

commentary

from other pens...

Surge among hispanics promises more friction

By Will Lester

WASHINGTON — The growth of America's Hispanic population to near parity with blacks appears certain to cause more friction as the nation's two most populous minority groups compete for political clout.

Long-term, growth of minorities makes the country more diverse and could increase their power if they form alliances and push common goals.

But short-term, both demographic analysts and politicians expect more of the jockeying for power that comes with such population shifts.

In America last year, there were about 35.3 million Hispanics, an ethnic group that includes whites and some blacks, preliminary Census estimates show. The black population ranged between 34.7 million and 36.4 million, with the exact figure uncertain because Americans were allowed to check off more than one race on the 2000 census form. "This growth leads to the potential of a stronger Latino community and to more Latino elected officials," said Rep. Silvestre Reyes, a Texas Democrat and chair of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus. "Currently, we do not have representation in Congress proportionate to the population of the country, and we need to change this."

About a third of the nation's Hispanics are under 18, according to Sonia Perez of the National Council of La Raza, and many new Hispanics are immigrants who have not become citizens and cannot vote.

The ethnic battle for political power has been a fixture in cities like New York, Los Angeles and Dallas and will spread around the country.

"The Latino population has migrated from the Southwest to cities like Chicago and Washington, D.C., and Southern states like North Carolina," said Texas state Rep. Domingo Garcia of Dallas. "We will see increasing demands for sharing political power and a piece of the political pie by surging Latino communities."

Garcia has helped lead the charge for more Hispanic representation in Dallas, which has roughly similar numbers of black and Hispanic residents but has only two Hispanics on a 14-member council that includes five black council members and a black mayor.

Hispanics filed lawsuits a decade ago that forced district representation on the Dallas Council and gave them their first seats.

"You've got two groups seeking the same kind of benefits," said James Jennings, a professor of urban and environmental policy at Tufts University. "Their middle class populations are growing, but you still have significant proportions who are impoverished, need access to higher education and other services. It's natural there may be some bumping."

Republicans have taken note of the increasing population of Hispanics and campaigned intensively for them in 2000. Bush got about a third of the Hispanic vote in the election and the GOP hopes to build on that. Blacks remained loyal to Democrats, giving Bush only one in 10 votes.

"I think the Hispanic community has done politics the right way," said Rep. J.C. Watts of Oklahoma, one of the most visible black Republicans. "Hispanics haven't been as beholden to any one party."

Many blacks aren't ready to concede that Hispanics are going to become the nation's most influential minority. They note Hispanics are not monolithic and some may end up with a stronger racial identity.

"We haven't seen the extent that Hispanics will blend into the black and white populations," said Ron Walters, a black political scientist at the University of Maryland.

And many black leaders hope Hispanics and blacks will join forces, as they have in the past, to achieve political power.

"You see both cooperation and competition, but you hope cooperation is going to carry the day," said Julian Bond, chairman of the board of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

"This didn't sneak up on anybody," said Rep. Alcee Hastings, a black Democrat from heavily Hispanic South Florida. "It just happened five years earlier than we expected."

EDITOR'S NOTE — Will Lester covers polling and politics for The Associated Press.

