

# Green Bay's Diversity Revolution

## *From 'Titletown' to 'All-America City'*

by Michael Kuehl

Perhaps one can forgive Vernon Taylor for indulging in a bit of self-aggrandizement. After all, as the *Green Bay Press-Gazette's* newest local "diversity" columnist, he's now a recognizable face, a "household name," a minor celebrity in this fabled National Football League city — a key player in local affairs, his opinions on race and culture and politics read or perused by tens of thousands of people.

A portly, middle-aged black man with a short "Afro" and a scraggly mustache, he debuted in May of 1999 with a column entitled, predictably, "Green Bay enriched by growing diversity." As one of the first blacks to live and work in Green Bay (Packers excepted) he portrayed himself as a sort of historic figure, a harbinger of demographic transformation, a symbol of "progress" and "diversity" and "multiculturalism."

Not surprisingly, his coming to "Titletown" was a result of "affirmative action."

*So why did I come to Green Bay? I came to Green Bay, as so many of us as people of color do, for opportunity. ... There was a position open, resulting from the transfer of a friend, at GMAC. Affirmative action was alive and well in the early 1970s (implying, falsely, that it is dead or dying today —M.K.) So it was recommended that I be hired.*

He arrived from Texas on October 27, 1974 with a trunk, suitcase, and \$28 and, as he puts it, "the rest is

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history." But, alas, the Green Bay of old was as "white" as Oslo or Dublin or Helsinki and, moreover, benighted and philistine; apart from the Packers — the legend of Curly Lambeau, Don Hutson, Vince Lombardi, Bart Starr, the "Ice Bowl," the first Superbowl champions, etc. — a place indistinguishable, racially and culturally, from such "cowtowns" as Fargo, Sioux Falls, Duluth and Cedar Rapids. He repines:

*To my surprise I discovered that Green Bay was a rural, blue-collar community that was 99.75 percent white. Not knowing, most people would assume that a professional sports city like Green Bay would be more urban, cosmopolitan and racially diverse. There was very little that I could identify with. The Oneida Tribe of Indians was the only ethnic group of major proportions.<sup>1</sup>*

Twenty-five years later, Green Bay isn't dramatically more "cosmopolitan." In some ways it is more urban if by "urban" one means crime, gangs, drugs, poverty, overcrowded jails, traffic congestion, etc. But it is far more "racially diverse." "As we enter into 200," writes Taylor, "thousands have followed since my arrival in 1974." How many thousands? How much diversity?

First, before answering that question, it should be emphasized that, particularly in regard to "Hispanics," the overwhelming proportion of non-whites in Green Bay have come after 1990. As late as 1990 the population of Green Bay and Brown County was still approximately 95

**N**ot only on our southern borders and in our coastal cities, but America's heartland is also experiencing significant demographic change.

percent white. Just nine years ago almost 9,500 non-whites lived in Brown County, and nearly 40 percent of these were American Indians: 3,869 “Indian, Eskimo, Aleut”; 2,522 “Asian, Pacific Islander”; 570 “Other”; 1,012 “Black”; and 1,525 “Hispanic”. And in the city of Green Bay, there were 4,986 non-whites and 1,063 Hispanics.<sup>2</sup> And even more significantly, most who came after 1990 have come since 1995.

### Recent Immigration

On Christmas Eve, 1996, in a paean to immigration that exhorted the people of Green Bay to embrace “diversity” and multiracialism, the *Press-Gazette* reported that

*In this area, 2,112 legal immigrants — mostly Asians — have come to Brown, Door, Kewaunee, Oconto and Shawano counties the past ten years. In addition, 3,000 to 4,000 Hispanics — including an estimated 1,000 illegal immigrants — have moved into the region.*<sup>3</sup>

The editorial doesn’t mention the source or year of such estimates. Unless outdated by several years, however, the numbers they cited were a gross underestimation. By the end of December, 1996 the population of Hmong and Lao in Brown County alone far exceeded 2,112 — to say nothing of the entire region of “Northeastern Wisconsin.” And so, too, with Hispanics.

According to a pamphlet distributed by United Way of Brown County,<sup>4</sup> “Brown County’s total Southeast Asian population is estimated around 4,200. Of this total, approximately 86 percent are Hmong, 13 percent are Laotian, and one percent Vietnamese.” Did the number of Asians in Brown County more than double from 1996 to 1997? And if so, what is the current Asian population?

