

# DIVERSITY AND DIVERSIFICATION RESEARCH

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## **Abstract**

This paper argues that diversity is more than just a mixing of people perceived as different, and consists of activities and relationships much like other social phenomena. Consequently, there is much to be studied, beginning with the diversification process by which diversity is implemented. Since diversification is often initiated as a deliberate policy, researchers can be helpful to policy makers, especially with empirical research that addresses their policy related questions.

**Keywords:** Diversity, Diversification, Diversification policy, Racial diversity, Anti-Diversification

## **INTRODUCTION**

Diversity has been pursued energetically in the United States—racial, gender, ethnic and now class diversity—by decision makers both in private institutions, and policy makers in public institutions. They, and many of the researchers studying diversity tend to see it as the assembling of different populations in groups ranging from work-places, residential areas, schools, other organizations, institutions—and countries. The diversity being pursued is more than a population mix. It is meant to result in activities and relationships between different people and groups, and have a desired impact on its participants and the rest of society.

Diversity is the result of diversification, a social process in which people with diverse characteristics are brought together. Actually, people with fewer material or other resources are brought together with better off ones, so that the former can be helped or can help themselves to become better off. Thus, racial diversification should enable non-Whites to obtain access to the levels of schooling, housing, employment and the like already enjoyed by Whites.

Diversification can be an intended process, as a policy undertaken by public agencies and other organizations and institutions. It can also be an unintended, as in the case of immigration, labor force transformations, and other social changes not deliberately initiated by policy makers. When the diversification is unintended, the diversity that

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results is a byproduct not sought by those participating in it. Nonetheless, unintended diversification often has a much greater social impact than intended diversification. For example, immigration and even the threat of immigration can generate a variety of anti-diversification actions, including political ones. Sometimes these actions try to homogenize or rehomogenize a population, by racial and other segregation, resegregation, and even cleansing or by policies to end diversification. Occasionally anti-diversification takes the form of ethnic or racial cleansing, sometimes of genocidal proportions.

This essay discusses a number of research questions and issues relevant to diversity, diversification and anti-diversification. Although it aims to understand all of them, the essay is focused mainly on racial diversity in the United States, for the possibilities and the problems of diversification vary by country. In addition, the essay is limited to the empirical study of diversity and diversification, viewing these as sociopolitical phenomena. It does not attempt to evaluate this process, or to compare it to affirmative action and other policies to achieve racial integration and racial equality.

Consequently, I do not discuss whether the pursuit of diversification is a substitute for affirmative action and other egalitarian racial policies. These and other political questions and the research questions they generate demand serious consideration, but they require a separate paper.<sup>1</sup>

The essay is further limited because I have not reviewed the immense diversity literature and cite only a few titles. Thus I cannot report which research questions have already been answered and which issues of evaluation have already been resolved. Also, many of my observations and assertions are currently hypotheses.

## UNPACKING DIVERSITY AND DIVERSIFICATION

Diversity is a term, not a concept and insofar as it touches on many components of social life. It is similar to terms like culture and community. To begin with, everyone is diverse from everyone else in some respects, and even family consists of diverse people playing diverse roles. Moreover, we, including researchers mainly notice the publicly visible diversities. For example, we pay little attention to the fact that most social groups consist of people of different heights. Which diversities are and are not noticed and why deserves to be studied.

Diversification's prime participants are the diversifiers and the diversified. The former initiate the process and help to bring diversity about. The diversified are the subjects of the process; they live in it and with it and thereby help to make it happen. Thus they also act as diversifiers. Many diversification initiatives involve incumbents who are already in place, and newcomers, who are the people diversifying the space. Racial diversification usually adds non-White newcomers to White incumbents. Newcomers and incumbents are diverse in a handful of ways. Newcomers are usually younger than incumbents; those participating in gender diversification are more likely to be women, and more recently, LGBTQs.

Further, and as already suggested, newcomers and incumbents almost always differ in social status, and whether diversification is unintended or intended, newcomers are generally lower in class status than incumbents. Diversification assumes a different shape and outcome when the newcomers are of higher status than the incumbents, as in gentrification.

However, intended diversification is generally undertaken to provide access and the opportunity for upward mobility to lower status newcomers. The access being sought is generally to elite and other status-bearing organizations and institutions, and

no one demands that dishwashers, lavatory attendants and supermarket cashiers must be racially or otherwise diverse.

