pressure on the two major political parties to address minority issues—especially those relating to Latinos. Democrats have generally supported immigration reform and a pathway to citizenship for illegal immigrants. Such positions may have helped President Barack Obama win re-election in November. An estimated 12.5 million of the 24 million eligible Hispanic voters cast ballots in the election. Approximately 71 percent of them voted for Obama, according to exit polls.

By 2030, the number of eligible Hispanic voters could increase to 40 million, and both parties are taking notice. After Mitt Romney’s loss, Republicans began reassessing their positions on immigration. The party “needs messages and policies that appeal to a broader audience,” says Mark McKinnon. He is a former strategist for President George W. Bush.

“I think the 2012 presidential election gives us a sneak peek of what’s going to happen in the presidential elections ahead,” says Frey. “Hispanics are going to . . . have more say.”

Not everyone, however, has embraced America’s changing demographics. From 2010 to 2011, more than 150 anti-immigration laws were passed by state legislatures, according to Mother Jones magazine. Efforts also have been made over the years to establish English as the country’s official national language.

What Would Ben Franklin Say?

The economy is most people’s No. 1 concern right now. However, there’s still great resistance to letting highly skilled workers into
the U.S. This is the case even though many financial experts say that such workers would help create more jobs for Americans.

In some ways, these issues are as old as the nation itself. In the 18th century, Benjamin Franklin feared that his fellow Pennsylvanians—who were largely white and British—would be overwhelmed by Germans. He said they “will soon so outnumber us, that all the advantages we have will not, in my opinion, be able to preserve our language, and even our government will become precarious.”

And in the 19th and 20th centuries, a solidly Protestant U.S. was wary of the arrival of many Catholics and Jews. Indeed, the Irish, Italians, and Eastern Europeans who arrived in the country in great numbers were not universally considered white.

Who will consider themselves Hispanic, black, or white later this century? With the increasing trend of interethnic and interracial marriages, ethnic and racial definitions in 20 years may be different from what they are today.

“The idea that you’re Hispanic and you can marry someone who is Asian, what does that mean a couple of generations down the road?” asks Frey.

Today, the Census Bureau considers Hispanic an ethnicity, not a race. (An ethnicity is a group of people who have the same racial, religious, or cultural background and a shared sense of identity.) And in 2000, after years of complaints, the agency began allowing Americans to check off more than one box to designate race. Frey also believes that in this increasingly globalized world, the country’s diversity gives the U.S. an edge over other nations.

“We in this country have a history of bringing in people from other parts of the world,” he says. “That’s still a part of our DNA as a society that puts us ahead of other parts of the world where they have real difficulties in [integrating] people.”

For many younger people, the idea of a less race-aware America is already a reality. Jarissa Vega, 14, was born in Chicago to Puerto Rican parents.

“I feel right at home,” the eighth-grader tells JS. “I have friends from different races, but I don’t judge them by race. I barely judge people at all. If you’re nice to me, then I’m going to be nice to you.”

—Jarissa Vega, 14

“...I have friends from different races, but I don’t judge them by race. I barely judge people at all. If you’re nice to me, then I’m going to be nice to you.”

—Veronica Majerol, with additional reporting by Brooke Ross

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**AMERICA’S CHANGING FACE**

**1950 to 2050**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1950</th>
<th>White 89%</th>
<th>Non-White 11%</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>White (Non-Hispanic) 63%</td>
<td>Hispanic/Latino 17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2050 (projections)</td>
<td>White (Non-Hispanic) 46%</td>
<td>Hispanic/Latino 30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau; Note: In 1950, the Census Bureau had just two categories; for 2011 and 2050, numbers add up to more than 100 because Hispanics may also report a race, such as white, black, or Asian.