

〈Article〉

MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

— The Changing Image of the U.S.A. —

Kazuo AKASAKA

1

America has, without a doubt been the preeminent world leader in politics, military affairs, industry, economics, and academic research for the past 50 years. America's present status among advanced countries is truly amazing, considering its relatively short history. America's success during the 20th century can be attributed to a large degree to its liberal immigration politics. The energy and talent of immigrants from all over the globe held make America the country it is today.

Liberal immigration politics have not been without negative social effects, however. The face of America is rapidly becoming less white as non-white minority groups increase. This trend is sure to make wide and lasting changes to all aspects of the society, especially the education system.

This paper will examine the American education system's efforts to adapt to the changes occurring in the society. As America becomes ever more multiracial and multicultural, the education system must come to terms with a wide variety of problems involving language, culture, values, religion, etc. America's future success depends on the outcome of this educational reform movement.

2

America is a country of immigration until recently, white European immigrants were in the majority. However, in recent years, new immigration trends are rapidly changing the racial and ethnic make up of traditionally white America. Of course this trend is not confined to America, it is also occurring in countries around the world such as England, Germany, France, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. These countries need only to watch America to see their own future. Even Japan has experienced increased immigration, although in relatively small numbers.

The 1990 census figures show current population trends in America. As indicated in Figure 1 below in 1990, whites comprised 80.3% of the total population, a decrease of 2.8% from 1980. During the same 10 year period, the Hispanic population increased from 6.4% to 9%, and the Asian population increase from 1.5% to 2.9% of the total U.S. population. In terms of gross numbers, the Hispanic population increased by over 50% and the Asian population doubled while the white population increased by only 6%.

Figure 1 Population

Population No.18. Resident Population, by Race and Hispanic Origin:
1980 and 1990

【As of April 1】

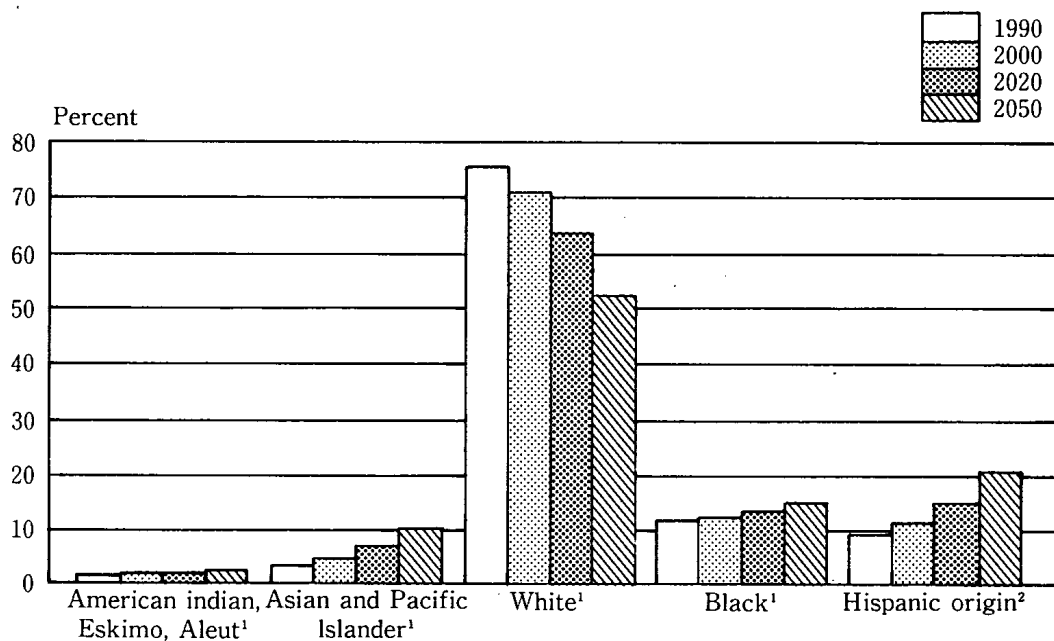
RACE AND HISPANIC ORIGIN	NUMBER (1,000)		PERCENT DISTRIBUTION		CHANGE, 1980-90	
	1980 ¹	1990	1980 ¹	1990	Number (1,000)	Percent
All persons	226,546	248,710	100.0	100.0	22,164	9.8
RACE						
White.....	188,372	199,688	83.1	80.3	11,314	6.0
Black.....	26,495	29,986	11.7	12.1	3,491	13.2
American Indian, Eskimo, or Aleut	1,420	1,959	0.6	0.8	539	37.9
American indian	1,364	1,878	0.6	0.8	514	37.7
Eskimo	42	57	(Z)	(Z)	15	35.6
Aleut	14	24	(Z)	(Z)	10	67.5
Asian or Pacific Islander	² 3,500	7,274	1.5	2.9	3,773	107.8
Chinese	806	1,645	0.4	0.7	839	104.1
Filipino	775	1,407	0.3	0.6	632	81.6
Japanese	701	848	0.3	0.3	147	20.9
Asian Indian	362	815	0.2	0.3	454	125.6
Korean	355	799	0.2	0.3	444	125.3
Vietnamese	262	615	0.1	0.2	353	134.8
Hawaiian	167	211	0.1	0.1	44	26.5
Samoan.....	42	63	(Z)	(Z)	21	50.1
Guamanian	32	49	(Z)	(Z)	17	53.4
Other Asian or Pacific Islander	(NA)	822	(NA)	0.3	(NA)	(NA)
Other race	6,758	9,805	3.0	3.9	3,047	45.1
HISPANIC ORIGIN						
Hispanic origin ³	14,609	22,354	6.4	9.0	7,745	53.0
Mexican	8,740	13,496	3.9	5.4	4,755	54.4
Puerto Rican	2,014	2,728	0.9	1.1	714	35.4
Cuban	803	1,044	0.4	0.4	241	30.0
Other Hispanic	3,051	5,086	1.3	2.0	2,035	66.7
Not of Hisoanic origin	211,937	226,356	93.6	91.0	14,419	6.8