Still, even the racial diversification of desirable organizations and institutions usually offers newcomers equality of opportunity rather than equality of outcome. (e.g., Berrey 2015).

Moreover, lower status newcomers are normally tested for their ability to succeed in their new social environment. Thus, the diversifiers' selection process probably chooses the most upwardly mobile of the population of eligibles. Even so, incumbents almost always do all they can to maintain some social gaps between themselves and the newcomers. One frequent solution: some or many neighborhood social organizations are segregated by race and class. If status conflict takes place, or the higher status population fears a shrinkage of the status gap, it may also try to put restrictions on the behavior of the lower status population. For example, they may do so if lower status non-Whites engage in activities that their higher status White and non-White neighbors object to as being "ghetto" (Chaskin and Joseph, 2015).

The above observations suggest that the class and status positions of incumbents and newcomers are major factors in understanding both diversification and diversity. In fact, class may be the most crucial factor for a successful outcome of the racial diversification process. Gordon Allport's classic contact hypothesis argued that it would be most successful if incumbents and newcomers were equal in status (Allport 1954).

When status equality is absent, as much similarity as possible in publicly visible status-related behavior may be the best available substitute. Status conflict can sometimes be avoided if lower status neighbors refrain from public activities others consider too distasteful, and higher status ones refrain from disparaging their less affluent neighbors and from public displays of consumption that they cannot afford.

The diversification process, especially at workplaces must also be distinguished by whether it takes place at executive, mid-level or lower levels of the organization. Most likely, the higher the level, the more likely that the diversification is intended. Lower level diversification is frequently an unintended effect of changes in the labor force seeking work in that industry or field, or of employers trying to reduce wages.

## RESEARCHING DIVERSITY AND DIVERSIFICATION

Since diversification is a social process which is embedded in social, economic, and political processes, the racial diversification process varies from one organization and institution to others, as well as from country to country. These variations include the size of the dominant racial group, the extent of its dominance and power, as well as its perception, judgment, and treatment of other races. Particularly in the case of a country, class and other hierarchies and social structures, as well as their power and their ideologies are also important.

Because researchers must be prepared to study a process, their research should logically begin with the diversifiers. The research ought first to identify the diversifiers and the reasons for initiating the process, but without ignoring others who play roles in the process. These others may include a variety of public agencies, firms, advocacy and pressure groups, social movements and other organizations.

Other areas to be studied are the organizations and individuals working to facilitate the newcomers' entry into and adjustment to their new sites and the incumbents' adjustment to the newcomers. When the diversification is unintended and a byproduct of immigration or population movements, the diversifiers will be harder to identify. Because the newcomers are more numerous, the diversification process can affect the

entire society. The outcome of national elections is now often determined by incumbents' attitudes toward actual, potential and imagined immigrant newcomers.

Studies of the diversified need to focus on what newcomers, incumbents, and other participants in the process do with, for, to and against each other—and what is done to them. Intensive fieldwork should answer questions about how incumbents and newcomers treat each other, what they do together (formally and informally), and when and how they cooperate, disagree, and fight. However, researchers must not forget that all of the participants in the process may be affected by outside agents, forces, and events. This is perhaps best illustrated by diverse peoples living together peacefully for centuries until external conditions, especially racial, ethnic, religious and other civil wars lead one or more groups to kill one another.

Being a process, diversification has a beginning, varies in duration and proceeds in stages. It can also have a different outcome, when newcomers themselves become incumbents or when the process is reversed by resegregation. Stages in the activities and relationships between newcomers and incumbents are apt to be predictable. They usually start with only the most necessary interactions, and are all the more difficult when there are language and other differences between newcomers and incumbents. When the two are equal in class status and not in competitive or antagonistic situations, the next stages are voluntary interactions, the development of informal, formal and friendly relationships. These should segue into cooperation and friendship and for at least some, then into eventual intimacy, including intermarriage.

The stages of racial diversification will differ from other kinds of diversification, and they could differ further depending on the races involved. Whites will typically accept Asian-American newcomers faster than African Americans. The first stage, which is limited to the most necessary activities and relationships could last longer. The move to intimacy could proceed more slowly, and if the process becomes problematic or antagonistic, relationships may never proceed far beyond unavoidable interactions. In this case, diversification may end in separation and self segregation. Sometimes, newcomers or incumbents separate themselves spatially, and if they do so in large numbers, the site is no longer diversified. Instances characterized as White flight and neighborhood tipping from White to non-White ought therefore to be studied as instances of an anti-diversification or rehomogenization process.