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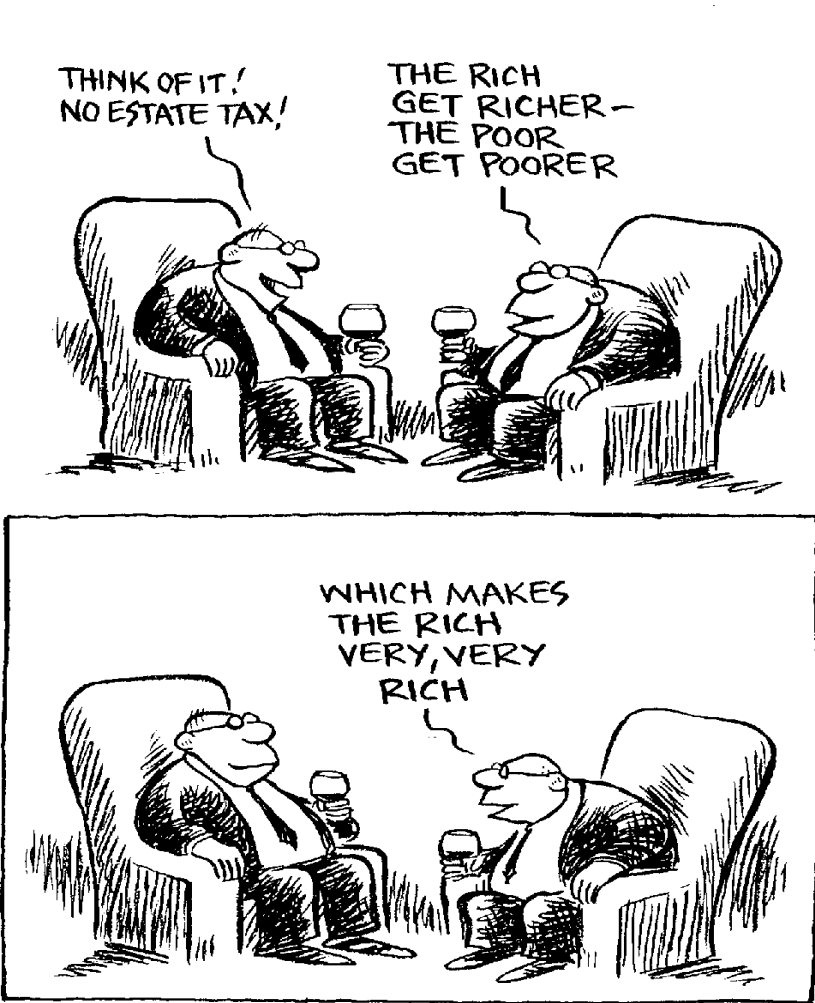
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Sometimes it is routines that get us down

I don't know about you, but I've been thinking about routines.

Routines can be good, and they can be bad. I have to admit that basically I'm a person who likes them. Now that doesn't mean that I fly into a tailspin when my routine is broken. It just means that I like to know what to count on, and I feel more comfortable in routine situations.

Sometime when I didn't even notice, I became more comfortable NOT in a crowd. Crowds are too unpredictable. Like some friends of mine who recently noticed the same thing, I joined the "matinee, eat early" generation.

Crowds, parking problems, cold nights, etc. just became too much of a hassle. Oh, I do go out in those situations once in awhile, but they're not my preferred routine.

Now that I've said I like routines, I have to take



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part of it back. There are some routines that I get tired of ("Don't end a sentence with a preposition." Yes, I know I routinely try to follow that rule, but right now I feel like breaking it.)

Some routines I have get just plain boring sometimes. Don't you once in awhile wish you could go to bed without your nightly routine? I do.

Sometimes I'd just like to forget to wash off the makeup, not brush my teeth, not floss, not shower. Sometimes I'm tired and would like to just fall into bed and have all the hygiene routines take care of

Testing compassionate conservatism

George W. Bush strongly supports increasing the involvement of faith-based organizations in salutary government activities. The president, therefore, would be well-advised to consult a recent publication of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, an organization I came to know through my friendship with the late Cardinal John O'Connor.

Titled "Responsibility, Rehabilitation and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice," the statement, say the bishops, "is a major initiative that is going to engage us pastorally and in advocacy for years to come."

In presenting the document, Cardinal Roger Mahony of Los Angeles emphasized, "We will not tolerate the crime and violence that threatens the lives and dignity of our sisters and brothers, and we will not give up on those who have lost their way and have been caught up in crime and punishment."

The bishops reject "simplistic solutions such as 'three strikes and you're out' and mandatory sentencing. One-size-fits-all solutions are often inadequate. The combination of accountability and flexibility works best with those who are trying to change their lives."

Going against the current move to treat young offenders as though they were adults, the bishops emphatically note that "placing children in adult jails is a sign of failure, not a solution."

In what I expect will strike many, including perhaps some Catholics, as "bleeding-heart liberalism," the bishops point out, "We cannot ignore the fact that one-fifth of our preschoolers are growing up in poverty and far too many go to bed hungry. Any comprehensive approach to criminal justice must address these factors."

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A good many of these children, especially in families with single mothers, are victims of the Clinton and Republican welfare "reform."