NA Not available. Z less than 0.05 percent. ¹See footnote 4, table 1. ²Not entirely comparable with 1990 counts. The 1980 count shown here which is based on 100-percent tabulations includes only the nine specific Asian or Pacific Islander groups listed separately in the 1980 race item. The 1980 total Asian or Pacific Islander population of 3,726,440 from sample tabulations is comparable to the 1990 count, these figures include groups not listed separately in the race item on the 1980 census form. ³Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, press release CB91-216.

due to both immigration and high birth rates. As indicated in Figure 2 below, should present trends continue, whites are projected to comprise only 50-55% of the total population by the year 2050. In their place will be Hispanic and Asians. Both of these groups are expected to more than double their relative numbers by 2050. In 2050, Hispanics are projected to comprise over 20% of total U.S. population with Asians making up about 10% of the total. Clearly, these projections hold serious implications for U.S. education and society at large.

Figure 2 Percent Distribution of the Population, by Race and Hisoanic Origin: 1990 to 2050 (Based on the middle series)



¹Non-Hispanic, ²Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.

Source: Chart prepared by U.S. Bureau of the Census. For data, see tables 19 and 20.

The U.S. education system has in recent years experimented with a number of programs designed to respond to changing student racial and ethnic make up. New programs are being tested which modify history, literature and cultural studies curriculums to eliminate the traditional emphasis on the contribution and importance of white,

Europeans to America's development. Of course, these developments are opposed by large numbers of whites. Many people wonder if history should be reinterpreted so freely to suit the needs of increasingly politically powerful racial and ethnic minorities.

4

Multicultural education will probably form the basis of the 21st century U.S. education system. Most educators agree on the importance of making the system more multicultural. When the issue of bilingual education is raised, however, large disagreement exists.

In California, Florida, Virginia, and many other metropolitan areas, bilingual education has been introduced to the public schools. In some cases, relatively uncommon language such as Cambodian, Hmong, Farsi, etc. are taught in addition to the more common Spanish. The programs are quite contentious because they require the expenditure of financial and human resources on relatively small minority groups. Bilingual Education is especially difficult for Blacks to accept, for they feel it uses resources which could be better spent on problems affecting Black students. In addition, earlier immigrants to the U.S. enthusiastically learned English and tried to become "real Americans." This group too has reservations about bilingual education.

Bilingual education is not without its supporters, of course, many people recognize the important role which language plays in cultural identity. They contend that bilingual education must be the main element in any multicultural education scheme. The battle lines are drawn on this contentious issue and the solution is far from clear. What is clear is that as the racial and ethnic population of America becomes less white and more diverse, the calls for more bilingual education are sure to increase. How much is appropriate?

I firmly believe in the importance of multicultural education. In a diverse society such as America, the only way to ensure that members of widely different groups understand each other and live together in peace is to teach mutual selfrespect in a multicultural education system.

5

As far as bilingual education is concerned, I cannot agree with current trends toward widening the scope and increasing the number of programs. I believe this is a recipe for disaster. Bilingual education and multicultural education should be considered as separate issues.

In order for a society comprised of varied racial and ethnic groups to function smoothly, a common means of communication is required. Practically speaking, this means an official language (or 2 or 3). Educating children in large number of languages will only cause American society to drift even further apart-to splinter into numerous subgroups which won't be able to co-exist. Thus, the only solution is to retain a limited number of official languages.

Many countries throughout the world such as India, the Philippines, and Kenya have large numbers of regional dialects which hinder communication. To solve this problem, these countries have decided upon an official language and taught this language in the public schools.

The existence of an official language doesn't prevent subgroups from retaining and expressing their cultural identity. The official language does, however, help to maintain unity in the country.

I believe the U.S. should treat various languages in the same way as the previously mentioned countries deal with local dialects. By instituting a limited number of official languages, the U.S. can promote

social stability and effective communication across ethnic and racial lines. In this way, the U.S. can cope with current population trends by means of a multicultural, but not multi lingual, education system.

REFERENCES

- Howard, Gary R. (1993). Whites in Multicultural Education —
Rethinking Our Role —. Journal of KAPPA
- Henry III, William. (1990). Beyond The Melting Pot. TIME, April 9,
1990
- Statistical Abstract of the United States 1993, The National Data
Book, U.S. Department of Commerce Economics and Statistics
Administrative Bureau of the Census
- Ezaki, Kazuhiro. (1991). Education for the Minority Journal of Educa-
tion and Medicine. October 1991