Empirical researchers studying these stages will soon realize that the acculturation and assimilation literature may be helpful. Indeed, diversification requires newcomers to acculturate to the incumbent culture, and incumbents have to acculturate sufficiently to the newcomers before they can allow or encourage them to assimilate socially and participate in incumbent groups. The analysis of stages may be more complicated if and when the diversification process is partial, with incumbents and newcomers both preserving some separate or segregated activities and relationships. When college administrations integrate their campuses, some incumbents and newcomers may self segregate themselves for parts of their nonacademic social life. The administrators of desegregated public schools sometimes resegregate the newcomers through tracking.

Occasionally, diversification can even be temporary, the best and fastest growing example being tourism. At least in New York, tourist agencies catering mostly to White visitors offer short visits to Harlem. Once upon a time, affluent Whites also engaged in the race-and-class tourism called "slumming."

Traditionally, the evolution and stages of incumbent-newcomer activities and relationships were measured by changes in social distance, mainly with the Emory Bogardus' social distance scale (Bogardus 1926). However, his scale only measured distance by what he called sentiments, i.e., the attitudes of incumbents and newcomers toward each other. The needed distance studies would have to look at is actual

activities and relationships. These might focus on close and distant relationships, formal and informal ones, or weak, strong and neutral ties. Ties can also be impersonal and personal, as well as obligatory and voluntary. Perhaps qualitative and quantitative measures for separateness, neighborliness, collegiality, friendliness, friendship and intimacy could be developed.

Undoubtedly, the most important topic of diversification research is the effects of diversification, intended and unintended. Researchers as well as policy makers have to know who benefits and who suffers from diversification; what kind of diversification processes can do the most good; which incumbents and newcomers are likely to cause problems in the diversification process; and what other conditions are likely to help produce good or bad effects. The cost-benefit studies should emphasize economic and noneconomic benefits and costs, notably social, emotional, and political ones. They should also provide data on which benefits and costs are of highest priority to the diversifiers and the diversified, or at least the most vulnerable among the latter.

Studies involving massive immigration and other population movements must also look at benefits and costs for the country as a whole, particularly its local and national economies. The effects on holders of economic, political, cultural and other power who can influence the diversification process have to be understood as well. Methodologically, diversification research calls for both quantitative and qualitative studies, beginning with the standard demographic analysis of the various characteristics and social affiliations of newcomers and incumbents.

Other numerical analyses are necessary because numbers affect the diversification process in many ways. The proportion of incumbents and newcomers in the diversified population is frequently significant. Numerical majorities fear becoming minorities, and will do all they can to prevent losing economic, political and cultural power. Incumbents are particularly concerned about retaining their status and other privileges and advantages over newcomers.

However, most of the studies of the diversification process must employ qualitative methods, undertaking case studies of the process in a variety of organizations, institutions and other sites. Already published case studies (e.g., Berrey 2015; Chaskin and Joseph 2015; Warikoo 2016) can be used as models. Incumbent-newcomer interactions and relationships are best understood through field work and in-depth interviewing.

## DIVERSITY POLICY

Intended diversification has to begin with and be implemented through policies. However, since diversity per se is not an end in itself, the policies have to include goals. While policies are explicit, goals may not be, and diversifiers may not even be aware that they are pursuing goals.<sup>2</sup> Policies usually originate with elected officials, other politicians and powerholders, the policy makers who work for them, and the diversifiers responsible for implementing the policies. They may also be suggested by the advocacy groups and social movements who exert pressure for diversification, as well as the legislators and courts which may have called for diversification.

All of them may be reacting to longer term forces and their agents which have been advocating or demanding diversity. This is particularly the case with racial diversity. A large number of organizations and institutions of all kinds have been actively work to diversify in recent decades.

The first diversifiers were frequently government agencies, but now they include other public, nonprofit, commercial organizations and institutions. Some of

the best known are educational institutions as well as journalistic and other suppliers of information and entertainment. Among businesses and other private firms, diversification probably takes place first and foremost in large corporations that need to respond to racially diverse customers, clients and other constituencies. Others seek to maintain or improve their images, reputations, and good will.

