



**Illinois Wesleyan University**  
**Digital Commons @ IWU**

---

John Wesley Powell Student Research  
Conference

2011, 22nd Annual JWP Conference

---

Apr 9th, 9:00 AM - 10:00 AM

## **Multiculturalsim and Metamorphoses: How Changing Racial Demographics in the United States are Influencing Museums in the 21st Century**

Catherine Bayles  
*Illinois Wesleyan University*

Ana Floriani, Faculty Advisor  
*Illinois Wesleyan University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/jwprc>



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

---

Bayles, Catherine and Floriani, Faculty Advisor, Ana, "Multiculturalsim and Metamorphoses: How Changing Racial Demographics in the United States are Influencing Museums in the 21st Century" (2011). *John Wesley Powell Student Research Conference*. 6. <https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/jwprc/2011/ESposters/6>

This Event is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by Digital Commons @ IWU with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this material in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/ or on the work itself. This material has been accepted for inclusion by faculty at Illinois Wesleyan University. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@iwu.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@iwu.edu).

©Copyright is owned by the author of this document.



# Multiculturalism and Metamorphoses: How Changing Racial Demographics in the United States are Influencing Museums in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

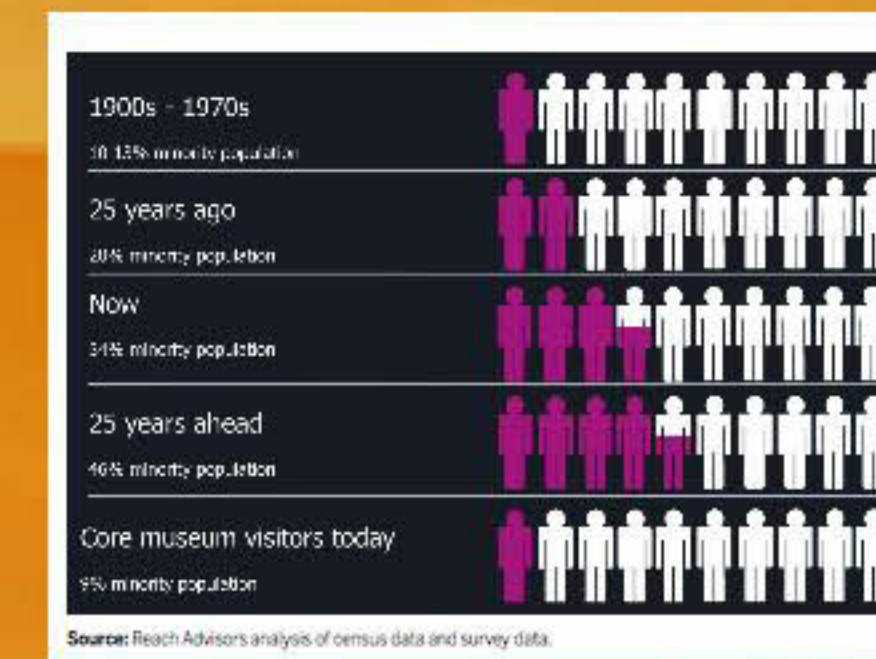


Chart (left) shows the shifting racial demographics in the United States. In 2008, only 9% of museum goers were minorities (Farrell, Medvedeva, 2010).

## Abstract

This poster presentation reviews literature related to museums and their ability to cope with the shifting demographics of our nation. It aspires to facilitate discussion pertaining to topics significant to educators as well as the general public. Through the analysis and review of current research articles on the topic of multiculturalism and museums, it has been determined that the changing racial makeup of our country is affecting the museum world greatly. Upon reflection of the pieces of literature read, it has been revealed that the altering demographics and the majority-minority shift in populace has led museums to focus on multicultural education, race and ethnic relations, and programs targeting minority populations. The research highlights the demographic move as a whole, how these transformations are affecting cultural institutions such as museums, and what solutions individual museums are incorporating in their practices to solve the quandary. A universal feeling expressed throughout the poster presentation is the museum world's need to see museums as living breathing advocates of cultural pleurisy. It is thought that they should be strongholds for communities where all people can come to be represented.

## Methodology

In the identification of research to support this inquiry, many types of sources were explored and utilized. Scholarly sources such as publications from national museum organizations like the American Association of Museum, Center for the Future of Museums, and Smithsonian Institute provided the background knowledge necessary to begin an in-depth analysis. Other literature, such as professional and scholarly journal articles, were investigated and selected based on their relevance to the subject of racial demographic change, museums, and multiculturalism in the recent past and coming future. Most importantly, museum teacher-research, rather than just academic and scholarly research, was sought out in an attempt to bring many perspectives to the analysis.

## Questions

How are the changing racial demographics of the United States affecting museums in the twenty first century?

## Subquestions

- In what ways are museum exhibits, program curricula, and educational tools shifting to encompass a multicultural approach to learning?
- How can (and how have) museums use(d) new information about our country's increasing diversity to their advantage?
- How can (and how have) museums transform(ed) into classrooms and enable(d) the teaching of race/ethnic relations and multicultural values?