And now, less than three years later, the Hispanic population (virtually all Mestizos and Indians from Mexico and other Central American countries) may have reached 15,000, including thousands of illegal immigrants. “At the moment,” writes Tom Perry in a pro-immigration editorial, “no one knows for certain just how many people with ties to Central and South America live in Green Bay. ...Estimates range from 6,000 to 10,000 people. The 2000 census should bring the number into sharper focus.”

Two years ago a TV anchorman said there were 10,000 Hispanics in Green Bay, and that their numbers

were expected to double in 4-5 years. If accurate, that would mean 20,000 Hispanics in Green Bay by 2002 or 2003. But, incredibly, this assessment might have been an underestimation. A year later (give or take a few months) assuming the number 10,000 was correct for 1998, Brown County might have experienced a 50 percent increase in its Latino population. Writes Jim Kneiszel in the *Green Bay Press-Gazette*:

*Because census data is old and many new Hispanic residents are difficult to track, the ethnic populations in Green Bay are an official mystery. But anecdotal evidence points to dynamic Hispanic growth and smaller gains in Asian growth. ...[T]he department of refugee migration and Hispanic services for the Archdiocese of Green Bay estimates there are about 5,000 Asian residents in the area.*<sup>6</sup>

This is remarkable, given that as late as 1990 (according to the census) the Hispanic population of Green Bay was 1,063, and that of Brown County 1,525. Thus, in less than a decade, the Latino population of Green Bay has increased from just over 1,000 in 1990 to perhaps as many as 10,000 in 1999 — and in Brown County, from just over 1500 to perhaps as many as 15,000. And, apparently, most have come after 1995. At this rate, the Hispanic population might exceed 20,000 in four or five years. And how many, one must ask, by 2010 and 2020 and beyond? And how many Asians? And how many blacks, including African and Caribbean immigrants? — impelled to migrate to a “racially diverse” Green Bay?

Demographically, in envisioning the future, perhaps the most illuminating and portentous datum is the number of nonwhite students in Green Bay’s public schools. “In Green Bay,” wrote the editors of the *Press-Gazette* in 1996, “white enrollment in the public schools was 82.8 percent last year compared to 92.3 percent in 1985. Hispanic, black, Asian and American Indian student populations all increased.”<sup>7</sup> Put inversely, minority enrollment in Green Bay’s public schools more than doubled in ten years, from 7.7 percent nonwhite in 1985 to 17.2 percent nonwhite in 1995.

Since Hispanics are by far the largest minority group in Brown County, and since many of those now in Green Bay arrived after 1995, the current minority enrollment is surely much larger than 17.2 percent. And, of course,

roughly half of the Asian and Latino students cannot speak English.

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*19,500 public school students can't speak English well enough to succeed in the classroom. Most are part of an influx of Asian and Hispanic immigration and migration that has increased the percentage of nonwhite students to 21 percent this year from 8 percent in 1986. Last year, 1,711 students speaking 24 non-English languages were enrolled.<sup>8</sup>*

Thus, minority enrollment in Green Bay's public schools almost tripled in thirteen years. And now, over a year later, the number is surely closer to 25 percent — if not even higher. By 1998, minority students were the majority at five Green Bay elementary schools. At Tank Elementary School white children were less than 28 percent of the student body. (Such statistics are all the more dramatic when we consider that most Hispanics seem to be young males in their late teens and twenties rather than family-members with children.)

In 20, perhaps even 10, years — if Wisconsin's low-wage economy continues to boom and national levels of immigration remain constant or increase substantially — perhaps 40-50 percent of the children enrolled in Green Bay's public schools will be nonwhite. As European-derived Americans age and die and have far fewer

children than nonwhites, these "children of color" will be the future of Green Bay.

Currently, the metropolitan area of Brown County (Green Bay, De Pere, the suburbs) has a population of approximately 200,000. The city is roughly 97,000-98,000 — a figure that has remained more or less constant for years since, without annexation, the city cannot expand dramatically in area or population. Thus, 30 or 40 years into the next millennium, one can imagine Green Bay, only yesterday 99.75 percent white," as a "minority-majority" city. And not primarily because of the migration of Vernon Taylor and his fellow African-Americans nor, even less so, because of large increases in the Native American population, but because of massive Third World immigration.