Religious and secular groups dedicated to liberal reforms and other social changes are among the most active racial diversifiers, while residential communities may be the slowest, particularly because home owners fear their property values will decline. Diversifiers can also be distinguished by whether they seek class as well as racial diversity. Recently, calls for more attention to class diversity have increased, partly as another way of realizing racial diversification now that anti-diversification groups are pushing for the elimination of affirmative action and related policies. Class diversity is also sought because less affluent populations have long been excluded from many places, including colleges and universities. The resulting pressure for more equality diversity has developed in part because of demands by the White working class, but also because assuming a positioning counter to that population is perceived as being against racial diversification.

Goals that underlie the policies vary with the organizations and institutions seeking to institute these policies. For example, diversification in higher education calls for admitting newcomers from racial minorities and lower status populations in order to create more variety in the student body so as to add new perspectives to the formal and informal instruction, and the campus cultural life. The schools which see their mission as training the country's next generation of leaders also want their students to gain greater familiarity with people unlike themselves. Some also seek to train the newcomers as candidates for leadership of the non-White and lower status population. However, the same process may remove these candidates from that population and add them instead to the elite leadership pool.

Diversifiers seeking increased residential diversity also aim to assist non-White lower status residents to become upwardly mobile, especially through access to better schools and other public facilities. Urban policy makers charged with providing new housing for non-Whites displaced from torn down public housing projects frequently seek to deconcentrate them and scatter them in more advantaged areas so as to reduce illegal, deviant and "ghetto" behavior—one reason for the development of mixed housing projects in several American cities (e.g., Silver 2013). Commercial and other firms may seek newcomers to add new skills and perspectives to their organizations in the hope of raising productivity and profits, as well as to compete more expertly in the global economy. In addition, they are probably responding to a diversifying customer or client base (e.g., Kalev et al., 2006).

Currently, however, many organizations and institutions with racially diverse constituencies must or want to demonstrate that their staffs and activities resemble and respect their constituencies. In addition, most seekers of diversification do so to improve their position in their fields to maintain their organizations' reputations and to demonstrate their goodwill. They may also wish or have to keep up with peers or competitors which are already diversifying; to prevent activists from protesting their failure to diversify; or to respond to demands from holders of power over them. Last but hardly least, just about all diversification initiatives are responding directly or indirectly to larger, typically nationwide goals, and the agents as well as impersonal forces demanding or requiring them.

These forces driving racial diversification include not only greater economic, political and other forms of social inclusion, but also worker shortages and globally induced pressures for economic and other forms of growth.



## DIVERSITY POLICY RESEARCH

Sociologists and other researchers can play a useful role in the realization of diversification policy. They can begin by analyzing whether policy makers, diversifiers and the diversified agree about the goals they want to achieve. At the same time, researchers should unpack the policies to achieve these goals ethically and morally. For example, they ought to ask whether the policies aim for racial integration and racial equality in the long run, or whether they are substitutes that seek to discourage or head off these goals.

Once the diversification process has reached the implementation stage, researchers must ask whether the finally agreed upon policies, and the process of implementation will achieve the goals. Their research among the diversified may help in revising the policies to maximize the satisfactions and minimize the dissatisfaction of at least the most important participants. Because the diversified, and especially the newcomers, are unlikely to be consulted in the determination of policies, the researchers ought to find out whether the policies are likely to work for them.

Then the researchers need to follow the process, and concentrate on its effects, both short- and long-term effects. Whenever possible, the studies should try to frame and measure the analysis of effects as benefits and costs. Sociologists and others who undertake fieldwork and in-depth interviewing can reach even the least involved and listened to, who are often the most disadvantaged and vulnerable in the newcomer population. They will also learn about problems in the process that diversifiers and others who are observing it from the outside cannot see.

The analysis of long-term effects should be designed to discover whether the process is leading to the intended outcome. For example, does racial diversification lead to Whites and non-Whites accepting each other? Will it produce closer relationships between incumbents and newcomers, and could it eventually lead to racial integration? Researchers studying diversification in higher education can follow non-White students from year to year, and keep up that study after graduation. They need to learn their job and career development histories as well as the fate of their informal relationships with their once fellow students. The researchers should pay special attention to the relations between lower status and higher status students, especially as colleges and universities begin to admit more of the former (Warikoo 2016).