The Catholic bishops have previously called for an end to the death penalty, and they speak again on that issue: "Increasing reliance on the death penalty diminishes us and is a sign of growing disrespect for human life." (Abortion is another form of disrespect for human life.)

"We cannot overcome crime," the statement continues, "by simply executing criminals, nor can we restore the lives of the innocent by ending the lives of those convicted of their murders. ... The death penalty offers the tragic illusion that we can defend life by taking life."

Moreover, "As bishops we believe that the current trend of more prisons and more executions, with too little education and drug treatment, does not truly reflect Christian values and will not really leave our communities safer."

According to the bishops, our "astounding rate of incarceration, six to twelve times higher than the rate of other Western countries," is due not only to "three strikes and you're out," but also to "zero tolerance for drug offenders."

The bishops also target the growing number of "supermax" prisons in which the most dangerous offenders are kept in "small cells by themselves for 22 to 24 hours each day."

Dubious plan uses school money

The Kansas City Star on NAIA headquarters bid:

The wooing of the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics has been done almost totally out of the view of Olathe taxpayers and patrons of the Olathe School District. ...

... The Olathe Chamber of Commerce revealed that it had requested \$2 million in taxpayer assistance that could be offered to the NAIA so it would leave Tulsa, Okla. The money would come in equal amounts from the school district and city over a 10-year period.

... It's difficult to see any compelling reason for Olathe School District taxpayers to shell out \$1 million to the NAIA at this point. ...

The request for an increase in the hotel tax up to 6 percent — from 4 percent — makes more sense.

... The hotel tax increase would raise about \$200,000 a year. This would be enough to permit the higher hotel tax to pay for the \$2 million subsidy being requested for the NAIA's relocation. ... It would have helped matters had the Olathe chamber unveiled its request for aid from the school district and the city before last-minute decisions had to be made about whether to approve them.

... The chamber also said last week that it couldn't give the city or school officials more in-

formation about the private incentives being offered to attract the NAIA. This leaves school and city taxpayers in the dark. ...

The relocation of the NAIA to Olathe could be a small but positive economic development step for that city ... but a higher hotel tax — not money from the school district — ought to furnish most of the local subsidy for the project.

Letter Policy

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themselves.

And of course there are the mornings when I'd just like to face the day without the day having to put up with my "natural" face. The routine of fixing my hair, brushing teeth, putting on makeup, selecting the right outfit, etc. gets tiring.

Those are the days I wish I lived in a remote mountain cabin where no one would see me all day, and if they did, they wouldn't judge my casual (and/or sloppy) appearance.

Fundamentally, I guess my routines get me through life with a minimum of hassle.

But there are the days when I'd just like to throw caution to the wind and break all the rules. I probably could do that. Few people would know and probably even fewer would care.

But that brings up another of my routines. I routinely impose routines upon myself.

I've reported on some of these prisons. Such extreme isolation makes many of the prisoners more dangerous upon their release than they were when they entered these human warehouses. And those who are mentally disturbed become much worse.

The bishops make another point that is often ignored by those who accuse critics of the present system of being "soft on criminals": We increasingly locate prisons, says the statement, "in remote areas far away from communities where most crimes are committed," which "creates hardships on families of inmates" because of the distances they have to travel to visit family members in prison.

"Being away from support systems is especially hard on juvenile offenders, who need family and community support," the bishops write. "Regular inmate contact with family and friends reduces the likelihood they will return to a life of crime."

Distant prisons also make it easier for the rest of us to avoid thinking about the burgeoning numbers of incarcerated Americans — and the abandonment of the very idea of rehabilitation by those who run prisons. Accordingly, unless there is a prison riot, the media keeps us comfortably ignorant of the conditions in some of these prisons — conditions that greatly disturbed Charles Dickens when he visited American prisons in the 19th century.

Tellingly, much of the media have completely ignored the message of the bishops.

The bishops also speak of the need for more attention to the victims of crime: "Too often the criminal justice system neglects the hurt and needs of victims or seeks to exploit their anger and pain to support punitive policies." And the more punitive the policies, the more recidivists our prisons breed.

Nat Hentoff is a nationally renowned authority on the First Amendment and the Bill of Rights.

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