

# Another Way to See 2050

## *U.S. becomes a majority-minority nation*

Book Review by Leon Bouvier

The Color of Our Future

by Farai Chideya

New York: William Morrow and Co.

272 pages, \$23.00

To regular readers of *The Social Contract*, I suspect that the title of this new book will prove intriguing. Much has been said and written about the changing racial composition of the United States in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and perhaps this is yet another analysis of these projections. Again, to regular readers of this journal, the author's name may be unfamiliar.

Let's set matters straight. While this book deals with the racial changes that are already transpiring in the nation, it is not a demographic treatise. Rather, it is an examination of the young people of America and how they are reacting to the massive changes going on in their own world.

As to the author, she is an African-American whose father is Zimbabwean and mother is American Black. Ms. Chideya is an *ABC News* correspondent and is the author of *Don't Believe the Hype: Fighting Cultural Misinformation About African Americans*. If the reader is looking for a demographic analysis, this is not the book you are looking for. If the reader is looking for a well-written "journalistic" publication dealing with the changing racial composition of the nation, then he or she may find this book, both informative and challenging.

The author begins by summarizing the now familiar Census Bureau projections for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Soon after the millennium, the United States will become a "majority-minority" nation — i.e. no racial group will be in the majority. That is already the case in California, although Chideya is of the opinion that it has not as yet taken place there. Then the author develops an

interesting approach to this issue. She concentrates on young Americans (i.e. high school and college age) for the simple reason that this group is already "majority-minority." As she states very succinctly:

*This generation — not just white but black, Latino, Asian, and Native America; not just native-born but immigrant — is both the inheritor and the architect of American culture. Today's young adults are paying the price for being different, growing up in an era where the diversity they represent is feared. We can only hope that they will chart a better course for race relations than Americans have in the past, that they will help lead us away from our centuries-long battles. If they do forge a new American unity, it will be because they've learned to work within the multiethnic nation we inhabit, rather than denying or decrying its very existence. Will they learn to work together? Will they yield to or rebel against the wishes of the generations before them? And how will their visions of American 'life reshape our culture? No one can answer these questions but this generation itself. (p.33)*

The author then proceeds to visit numerous areas throughout the country and interviews, sometimes in depth, representatives of the various racial groups of that age. She begins by discussing the problems the Census Bureau is having defining race, and especially multi-race individuals; or as she puts it: "others," citing golfer Tiger Woods and his "Cablinasian" label.

Then she heads south to interview an interracial couple in Thomasville, Georgia. She crosses the country to discuss 'hip-hop' and 'rap' music and the culture it is defining. She spends time on a Crow Indian reservation in Wyoming. She, with assistance from the Census Bureau, locates a city that almost exactly reflects the racial composition of the nation: Aurora, Illinois (and later) Colorado Springs, Colorado. She visits Oakland, California where she examines the school system and

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spends considerable time with high school students.

In Chapter 8, the end of affirmative action is discussed, again through the eyes of high school and college students. Both perspectives, pro and con, are presented.

*Soon California will have no racial majority (sic). The battle over affirmative action, over what helps and hurts racial equality, is no dry academic matter here [in California].* (p.179)

Her next trip is to El Paso where she gets first-hand information on the legal as well as illegal movements of people across the border. Again, she interviews young people and gets diverse views of the immigration issue — some opinions are quite surprising.

In her last chapters the author looks at programs that have helped erase racial animosities, mostly in high schools in various parts of the country. Finally she speculates on the future and makes a few "predictions" of her own. Most important:

*As Americans continue to intermarry, the size and influence of the multiracial community will grow. Over time, the decisions they make about how to classify themselves will reshape the racial landscape.* (p.253)

In the final chapter, Chideya discusses ten ways to deal with diversity. All are worthy of further analysis by anyone interested in this dramatic chance that will soon occur in the United States. Her last paragraph is worth repeating here:

*The changes the next millennium brings will at the very least surpass and quite possibly shatter our current understanding of race, ethnicity, culture, and community. The real test of our strength will be how willing we are to go beyond the narrowness of our expectations, seek knowledge about the lives of those around us — and move forward with eagerness, not fear.* (p.261)

As a descriptive, journalistic approach to this great challenge facing our nation in the new century, one

can hardly find fault with it. It is a fascinating way to look at the issue — interviewing young Americans of all races. The author clearly has a point of view and, as a fellow liberal, I share many of these — especially on affirmative action. However, the book is weak on its demographic side. It states the Census Bureau projections but never explains how we got that way. The 1965 immigration legislation that caused this incredible shift in racial proportions is never mentioned. For the reader unfamiliar with the historic precedents, it could lead to the obvious question: "How in the world did this ever happen?" Unfortunately, the author never addresses that question. Nor does she comment on the level of immigration that has contribute so heavily to this shift. An introductory chapter in which to summarize these matters would have been most useful and made a well-written book that much more authoritative.

Other minor distractions are to be noted, but some of these are better attributed the editor than to the author. Statements are repeated on occasion. The quotes from the young adults become a little tiresome after a while. The teen-age use of the word "like" is repeated over and over again, like! [Some may chalk this up to the age of this reviewer and his unwillingness to accept remodelings of the English language.] Finally, a real index would have been useful.

All in all, this is a book worth reading if only to get a better idea of what our young adults are thinking about as we approach the year 2000 and get ready to live in a much more heterogenous society.