Similar studies in mixed housing projects can determine whether relationships between the races and classes become closer, more distant, or nonexistent over time. Enough mixed housing projects now exist to enable researchers to determine whether and how the fate of these relationships is affected by conditions inside and outside the projects.

Both in schools and mixed neighborhoods, studies of the newcomers should also look at what happens to their relationships with peers and others in the schools, neighborhoods and other places from which they came. Do old relationships survive their departure, or do past peers and others punish them in some way for leaving them, perhaps by accusing them of becoming “uppity,” i.e., pursuing too much upward mobility too intensely?

Long-term effects research could even discover under what conditions racial diversity can eventually result in greater racial equality. Possibly, a comparison with the outcome of affirmative action and other equality-driven policies could be undertaken if otherwise similar cases can be identified. However, such studies also have to take into account that the diversifiers virtually always carefully select newcomers to maximize the likelihood that the diversification process will be successful. Thus, those selected are thought to be particularly able to adapt to novel situations, including

dealing with whatever obstacles that incumbents create. The selected are therefore likely to differ in various ways from applicants who were not selected and from those who did not even apply.

This selection process, called *creaming* in the 1960s affected the introduction of most controversial policies and remained in effect until the policies are no longer controversial. Effects studies must include the politics of diversification, beginning with the politicians whose intervention in and approval of diversification policies is necessary before the process can start. Policy makers and politicians—and therefore researchers as well—have to be concerned when the diversification process is accompanied by serious conflicts, especially violent or otherwise publicly visible ones.

Then they must struggle over what level and kind of conflict they can live with politically. At that time, researchers may prove to be helpful in figuring out what policies or programs could preserve the benefits of diversification for the newcomers, particularly those low in status and political influence.

Needless to say, the effects research must try to identify the causes of both positive and negative effects. Policy makers and diversifiers need to know whether, how and how much the diversification process actually caused the effects, or whether other processes, including halo effects accompanying diversification were also responsible. For example, is the success of diversification in higher education the result of the population mix, or of extra effort by faculty and others to support the newcomers, perhaps because they have been disadvantaged? Or could that support stem from the normal faculty practice of paying more attention to the best and most poorly performing students? Does the harassment of lower status people by their higher status neighbors in mixed housing projects result from the mixing or is it simply a continuation of regular racial and class conflict that occurs less visibly in other circumstances or on other sites?

Effects studies conducted to follow diversification policy differ from basic research ones in one very important respect: they should be designed to help policy makers and others participating in policy making. Policy-oriented research is particularly necessary when the diversification process becomes problematic. Researchers can also help policy makers by identifying the limits of diversification. They can help to avoid, or to change policies known not to work, including those exacting serious costs on the participants in the diversification process. If the studies include fieldwork, researchers can sometimes be the first to discover the emergence of opposition to diversification that could result in ending the process.

Moreover, researchers can point out that class mixing involving the poor is not and should not be considered or promised as an antipoverty policy, because it does not supply them with the financial support needed to escape poverty. They can also tell policy makers seeking to support the upward mobility of lower status newcomers not to expect middle class neighbors to act as role models to inspire and guide them. However, they, like most other people are concerned with protecting their own class and status positions from actual or imagined threats on the part of people they perceive as being of lower status.

Poor people are unlikely to accept guidance on how to live from even the most well-intended middle-class neighbors for they are concerned with protecting their dignity and self respect. They reject being treated as inferiors, particularly if the neighbors offer advice that they cannot afford, or that conflict with how they want to live. Policy makers might also consider that asking middle-class neighbors to be role models is yet another way of helping the poor escape poverty without giving them the economic help they need to do so.



Sometimes, research findings can help dissuade policy makers from taking the wrong steps by suggesting alternative policies to help those experiencing the most serious costs.

## ANTI-DIVERSIFICATION

In the current political climate, researchers need to pay more attention to anti-diversification activities than to diversification. Indeed, anti-diversification studies need to become an intrinsic part of diversification research. Anti-diversification activities usually begin before or just after diversification has begun but they may also develop later when developing incumbent-newcomer relationships go awry, and incumbents seek to separate themselves from or exclude the newcomers. The resulting process may take place in only a single site, like a city neighborhood, or in a set of organizations and institutions. It can also turn into a national movement, and even into national policy, such as the currently increasing attack on affirmative action.

