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# Urban Vitality, Diversity, and Culture: Population Growth and Ethnic Change in Philadelphia: 1990-2000

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SIAP's Culture Builds Communities inquiry was undertaken from 1996 to 2001 with support by the William Penn Foundation.

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# Urban Vitality, Diversity, and Culture: Population Growth and Ethnic Change in Philadelphia: 1990-2000

## **Abstract**

This paper uses the early release of 2000 census data to get a glimpse of demographic changes in the city of Philadelphia during the 1990s. Unlike New York and Chicago, Philadelphia continued to lose population during the 1990s, a four percent decline. However, without an influx of immigrants—the city's Hispanic population grew by 45,000 and its Asian population by 25,000—the decline would have been more than twice as large.

The paper focuses on the city and diversity. It first examines the changing ethnic character of Philadelphia during the 1990s and identifies where change was most apparent. It then examines the relationship of population growth to diversity. Finally, it looks at other variables—including poverty status and cultural participation rate—in order to account for the variations in population change found in the city. The paper concludes that, although early findings await further analysis, the data suggest that diversity and culture will be an important part of the story of urban vitality in the coming years.

## **Disciplines**

Arts and Humanities | Sociology | Urban Studies and Planning

## **Comments**

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**Social Impact of  
the Arts Project**

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Working Paper #14:  
Urban Vitality, Diversity, and Culture:  
Population Growth and Ethnic Change in Philadelphia:  
1990-2000

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The recent release of the redistricting files for the 2000 census gives us our first glimpse of the social and economic changes that shaped the United States during the 1990s. Although the data represents merely a trickle of what will be available within the next year, there are a number of trends in these data that demonstrate that the 1990s were marked by significant continuities and departures.

An important turn-around in the demographic history of American cities occurred during the 1990s. As reported by the media, New York grew by more than one-half million people during the decade, fueled primarily by the influx of immigrants in the outer boroughs of the city. This represented the continuity of a revival that began during the 1980s. Chicago, on the other hand, again thanks to immigrant growth, also grew during the 1990s. However, for the Windy City, the population increase was the first since 1950.

Compared to New York and Chicago, Philadelphia did not fair well, recording a population decline of four percent during the 1990s. However, compared to previous census estimates, this decline was a kind of moral victory. Again, immigrants played an important role; the Hispanic population of the city grew by 45,000 and the Asian population by 25,000. Without these increases, the population decline would have been more than twice as large.

Yet, this revival was certainly not the only trend in the metropolitan area. Although city folk can congratulate ourselves that the demise of our metropolis has been exaggerated, the real action in the metropolitan area has been far from Market and Broad. As the map of population growth in the metropolitan area makes clear, the most rapidly growing areas of metro Philadelphia have been in exurbia, between 6 and 10 miles from the city's borders. This push to the poles—with Center City and exurbia accounting for the highest levels of population growth—has become the geographical expression of the “hallowing” out of the middle that we have seen in social and economic structures. It expresses, as well, the split personality that American city's now have on the issue of diversity. As we shall see, the city of Philadelphia enjoyed a major blossoming of ethnic diversity during the 1990s and it was diverse block groups that were most likely to attract new residents. In the suburbs, however, growth was primarily associated with homogeneous white neighborhoods. During the 1990s, both diversity and homogeneity enjoyed a boom as significant numbers of residents sought out each. (Figure 1)

This paper focuses on the city and diversity. First we examine the changing ethnic character of the city during the 1990s and identify where change was most apparent. We then examine the link of population growth and diversity in the city. Finally, we bring in several other variables—including poverty status and cultural participation rates—in order to account for the variations in population growth we found in Philadelphia.

### **The changing ethnic character of the city.**

A look at the ethnic map of Philadelphia in 2000 in many ways looks familiar. (Figure 2) As in 1990, three features characterized Philadelphia's ethnic composition:

- Large homogeneous African American concentrations in North Philadelphia and West Philadelphia
- A Hispanic salient centered on 5th Street in North Philadelphia/Kensington
- Homogeneous white concentrations in Northwest (Chestnut Hill, Roxborough) and Northeast Philadelphia

Yet, a closer examination of the changing ethnic character of individual block groups shows that there was more change than was apparent. The 35 percent of block groups that were predominantly African American in 1990 remained so ten years later. Just over one percent of them changed their ethnic character over the decade. The predominantly white sections of the city changed more. Of the 40 percent of the block groups that fit this description in 1990, 25 percent remained stable white in 2000. No block group in the city moved from homogeneous white to homogeneous black during the decade, but 14 percent moved from homogeneous white to ethnically diverse. (Figure 3)

Among diverse block groups there were no pronounced trends. Among the 11 percent of block groups that were at least 20 percent black and 20 percent white in 1990, a majority remained black/white in 2000 and another 2.4 percent of block groups moved to another diverse status. 1.5 percent moved to homogeneous black and 0.3 percent became homogeneous white. The vast majority of other diverse block groups in 1990 remained diverse ten years later.