	% of visitors to art museums	% of U.S. population
By race/ethnicity		
Hispanic	8.6%	13.5%
Non-Hispanic White	78.9%	68.7%
African American	5.9%	11.4%
Other	6.6%	6.4%

Figure 3b. Percentage\* of U.S. adult population visiting art museums/galleries

	1992	2002	2008
All	26.7%	26.5%	22.7%
By race/ethnicity			
Hispanic	17.5%	16.1%	14.5%
Non-Hispanic White	28.6%	29.5%	26.0%
African American	19.3%	14.8%	12.0%
Other	28.4%	32.7%	23.4%

\*Based on data from the Current Population Survey, which varies slightly from the American Community Survey data cited elsewhere in this report. Source: NCA, 2008 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts.



An explainer with a visitor at "The Search for Life Beyond Earth," New York Hall of Science. Photo by David Lipschultz. Courtesy of the New York Hall of Science.

The figure above shows the percentage of U.S adult populations that visit museums/galleries. An explainer (student helper/interpreter) engages a child in the above photo taken at the New York Hall of Science. These explainers help guide individuals through exhibits by giving them individual attention.

Catherine Bayles and Ana Floriani\*  
Educational Studies Department



Visitors at the Monterey Aquarium (pictured above) enjoy an exhibit. The museum worked diligently to market to Latino populations by identifying a need for family programming in the community. Through these efforts they increased Latino attendance from 8% to 24% in less than six years (Farrell, Medvedeva, 2010).

## Acknowledgements:

McLean County Museum of History, Bloomington, IL  
KidsWork Children's Museum, Frankfort, IL



## Primary Findings

The inquiry is structured thematically in a continuum or storyboard fashion. Firstly, changing racial demographics in the United States are looked at as a whole. These statistics show the transformation through which our country is going. Close attention is paid to how individual museums have been integrating multicultural notions, racial and ethnic studies, and diversity perspectives in the field. Overall, a shift in the thought process surrounding multiculturalism is having a profound affect on museum practices now and will continue to influence the field in the future.



Vietnamese Americans at the Children's Discovery Museum of San Jose, California. Courtesy of the Children's Discovery Museum.

## Conclusions

What will the majority minority shift mean for museums? It means that museums will have to continue doing what they have been doing for centuries – adjusting to their surroundings and modifying themselves to meet the needs of their communities. Museums that want to draw in a diverse populace will have to continue rethinking what diversity means for the audiences they are attempting to educate. What is certain is that our country is undergoing a monumental shift both racially and ideologically. What diversity means now may not be what diversity means in the future. That being said, research shows that individual museums are beginning to think outside the box and broaden their understanding of what the museum world can give to communities near and far. Relationships between communities and institutions will need to continue to grow in order for museums to accurately represent their populations. Listening to the youth and compiling focus groups aimed at getting more nuanced information about racial changes are two solutions being utilized by many museums. Overall, making better use of existing data, continuing to collect more data about museum visitors, sharing this knowledge, and partnering with other similar educational institutions will help further the museum cause. By broadening our sense of identity we can begin to see museums as catalyst for social change as well as educators for a more collaborative future.



The Nassau County Museum of Art uses art to enhance literacy among immigrants. Courtesy of the Nassau County Museum of Art.

The Nassau County Museum of Art uses language programming among immigrants to get people into the museums and tackle the problem of illiteracy in the area (Farrell, Medvedeva, 2010).

## References

- B. J. (2010, November 10). Diversity: have we gone far enough? [Web blog post]. Retrieved from Museum History: <http://cgmuseumhistory.wordpress.com>
- Brown, C. K. (n.d.). The Museum's Role in a Multicultural Society: Patterns in Practice. *Sociology from the Journal of Museum Education*, 3-8.
- Dorling, S. K. (n.d.). Cultural Diversity: The Museum as Resource. Retrieved January 31, 2011, from <http://www.learningdesign.com/portfolio/museum/museum-school.html>
- Farrell, B., Ph.D. Medvedeva (2010). Demographic Transformation and the Future of Museums [Article]. Retrieved from AAM Center for the Future of Museums website: <http://www.futureofmuseums.org/reading/publications/>
- Jovani, M., & Olivera, G. (2010, July). Intercultural dialogue in the museum context. *US-China Education Review*, 7(7), 30-42.
- King, E. W. (1992, April). Using Museums for More Effective Teaching of Ethnic Relations. *Teaching Sociology*, 20(2), 114-120.
- Morris, E. (2008). *Museums & Society 2004: Trends and Potential Futures*. Retrieved from Center for the Future of Museums website: <http://www.futureofmuseums.org/reading/publications/>
- Nederveen Pieterse, J. (1997). Multiculturalism and Museums: Discourse about Others in the Age of Globalization. *Theory Culture & Society*, 14(1/2).
- Naves, C. M. (2007, July). 2010 Vision: Anticipating the Needs and Expectations of Museum Visitors of the Future. *Smithsonian Institution*.
- Vallance, E. (2004, Summer). Museum Education as Curriculum: Four Models, Leading to a Fifth. *Studies in Art Education*, 45(4), 343-358.