Empirical studies of the forces and agents of anti-diversification should be used to develop policies to deal with anti-diversification, especially to find ways by which incumbents and newcomers can live together beneficially. Anti-diversification has a long history in the United States, and can be traced back at least to the time when native Americans and European immigrants were trying to kill each other. The descendants of the original White Protestant settlers were discriminating against non-Protestant White newcomers and both sought to keep African Americans from becoming full citizens.

Today, as “people of color” are able to enter the White mainstream, many Whites fear African Americans, Latinos, and some other non-White immigrants as threats to White dominance. In fact, anti-diversification processes that cater to and further stoke this fear have been incorporated into Republican politics, and in pursuit of two goals.<sup>3</sup> The first is to keep African Americans in or return them to a quasi-caste like position at the bottom of society that began after the abolition of slavery. This goal was also pursued among dark skinned Latinos and other newcomers in the 1960s. When the civil rights movement enabled Blacks to vote, most voted Democrat. Southern Whites then began to vote Republican, after which the Republican party developed the “Southern strategy” to racialize their party and turn it into an almost entirely White one (e.g., Katznelson 2015).

Subsequently, the Republicans have expanded this strategy to the entire country and to other non-Whites (notably Latinos) in order prevent as many of them as possible from voting, to reduce or abolish affirmative action, and to increase racial inequality in other ways. These activities and policies have a second goal, to disenfranchise as many Democratic voters as possible, and not only non-Whites, and thereby to maintain and expand Republican control of the federal and state governments into an indefinite future.

Since Donald Trump became president, attempts to hasten both goals have increased, notably by deporting Latino and other non-White immigrants and to bar future ones, including Muslim refugees. In addition, Trump has now virtually legitimated the small but long-standing White supremacist, nationalist and neo Nazi movements some of which seek to turn the country into both a White Christian—and Republican—nation.

Halting and reversing the anti-diversification process will not be easy, not only because it has become part of the Republican political program, but also because it requires significant changes in both the economy and the polity. Democratic party

victories that return control of the government to the party for several election cycles might at least initiate a reversal. But only a healthier economy made up of both native born and immigrant workers and a more democratic polity can reduce inequality, downward mobility and social insecurity to allow America to move toward greater racial equality.

Meanwhile, smaller scale anti-diversification efforts are taking place as well, some reacting to diversification policies in higher education, housing, workplaces, and elsewhere. For example, on campuses undergoing diversification, White students sometimes protest against Black ones with dramatic racist symbols, such as nooses like those once used in lynchings. More often, they invite speakers with inflammatory racist messages. Non-White students and their White supporters then react with their own protests. When campus protests turn violent, the news media report them to nationwide audiences, making both diversification and anti-diversification visible to supporters of both sides.

Researchers can study the anti-diversification process in much the same way as, and whenever possible in conjunction with, diversification studies. Their research should also contribute to the development of effective policies against anti-diversification.

## FOR COMPARATIVE STUDIES

Because diversification and anti-diversification processes vary somewhat from country to country, comparative studies of both are needed. Researchers should explore inter-country similarities and differences.

Such studies could include small and large scale diversification and anti-diversification activities. They should emphasize the two processes in similar institutions, such as higher education and housing; and in places experiencing the recent massive immigration to Europe. Studies should address the long-term efforts to minimize diversification that preceded it. Causal studies can look at the role played by the global economy and its political and geopolitical by-products; as well as the population movements spurred by global warming. And comparative policy studies may be able to help countries seeking to reduce anti-diversification processes in this era of nearly world-wide racial polarization.

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## NOTES

1. For a brief but comprehensive analysis of these issues, see Sanneh 2017.
2. Unintended diversification also requires policies, but the existing ones tend to provide benefits for incumbents and high status newcomers but only minimal ones for lower status newcomers. Above all, policy makers seek to prevent or minimize conflict between incumbents and newcomers.
3. Demographic projections which estimate that African Americans, Latinos, and other non-Whites will outnumber Whites by the 2040s and turn the country into a majority-minority society add to these fears. However, the projections are questionable on sociological grounds (Alba 2016; Gans 2017).

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