When all was said and done, then, the proportion of block groups that were black had fallen slightly while the percent that were white fell from 40 to 26 percent. The Latino and Latino/Black share of block groups had grown from 4.9 percent in 1990 to 8.4 percent. The biggest increases, however, were among the other ethnically diverse categories. The three diverse categories—black/white, other diverse with at least 10 percent Asian, and other diverse—rose as a share of block groups from 19 percent to 29 percent. A much larger share of the city’s “turf” did not belong to one ethnic group in 2000 than had been the case a decade earlier.

Yet, attention to block groups actually understates the level of change. Although the proportion of block groups that were homogeneous black did not change much between 1990 and 2000, the proportion of African-Americans who lived in these areas dropped sharply. In 1990, the city had 624,000 black residents of which 486,000 lived in homogeneous black block groups. (Table 1) By 2000, the black population had risen to 656,000, but the number of African Americans in these block groups had fallen to 443,000—a decline from 78 to 68 percent of the black population. Only 124,000 African Americans had lived in diverse block groups in 1990; ten years later 159,000 did, rise from 20 to 30 percent of the black population. Overall, the population of diverse block groups rose from 22 percent of the city’s population to 38 percent. Although 62 percent of whites and 68 percent of blacks continued to live in homogeneous block groups, these figures were much lower than they had been a decade earlier.

The 2000 census was the first to allow individuals to identify themselves as multi-racial. At least in Philadelphia, this group remained small and scattered. Just over two percent

of the city's residents identified themselves as multi-racial and those who did not concentrate in any section of the city. In only 14 block groups did more than 10 percent of residents identify themselves as multiracial.

The reason for this apparent conflict between the stable geography of the city and the shift in population was the result of a widespread de-population of homogeneous African-American block groups. Between 1990 and 2000, the average change in block group population was a loss of 23 residents. Yet, much of this decline was a result of the shrinking of black and Latino block groups. Stable black block groups lost an average of 104 residents during the decade while stable Latino block groups (of which there were only x) lost 117 residents. Stable white block groups remained generally unchanged (a loss of 5 residents) while block groups that were stable diverse or became diverse gained 15 and 30 residents respectively. In short, even as the areas of the city that were diverse increased during the 1990s, the share of the population that lived in these areas increased even more quickly.

Ethnic composition was an important determinant of population changes, but it wasn't the only one. What is apparent from these data is that the black and Latino population of poor sections of North Philadelphia and West Philadelphia declined sharply during the 1990s. This explains why poverty status in 1990 was also an important determinant of population decline. On average, sections of Philadelphia with below average poverty remained stable while those with above average poverty lost population.

The maps of population change illustrate where population declines and increases were concentrated. Center City and University City enjoyed an increase in population, but so did a set of populations adjoining North Philadelphia. Neighborhoods like Olney, Juniata Park, and Frankford all gained population, as did sections of Germantown and Ogontz. While few black block groups gained population, Latino and diverse sections of the city were among those that grew the fastest (Figure 4)

Finally, we tested whether our indexes of cultural activity were related to population changes. Here two trends were notable. The relationship of cultural *institutions* to population change was quite limited. Institutions that had been part of the cultural core before 1960, essentially Center City, University City, and a part of Germantown, did experience population increases, but areas of the city that became centers for cultural institutions after 1960, especially sections of North Philadelphia actually experienced declines in population. Overall, there was not compelling relationship between population change and cultural institutions.

On the other hand, population change was related to cultural participation. In SIAP Working Paper #6, we had developed indexes of different dimensions of cultural participation. The one that we identified as "mainstream" participation—connected with such institutions as the Philadelphia Orchestra and the Museum of Art was most associated with population change. Overall, sections of the city that had low "mainstream" participation lost about 83 residents during the decade while those with high mainstream participation gained 69 residents. The relationship of mainstream

participation to population change was similar for predominantly African American, white, and diverse block groups. Although the full analysis of these trends will have to await the full census reports, these data suggest that cultural participation may have had a role in which areas held their population and which did not.

