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# New Jersey City Called Biggest 'Melting Pot' as State Diversity Increases

By Terrence Dopp - Feb 7, 2011 12:01 AM ET

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The Goldman Sachs Building in Jersey City, New Jersey. Photographer: Andrew Harrer/Bloomberg

Hudson County is [New Jersey's](#) most-diverse. At its heart, and within sight of Ellis Island, lies Jersey City, the state's most polyglot large municipality, according to U.S. Census Bureau figures.

There's a 77 percent probability that any two Hudson County residents, chosen at random, will be different in terms of race or ethnicity, according to a Bloomberg Diversity Index based on Census data. In Jersey City, that ratio rises to 82 percent.

Statewide, the diversity index climbed 13 percent to 60, from 2000, while in the county it rose 2.2 percent. In [Jersey City](#), where 75 languages are spoken in the [public schools](#), the racial and ethnic mix of residents was little changed from a decade earlier. The community, dubbed "Wall Street West" by some, sits across the [Hudson River](#) from the towers of [Lower Manhattan](#) and overlooks the Statue of Liberty.

"If America's a melting pot, then Jersey City is truly the melting pot and it always has been," Mayor Jerramiah Healy said in an interview. "We were the reception committee for the world and that really hasn't changed."

[Ellis Island](#), an icon of America's immigration heritage, connects by footbridge to Jersey City's Liberty State Park. Healy said his parents, who arrived from Ireland in the 1930s, settled here. More than 12 million people came to the U.S. through the island's facilities from 1892 to 1954, when it closed, according to the National Park Service. The U.S. government maintains the buildings there.

The earlier waves of Irish, Italian and German immigrants have been supplanted in Jersey City by those arriving from Latin America, the Middle East and [Africa](#), the mayor said.

## Population Breakdown

"It's really quite diverse," said [William Frey](#), a senior fellow at the [Brookings Institution](#), a nonprofit research organization in [Washington](#). He said Hudson County is about 31 percent white, 11 percent black and 13 percent Asian, in terms of its racial makeup, with 42 percent counted as Hispanic. The U.S. as a whole is 65 percent white, he said.

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Census figures released last week gave the first glimpse of the changes in state demographics since 2000. The shifts in population nationwide will provide a basis for redrawing congressional districts. Data for New Jersey, Virginia, Louisiana and Mississippi were released first because their political calendars call for some of the earliest elections.

Jersey City, where the population grew 3 percent from 2000 to 247,597 residents last year, benefitted as immigrants flocked to urban areas, said James Hughes, dean of the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers University in New Brunswick. The state's second-most populous city, trailing Newark, is about 26 percent black and almost 28 percent Hispanic, according to Census data.

### Undercounted by Census

Healy's office contends the Jersey City's residents were undercounted and the actual population may be as high as 267,000. The Census underestimated the figure in 2000, which meant the city received \$40 million to \$50 million less in federal aid during the past decade, he said.

"We were conservatively undercounted by 20,000," Healy said. "There's a general apathy, people are busy going about their lives."

Luxury condominiums and new construction blossomed along Hudson County's "Gold Coast," a waterfront area with Manhattan views, during the past decade as developers found easy financing and willing buyers. Along with Jersey city, the stretch includes Hoboken, home of Jon Corzine, a former governor who is chief executive officer of New York-based broker MF Global Holdings Inc., as well as Weehawken, North Bergen, Secaucus and others.

### Trans-Hudson Boom

Jersey City's waterfront was dubbed "Wall Street West" as securities firms from across the Hudson sparked a building boom in the early 1980s. The municipality boasts 17 million square feet (1.6 million square meters) of office space and sports the state's tallest skyscraper, anchored by Goldman Sachs Group Inc., according to the city's economic development agency.

Empty-nesters and 20-something professionals flocking to urban areas such as Hoboken and Jersey City fueled the growth, Rutgers's Hughes said in an interview. At the same time, many rural and suburban communities passed local ordinances restricting home building or purchased open space to keep it from developers, he said.

"Those areas were almost taken out of the development cycle," Hughes said. "The state as a whole grew slower than the rest of the nation. That's been true for the last three decades: We're a dense, mature state."

To contact the reporter on this story: Terrence Dopp in Trenton at [tdopp@bloomberg.net](mailto:tdopp@bloomberg.net)

To contact the editor responsible for this story: Mark Tannenbaum at [mtannen@bloomberg.net](mailto:mtannen@bloomberg.net)

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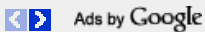
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