On C-Span 2, April 24, 1999, at a *Los Angeles Times* "Festival of Books" symposium on *Americanos* (a "coffee table" book that celebrates Hispanic life in the United States), one David Carrasco joked about Anglos viewing Mexicans as "border people" huddled at the Mexican border. There was laughter in the audience and then came the punch line (I paraphrase): "As someone has said earlier, the Mexican border has now moved all the way up to Northern Wisconsin." I assume he was referring primarily to Green Bay.

### From 'Titletown' to 'All-America City'

"Green Bay, a three-time winner of the Superbowl, is now a two-time winner of the All-America City Award," crowed the editors of the *Green Bay Press-Gazette*.<sup>9</sup> In June of 1999, at the Marriot Hotel in downtown Philadelphia, Greater Green Bay was one of ten winners, the eighth city to be so awarded.

Green Bay first won the All-America City designation in 1964 because of its community-based attack on air and water pollution. But 35 years later the criteria are different:

*The All-America City Award is presented by the civic league and Allstate Insurance Company. It recognizes grassroots efforts to solve community problems and is especially focused on youth and diversity ... Green Bay highlighted three programs in its application and presentation. They were Coalition to Promote Respect, Partners in Education, and Urban Partnership. [Emphasis added]<sup>10</sup>*

The above are all programs relating, one should emphasize, to problems of race and immigration: to ending “racism” (i.e. “white racism”) and “discrimination” (only against minorities), “promoting cultural diversity,” “assisting minority-owned businesses,” and improving the educational performance of minorities. (In a *Sports Illustrated* article on the firing of Ray Rhodes, the first black head coach in Packer history, columnist Rick Reilly described “Coalition to Promote Respect” as a “Green Bay-area race-issues watchdog.”) Thus, Green Bay won the award for its efforts to “solve” problems that, just 10-15 years ago, did not even exist. Ironically, Green Bay had to experience the problems of multiracialism and high levels of Third World immigration — far more crime than would be the case except for mass immigration; Hispanic, Asian and multiracial gangs with ties to Milwaukee, Chicago, California and Mexico; increased poverty; deteriorating neighborhoods; overcrowded jails and schools; bilingualism; racial strife; etc. — before it could be named “All-America City.” In many ways, the vitiation of the “quality of life” was a prerequisite for nomination and victory. And now, for two years, it can use the award to “promote the city,” encourage tourism, attract more businesses, and welcome more immigrants and “newcomers.”

According to Clinton Smith, an “African-American business owner,” “a graduate of Urban Hope and a representative of the Urban Partnership”:

*Diversity was the key to winning the award. The delegation was led to the podium for its presentation on Saturday by the Oneida Tribe of Indians singers and dancers, and more than half of the delegation members were minorities.*<sup>11</sup>

Appreciate the revelation: Insufficient racial “diversity” is now “un-American.” •

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Vernon Taylor, “Green Bay enriched by growing diversity,” *Green Bay Press-Gazette*, May 20, 1999, p.A-15.

<sup>2</sup> *Wisconsin Blue Book 1997-1998*, p.714, p.769.

<sup>3</sup> *Green Bay Press-Gazette*, December 24, 1996, p.A-7.

<sup>4</sup> United Way of Brown County, “Practitioner’s Workshop Series to increase your skills and capacities for working with the Hmong & Lao communities,” January 1999; quoting in the pamphlet figures from the State of Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, September 30, 1997.

<sup>5</sup> Tom Perry, “Mexican immigrants chase ‘El Sueno’ in Green Bay,” *Green Bay Press-Gazette*, May 4, 1999, p.B-1.

<sup>6</sup> Jim Kneiszel, “Survival of the fittest,” *Green Bay Press-Gazette*, July 4, 1999, p.E-1.

<sup>7</sup> “Racial equality can’t take a back seat,” *Green Bay Press-Gazette*, July 7, 1996, p.A-7.

<sup>8</sup> “We must help non-English-speaking students,” *Green Bay Press-Gazette*, March 8, 1999, p.A-5.

<sup>9</sup> “All-America City must not rest,” *Green Bay Press-Gazette*, June 29, 1999, p.A-7.

<sup>10</sup> Steven Bruss, “An All-America City: Green Bay one of ten communities honored for efforts,” *Green Bay Press-Gazette*, June 27, 1999, pp. A-1, A-2.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p.A-2.