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Whites Now A Minority In California

SACRAMENTO, California, March 30, 2001

(AP) Non-Hispanic whites are now a minority in California, according to new census data.

A jump in Hispanic births and Asian immigration propelled whites into minority status for the first time since 1860, when accurate census data started being recorded. As recently as 1970, non-Hispanic whites accounted for nearly 80 percent of the state's population.

Hispanics accounted for more than three-quarters of the state's growth during the 1990s and now account for nearly one in three residents. Non-Hispanic whites slipped to 47 percent of the state's population.

Asians now comprise about 11 percent of the state's population.

"I think it's kind of peculiar and kind of comical that people are shocked that the number of Latinos are going up," said Gregory Salcido, 32, a history teacher at El Rancho High School outside Los Angeles. "No matter where you go, you'll see people my skin shade."

The Golden State added 4.1 million people during the 1990s, more than the individual populations of 26 other states. But the state's 13.8 percent growth rate ranked only 18th nationally.

With 33.9 million people, California is easily the most populous state. Nearly one of every eight Americans is a Californian and the state's booming economy, fueled in part by a huge labor force, is ranked sixth in the world.

California is gaining one congressional seat because of its growth, its smallest delegation increase in 80 years.

The Hispanic population nationally grew by 58 percent to 35.3 million, or about 13 percent of the U.S. population. Nearly one in every three Hispanics nationwide lives in California.

California joins New Mexico, Hawaii and the District of Columbia where non-Hispanic whites are also in the minority.

A 27 percent increase in the Asian population in California was due mostly to immigration, according to the state.

The black population remained steady at 7 percent of the total population, while the non-Hispanic white population continued to shrink, partly due to an exodus during the recession of the early 1990s.

"If there is no majority, maybe there are no minorities," said Lt. Gov. Cruz Bustamante, the first Hispanic elected to statewide office since 1871. "The time has finally come for us to simply refer to ourselves as Californians."

California remains a key destination for newly arrived Hispanic immigrants and growth also is occurring among Hispanics who have long made the state their home, said Albert Camarillo, a history professor at Stanford University.

"We're also seeing the second- and third-generations are moving to the suburbs, which has been true for the last 20 years," Camarillo said. "When people have the economic means, they will leave the more concentrated Mexican-American barrios."

In the city of Los Angeles, about 47 percent of the 3.7 million residents identified themselves as Hispanics. In SaDiego, 25 percent of the city's 1.2 million residents were Hispanic, and in San Francisco, 14 percent of its 776,733 residents identified themselves as Hispanic.

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