

The Dawning of Multicultural America

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In 1992, Horowitz Associates launched Surveys Unlimited, a division devoted to understanding the increasingly important ethnic markets in the U.S. Then, and now, our goal is to contextualize these markets in terms of their own social and cultural characteristics, as well as in terms of how each group impacts, and plays a role in, American society.

Toward that end, in 1999 we launched an innovative, cutting edge, multi-method syndicated study we named **State of Broadband Urban Markets**.[©]

From the start, the goal of the **State of Broadband Urban Markets**[©] study was to help our media industry clients fill the gaps in knowledge about urban, multicultural consumers. We understood that urban markets — characterized by shifting racial/ethnic, gender and cultural identities — would become more and more central to the future of the wired world for service providers, programmers and advertisers as the digital era dawned. The first **SOB Urban Markets**[©] was a benchmark study, providing a basis of comparison and point of reference for this dynamic marketplace.

In the first chapter of the first **SOB Urban Markets**[©] study, we wrote:

...People of color are a dominant force and source of culture in the urban markets, but not exclusively so. The urban market category is broader than the narrow “ethnic market” category suggests; at the same time, it incorporates and includes all “ethnic markets” as essential.

This **State of Broadband Urban Markets**[©] survey anticipates the enormous demographic shift already underway in the U.S. in which Americans of African, Asian and Latin American ancestry will begin to outnumber those of European origin. In addition, the survey anticipates the new race and ethnic classification system to be implemented by the U.S. Census 2000. **SOB Urban Markets**[©] uses the same race and ethnic categories that have been developed and tested by the Census Bureau, and that will be implemented in the upcoming Census 2000.¹

We recognized back then that our clients in the media industry would see new and important opportunities, and yet face some huge obstacles. Through this annual study, we sought to provide our clients the insights and the knowledge they would need to achieve success in these uncharted waters.

As we anticipated, the impact of Census 2000 on the business of programming, marketing and advertising to multicultural markets has been enormous. Multicultural consumers are

¹ *State of Broadband Urban Markets I*, Horowitz Associates, Inc./Surveys Unlimited, June, 1999
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now viewed as an important opportunity. Emerging multicultural businesses seek to stake their claim in arenas that, until recently, were often overlooked by their mainstream counterparts, and mainstream companies are focusing on markets they had not considered until now. Businesses in every sector are rethinking their strategies when it comes to identifying who their most valuable customers are, and contemplating the investments they need to make to reach those important customers.

Today, the study enjoys widespread loyalty and recognition by many of the major media players. The increased interest in our data on urban, multicultural, Latino, African-American, and Asian consumers — also evidenced by the great success of our annual Forum — is a testament to the media industry's commitment to the business of serving multicultural America.

As researchers, anthropologists and analysts we are trained to anticipate shifts, understand change and identify trends. We recognize the progress that has been made up to now in the urban, multicultural arena, and we wonder, "What is next?" As we move forward into the next five years of the **State of Broadband Urban Markets**[®] study series, what are the new challenges and opportunities on the horizon? In a business that is impacted on the one hand by new technological advances, and on the other by these shifting dynamics of American culture, how can we anticipate, once again, what the future will hold?

In order to assess the future, we turn to the urban markets paradigm we developed in 1999 at the launch of the **SOB Urban Markets**[®] study. In this paradigm, the urban, multicultural market is diverse, it is cosmopolitan and it is globally connected. The concept of a "melting pot" is rendered obsolete as people of all races, ethnicities, languages and ancestries live and thrive together, while still preserving important aspects of their heritage and culture. In this new, urban market, it is essential to get beyond ethnic segmentation and understand that it is the very *intermingling* of cultures and ethnicities that defines the urban sensibility. And the urban market is not just the inner city of New York or parts of Los Angeles — the urban market *is* America.

We can point to current cultural phenomena to begin to understand this urban, multicultural dynamic. We think of Jennifer Lopez as a Latina pop idol and movie star, yet we know that she was born and raised in the Bronx. She is, by birth, as American as apple pie. While African Americans have been at the cultural forefront with rap and hip-hop, Latino, Asian and white youth have embraced the genre, helping propel 50 Cent's album, "Get Rich or Die Tryin'" to the No. 1 selling spot in 2003², beating out Norah Jones in spite of her GRAMMY[®] for Album of the Year. On the Asian front, the popularity of Anime characters such as Pokeman and the influence of martial arts on major motion pictures, like the Matrix and Charlie's Angels movies, are just two markers of Asian influence on American culture. This dynamic makes it possible to comprehend the emergence of Latino rap, Spanish rock, and Asian hip-hop music as a cultural reflection of this very diversity, evidenced in growing proportions on the shelves of some of this country's largest music retailers.

Multiculturalism is also changing our standards of beauty, of sexuality. Today, black/African-American, Latino, Asian and multiracial celebrities Beyonce, Jada Pinkett Smith, Denzel Washington, Penelope Cruz, Selma Hayek, Benicio del Toro, Ricky Martin, Mark Anthony,

² Source: **50 Cent Top Seller In 2003**, The Associated Press, CBS News.com

Lucy Liu, Halle Berry, Lisa Bonet, Rosario Dawson, Alicia Keyes, Mariah Carey, The Rock, Vin Diesel, Lenny Kravitz, Benjamin Bratt, Derek Jeter, Dean Cain, and Tiger Woods grace the front covers of mainstream magazines almost as often as their white, non-Hispanic counterparts.

In short, it has been our assertion that what we understand as the “general market,” the “mainstream audience” or the “average consumer” is changing dramatically. In turn, we anticipate that, going forward, the media industry, and all related businesses, will have to re-adjust their thinking about the consumers that make up what are still defined by many as “niche,” “minority” and “emerging” markets.