In order to summarize our findings on population change, we performed a logistic regression. The dependent variable was whether an area experienced population growth during the decade (population change > 0) and the independent variables were the block group's poverty status in 1990 (quartiles), its mainstream cultural participation rate, and its ethnic composition in 1990 and 2000 (six categories: stable black, white, Latino, and diverse, became diverse, other). The first category of each factor was excluded from the analysis. (Table 2)

By far the most important factor was ethnic status. Compared to stable African-American block groups, homogeneous white areas were more than twice as likely to experience population growth. Stable diverse sections of the city and those that became diverse were more than 3 and 5 times more likely than black block groups to experience population growth. When entered last in the model, ethnic composition nearly doubled the explained R-square of the model.

Mainstream cultural participation also remained an important variable. Compared to low participation sections of the city, those with high cultural participation (top quartile) were nearly two and one-half times more likely to experience growth in their population. Overall, when entered last into the model, mainstream cultural participation increased the explained variance by about 30 percent.

When cultural participation and ethnic change are taken into consideration, the 1990 poverty rate was not a reliable predictor of population growth. Although areas with higher poverty had a smaller chance of experiencing population growth than low poverty areas, these differences were not statistically significant.

Overall, the model was reasonably successful at predicting which sections of the city grew during the 1990s. Of the areas that didn't grow, it predicted 64 percent correctly. The model predicted 70 percent of block groups that did grow correctly.

## Conclusion

The new 2000 census data only provides data on the size of the population and ethnicity and is limited in what it can tell us about social change in Philadelphia during the 1990s. Still, given its limits, it underlines some important changes that were underway during the decade.

Population growth was concentrated in narrow sections of the metropolitan area. Far out suburbs grew the fastest, but so did Center City. Within the city, the population of traditionally black sections of the city fell rapidly while adjacent sections of the city that were either historically diverse or became diverse grew most quickly.

The ethnic composition of the city also changed suddenly. As Black Philadelphia lost population, many neighborhoods that had been homogeneous white in previous years became diverse. By 2000, the proportion of residents living in diverse block groups had increased from 22 to 37 percent.

The ultimate meanings of these trends will have to await further analysis. However, these data suggest that diversity and culture will be an important part of the story of urban vitality in the coming years.



