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Time

White Majority, White Minority

Joan Indiana Rigdon, 06.04.09, 6:50 PM ET

It's official. We're not in Kansas anymore. At least the people of Finney County, Kan., aren't. According to the U.S. Census bureau, Finney, just up the road from Wyatt Earp's old stomping grounds of Dodge City, has morphed over the last two years, from a mostly white population to "majority-minority."

Which means that if you are a white Finneyan, you now know what it feels like to be a minority.

I can tell you: It's not fun.

In fact, if you're mixed-race like me, this demographic shift is starting to feel like the Seussian morality tale of the Star-Bellied Sneetches.

Consider this: When it comes to race, I'm a "Not Quite." By dint of a Filipina grandmother and Spanish-blooded grandfather, I have dark hair and olive skin on a Scot-Irish and Dutch frame. All my life, I've been a minority of an undefined sort; not quite white, but not quite Asian or Hispanic either. Instead, I'm one of those people who inspired the "Other" box.

Now, the other Others and I, along with the official minorities, are fast becoming America's majority. As of last July 44% of the nation's children under age 18 were not white. The Census Bureau tells us almost 10% of the nation's counties are now majority-minority.

In fact, the more I look around here in suburban Washington, D.C., whether I'm on the metro or at my children's school, the more skin tones I see. This is a great relief to me, because it makes my own coloring completely unremarkable. This means people no longer feel compelled to stop me on the street to ask, "What *are* you?" (Yes, that really happened.)

Now for the bad news: My kids are almost completely white. That's not bad in and of itself, of course. But from my perspective it's unfortunate timing.

A decade ago, when my husband and I first mulled the merits of multiplying, it occurred to me that since he is Scot-Irish, Welsh and looks part Viking, our children would be almost entirely British Isles. By my calculations back then, this meant that they would be members of this country's majority, skipping right past my Otherhood. My own Filipina's mother's stories, of being banished, alternately, to the African-American and white sections of buses and dressing rooms in the Deep South in the 1950s--after all, no one could peg her dark skin--would seem like bizarre fairy tales.

In a world of Star-Bellied Sneetches, my children would *fit in*. They would have stars on *thars*.

Instead, my children are living as part of something I've long hoped for: an amazingly diverse neighborhood anchored by an equally diverse public school populated by children of parents who moved here from all over the globe.

When my daughter started kindergarten two years ago, there was one other white kid in her class, and English wasn't even his native language. She hasn't noticed her minority status yet. And for the most part, none of the kids seem fixated on who is what color, at least not yet.

In fact, it only came up once, and not from a kid. It was last year, when I asked my daughter if one of her favorite playmates would be coming to her sixth birthday party. My daughter had invited several friends from different classes and one from another school. As it happened, the guest list included three African-Americans, three whites, two Latin Americans and one Asian American. The friend in question was one of the African-Americans, but the only African-American invited from a certain

classroom. She had no idea that other children were being invited from outside her class.

"Her mom said she can't come because I didn't invite enough black people," my daughter reported, pulling a long face.

At which point I pondered a lengthy letter, establishing my credentials as a Not Quite, as the daughter of a woman who was discriminated against in the Deep South. Or a short letter, bypassing the big issue, but explaining the fact that our party would be quite diverse.

I finally settled on no letter at all, because I didn't want it to somehow blow up and become my daughter's awful initiation into race. Instead, I explained that her friend's mother didn't understand, and we let it drop.

Besides, it wasn't worth the fight. One RSVP aside, the rest of the world is changing. It's becoming one giant mix of hyphenated Americans. And if we just let them, our children will show us how to live happily in it.

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