Projections on American demographics continue to paint a portrait of the dramatic transition we have anticipated and tracked over five years. And *just last week*, the Census Bureau released the following data:

The nation’s Hispanic and Asian populations would triple over the next halfcentury and non-Hispanic whites would represent about one-half of the total population by 2050, according to interim population projections released today by the U.S. Census Bureau.

From 2000 to 2050, the non-Hispanic, white population... is projected to actually *lose* population... and would comprise just 50.1 percent of the total population in 2050, compared with 69.4 percent in 2000.

Nearly 67 million people of Hispanic origin (who may be of any race) would be added to the nation’s population between 2000 and 2050. Their numbers are projected to grow from 35.6 million to 102.6 million, an increase of 188 percent. Their share of the nation’s population would nearly double, from 12.6 percent to 24.4 percent.

The Asian population is projected to grow 213 percent, from 10.7 million to 33.4 million. Their share of the nation’s population would double, from 3.8 percent to 8 percent.

The black population is projected to rise from 35.8 million to 61.4 million in 2050, an increase of about 26 million or 71 percent. That would raise their share of the country’s population from 12.7 percent to 14.6 percent.³

While large-scale immigration to the U.S. — especially among the Asian and Latino populations — will continue to have a big impact on the growth of these groups, demographers actually predict a large percentage of the anticipated surge in populations will come from *second-generation* births.

³ Source: *Census Bureau Projects Tripling of Hispanic and Asian Populations in 50 Years; Non-Hispanic Whites May Drop To Half of Total Population*, Mike Bergman, Public Information Office, U.S. Census Bureau, March, 2004

A recent report from the Pew Hispanic Center and the Urban Institute titled **The Rise of the Second Generation: Changing Patterns in Hispanic Population Growth** gives us an inkling of what is to come for the Latino market:

As it continues to grow, the composition of the Hispanic population is undergoing a fundamental change: Births in the United States are outpacing immigration as the key source of growth. Over the next twenty years this will produce an important shift in the makeup of the Hispanic population with second-generation Latinos — the U.S.-born children of immigrants — emerging as the largest component of that population. Given the very substantial differences in earnings, education, fluency in English, and attitudes between foreign-born and native-born Latinos, this shift has profound implications for many realms of public policy, and indeed for anyone seeking to understand the nature of demographic change in the United States.⁴

So what does this mean for American culture in the 21st century? One way to think about it would be to look back at our own experiences. A look at our own family histories might reveal that the characteristics of second-generations of ethnic groups are quite different than those of the first, foreign-born generation. In fact, often, second and third generations have less and less in common with their “old country” ancestors than they do with their U.S. born contemporaries from other ethnic groups.

But the 21st century promises to be quite different than the last. During the 20th century, immigrant populations coming to America were encouraged to assimilate⁵ into the greater American culture. Ethnic diversity was not embraced, and in fact, our immigration policies were designed to maintain America’s greatly white, European ethnic makeup. Professor Maurice Waters in 1999 wrote:

In the 1920's, quotas designed to maintain our original ethnic and racial immigration origins became the basis of our new laws. And while the quota concept was finally abolished in the mid 1960's, the numbers admitted to this country continued to favor white Europeans and their descendants.⁶

In spite of those quotas, America as we know it today was influenced by the cultures and ethnicities that crossed our borders in the past century. Aspects of our cultures of origin stayed with us, and a process much more akin to acculturation⁷ occurred.

Developments in technology played a key role in this process. Transportation back and forth to our countries of origin became easier, and developments in media and communications made it possible for us to keep connected with our roots. Also, ethnicity has become central

⁴ *The Rise of the Second Generation: Changing Patterns in Hispanic Population Growth*, Roberto Suro (Pew Hispanic Center) and Jeffrey Passel (Urban Institute), October 14, 2003

⁵ **assimilation** - when one ethnic group absorbs another, so that the cultural traits of the assimilated group become indistinguishable. (Source: Definition of Anthropological Terms, Oregon State University Website)

⁶ Source: *America's Immigration History and its Current Law*, Professor Maurice Waters, Secretary's Open Forum, U.S. Department of State, May 25, 1999

⁷ **acculturation** - culture change resulting from contact between cultures. A process of external culture change. (Source: Definition of Anthropological Terms, Oregon State University Website)

to politics and policy-making as attitudes towards “foreigners” and people who were “different” became more inclusive. Today, we can recognize traces of the immigrant history of America in the foods we eat, words we have adopted into our language, our beliefs and values, our art and our literature — in fact, on virtually everything we think of as quintessentially “American.” Other characteristics of our cultures of origin may have faded from prominence in our daily lives, yet many of us still hold them close to our hearts as the bonds we share with our ancestors.

The 21st century promises more enormous change to come. The demographic shifts we have identified will impact the way people perceive themselves and others, the way we coexist in American society, even how we define “American.” At the dawn of the digital era we can already feel the impact of 21st century technology on the way people live and how they behave. The media industry is charged with an important responsibility since the messages our industry crafts and the technology we distribute to deliver those messages will most certainly impact the evolution of American culture in this new century.

New media and new markets lead us to the conclusion that the 21st century will be defined by yet another process: one that we term “cultural hybridity.” To us, cultural hybridity means the sharing and intermingling of one culture with another, a phenomenon we already see in urban, multicultural markets. It goes beyond acculturation, because cultural hybridity does not imply that any one culture is changed, but rather that a new, different and entirely unique culture is created.

The hybridity that is so palpable in our popular, urban culture is only the beginning. As we reflect on all the changes on the horizon, it is easy to foresee an America in which diversity, multiculturalism and multi-ethnicity is the norm, not the exception.

Will you be ready for this new, multi-colored, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-lingual general market?