Figure 1—Population growth, 1990-2000, Metropolitan Philadelphia

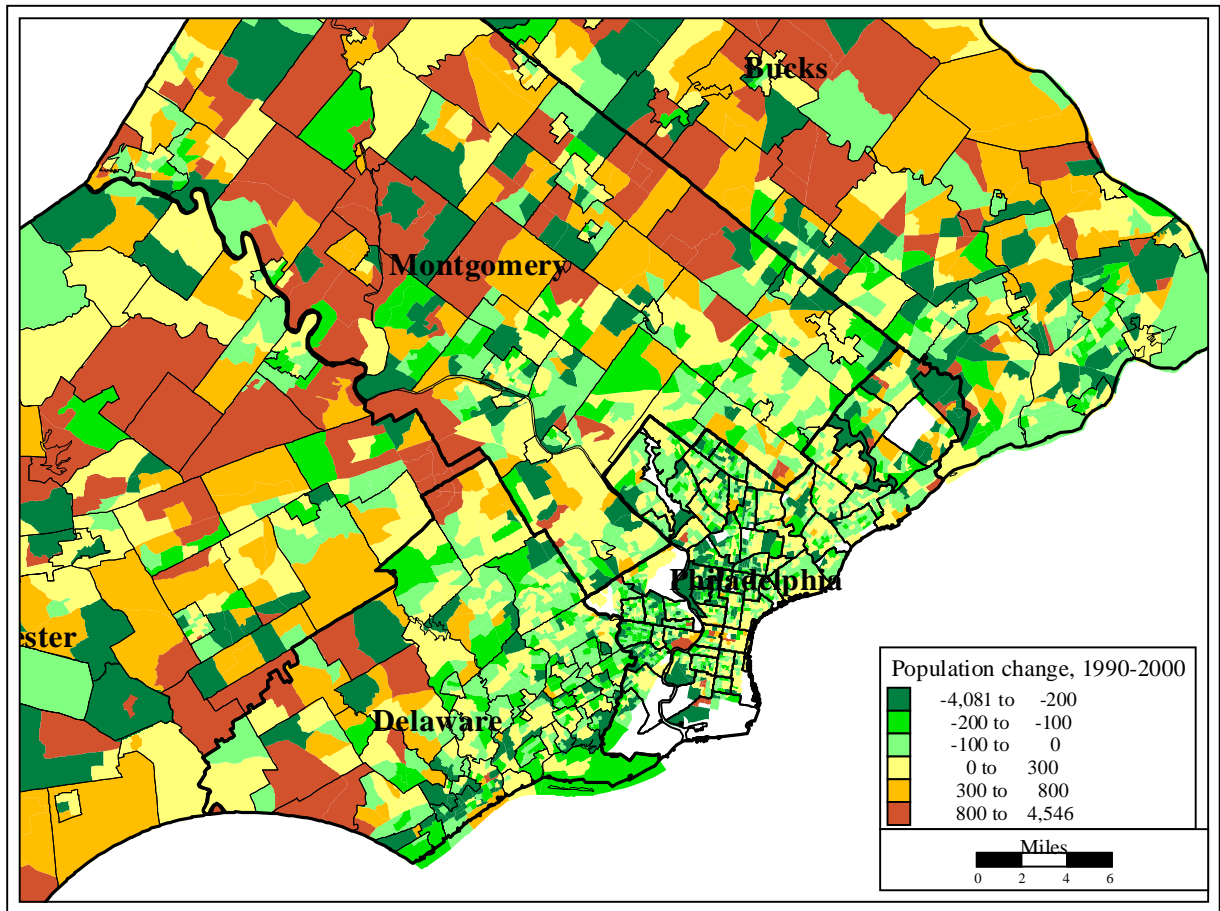


Figure 2. Ethnic composition, Philadelphia, 2000

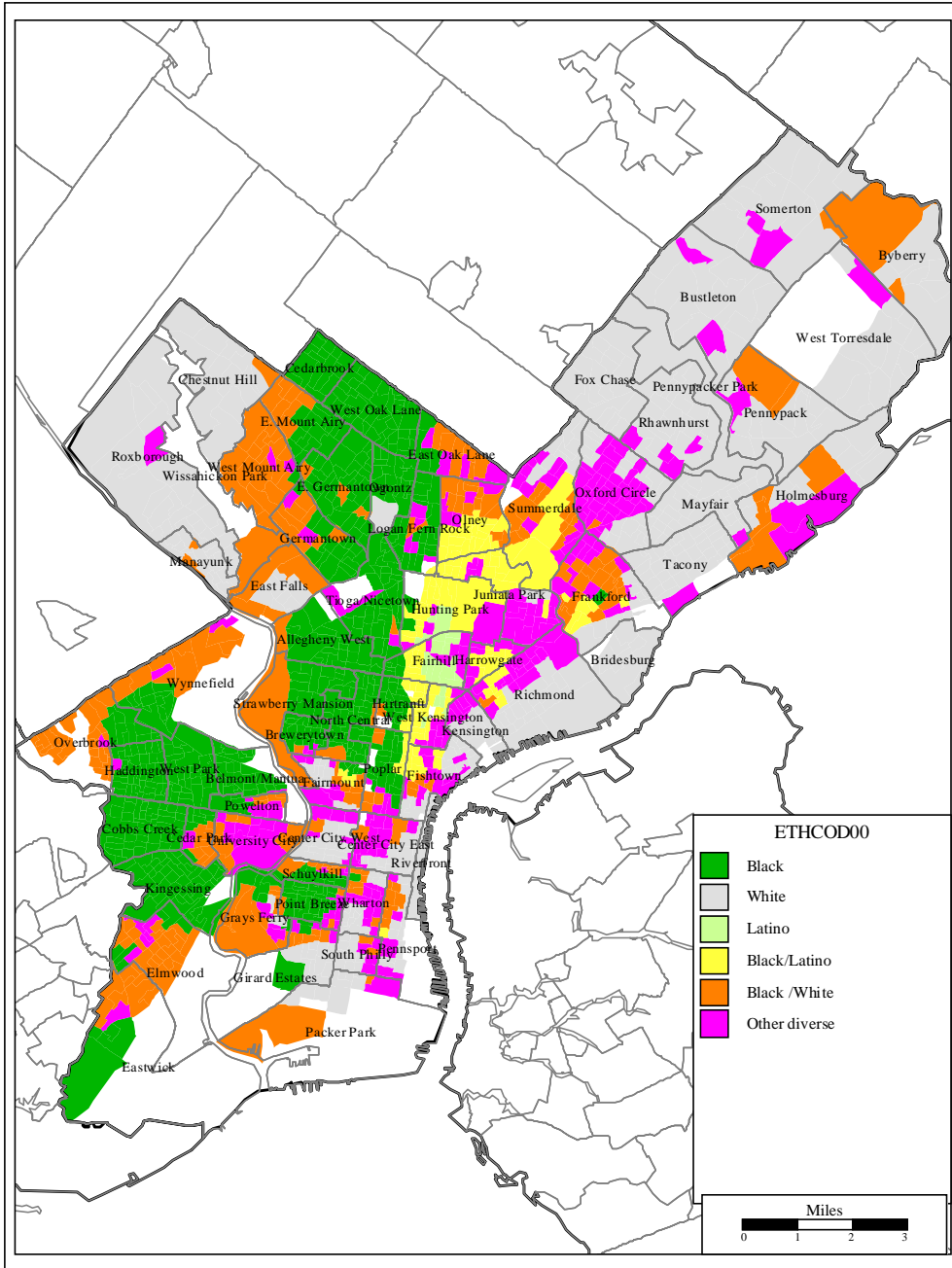


Figure 3. Changes in ethnic composition of block groups, 1990-2000, Philadelphia

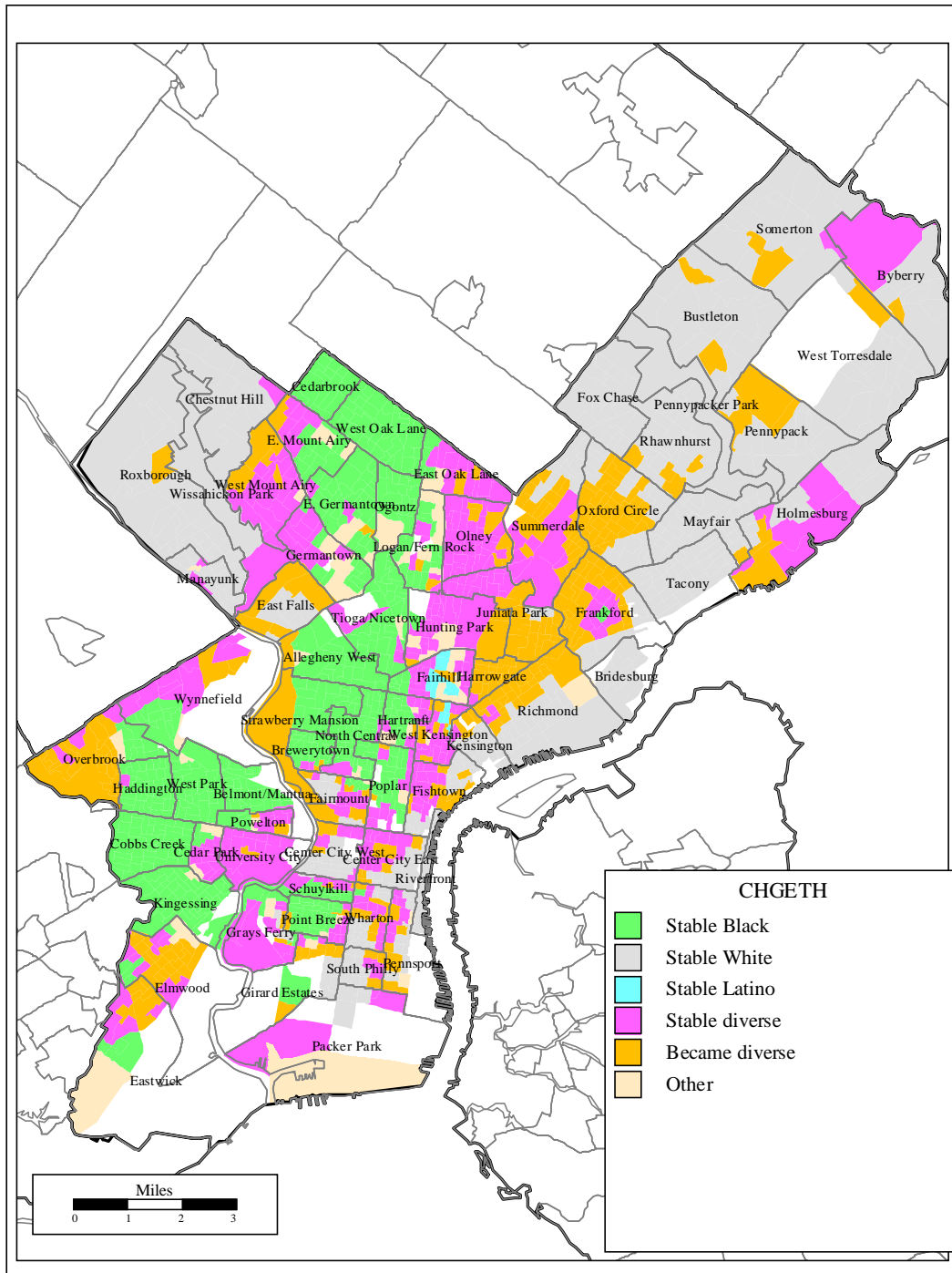


Figure 4. Population change, 1990-2000, Philadelphia

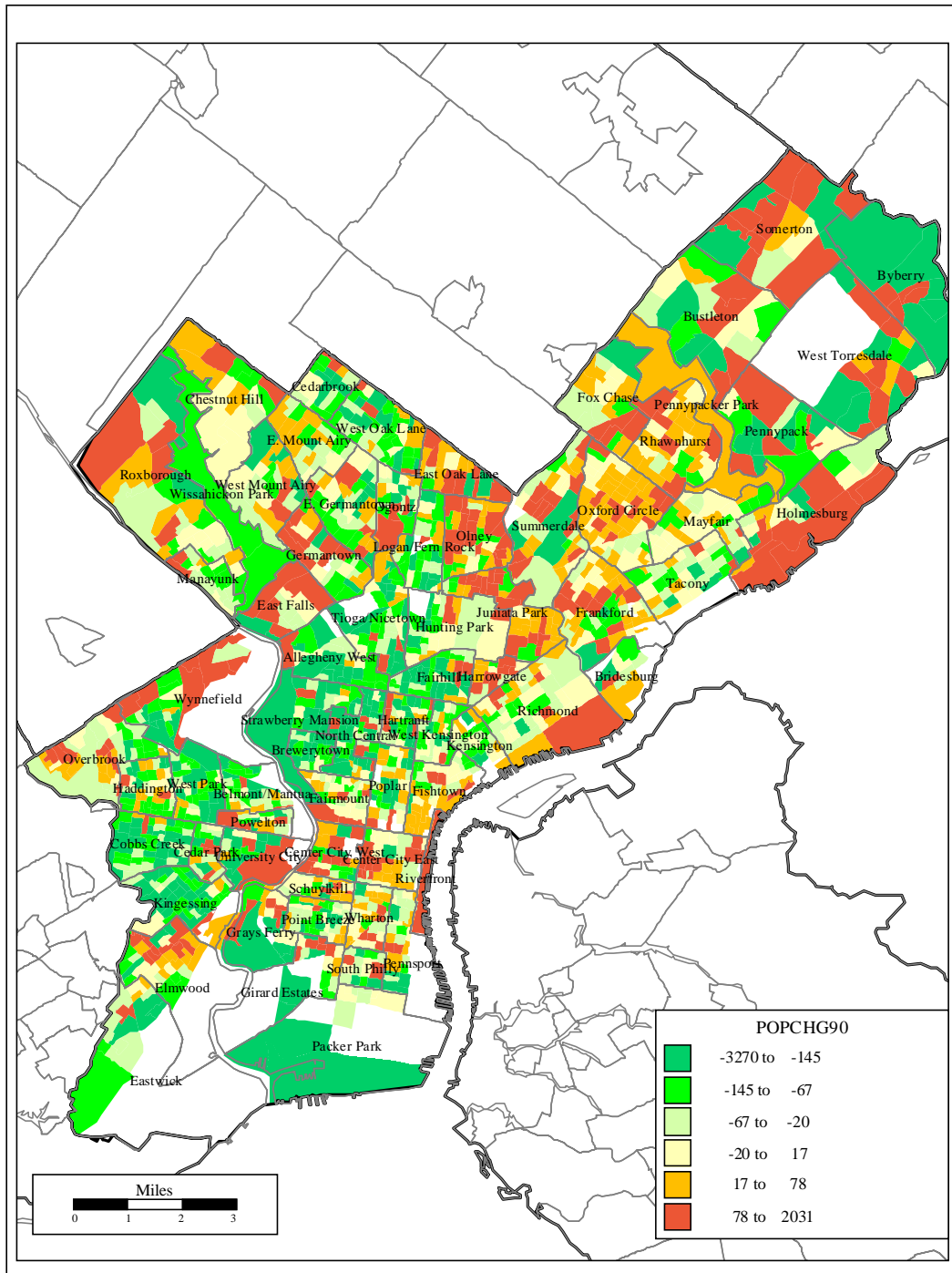


Table 1—Distribution of Philadelphia by race and ethnic composition of block group, 1990-2000

<b>Ethnic composition, 2000</b>	<b>Whites only</b>	<b>Blacks only</b>	<b>Asian only</b>	<b>Hispanic</b>	<b>Total multiracial population</b>	<b>Total population</b>
<b>Black</b>	1.7	67.6	4.2	6.0	22.0	30.9
<b>White</b>	61.6	2.5	20.1	11.6	19.7	30.6
<b>Latino</b>	0.5	0.3	0.2	10.0	2.2	1.0
<b>Latino, Black</b>	3.7	5.3	7.9	34.0	13.8	6.4
<b>Black, White</b>	13.6	15.0	24.9	10.2	18.9	14.6
<b>Other diverse, Asian 10%+</b>	8.0	3.7	34.3	6.7	10.2	7.2
<b>Other diverse</b>	10.9	5.7	8.5	21.5	13.2	9.2
<b>Total</b>	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

<b>ETHCOD90</b>	<b>White population-1990</b>	<b>Black population-1990</b>	<b>Asian population-1990</b>	<b>Hispanic population-1990</b>	<b>Total population-1990</b>
<b>Black</b>	1.7	77.9	6.0	6.0	32.5
<b>White</b>	79.9	2.0	33.6	14.6	44.7
<b>Latino</b>	0.3	0.2	0.0	12.8	0.8
<b>Latino, Black</b>	1.1	3.4	3.8	29.6	3.3
<b>Black, White</b>	8.1	11.9	19.7	5.1	9.8
<b>Other diverse, Asian 10%+</b>	4.1	1.4	29.8	7.5	3.8
<b>Other diverse</b>	4.9	3.3	7.0	24.4	5.2
<b>Total</b>	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 2—Logistic regression, Population growth 1990-2000, by Change in ethnic composition, 1990 poverty rate, and “mainstream” cultural participation index, Philadelphia

Variables in the Equation

	<b>B</b>	<b>S.E.</b>	<b>Wald</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Sig.</b>	<b>Exp(B)</b>
<i>Poverty rate 1990</i>			5.537	3	.136	
<b>2nd quartile</b>	.156	.148	1.119	1	.290	1.169
<b>3rd quartile</b>	-.049	.163	.091	1	.763	.952
<b>Highest quartile</b>	-.222	.174	1.638	1	.201	.801
<i>Change in ethnic composition</i>			125.182	5	.000	
<b>Stable white</b>	.851	.166	26.202	1	.000	2.343
<b>Stable Latino</b>	.385	.707	.297	1	.586	1.469
<b>Stable diverse</b>	1.182	.150	61.899	1	.000	3.260
<b>Became diverse</b>	1.756	.171	105.642	1	.000	5.790
<b>Other</b>	.807	.261	9.549	1	.002	2.242
<i>Mainstream cultural participation</i>			32.275	3	.000	
<b>2nd quartile</b>	.307	.148	4.300	1	.038	1.360
<b>3rd quartile</b>	.683	.155	19.531	1	.000	1.980
<b>Highest quartile</b>	.879	.167	27.589	1	.000	2.408
<b>Constant</b>	-1.282	.178	51.805	1	.000	.278

Model Summary

<b>Step</b>	<b>-2 Log likelihood</b>	<b>Cox &amp; Snell R Square</b>	<b>Nagelkerke R Square</b>
1	2172.976	.144	.192

Classification Table

	<b>Predicted</b>	<b>HIGROWTH</b>		<b>Percentage Correct</b>
<b>Observed</b>		.00	1.00	
<b>HIGROWTH</b>	.00	586	324	64.4
	1.00	258	599	69.9
<b>Overall Percentage</b>				67.1

a The cut value is .500