

Ethnicity and Race In North America

Ethnic and racial patterns vary widely within the unions and senior colleges of the North American Division.

by Lara Beaven

FEW WOULD BE SO NAIVE AS TO SUPPOSE THAT North American Adventists are the ethnically homogeneous group depicted in the early drawings and folklore of its New England founders, but what are the colors and cultures comprising the church in North America today? Discussion of diversity and multiculturalism in the North American Division has to begin with an examination of the facts and figures of ethnicity.

Diversity Among Members

The 1992 membership statistics for multicultural groups in North America, compiled by the Office of Human Relations, show a membership that is overall just under 60 percent white (or Anglo), and shrinking. The members of African descent comprise 29 percent of the total, or more than twice the

percentage in the United States. The percentage of Hispanics (8.5 percent) and Asians (2.5 percent) mirrors percentages in the general population.

Most Adventists probably are not aware that two sunbelt unions (Pacific with over 185,000 members and Southern with almost 150,000) make up almost half the members in North America, and that Anglos are a minority in one of them—46 percent of the Southern Union. There, African-Americans now slightly outnumber whites, 48 to 46 percent. Perhaps this might be expected. After all, this is the part of the country where slave plantations once flourished.

However, it surely is surprising that in the Atlantic Union, an area often associated with New England Puritans, Anglos are now only 26 percent of the membership, while those of African descent make up 61 percent, and Hispanics comprise almost 13 percent of the membership. The numbers become less startling, though, when one takes into account the fact that this union includes Bermuda and New York City. Even more important has been

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immigration of Adventists to New York from the Caribbean.

It is to be expected that the majority of Hispanic Adventists would be concentrated in the Pacific (17 percent) and Southwestern (15 percent) unions, since historically much of this area originally belonged to Mexico. Similarly, for Asians to have the highest concentration in the Pacific Union (6.5 percent) is also to be geographically expected.

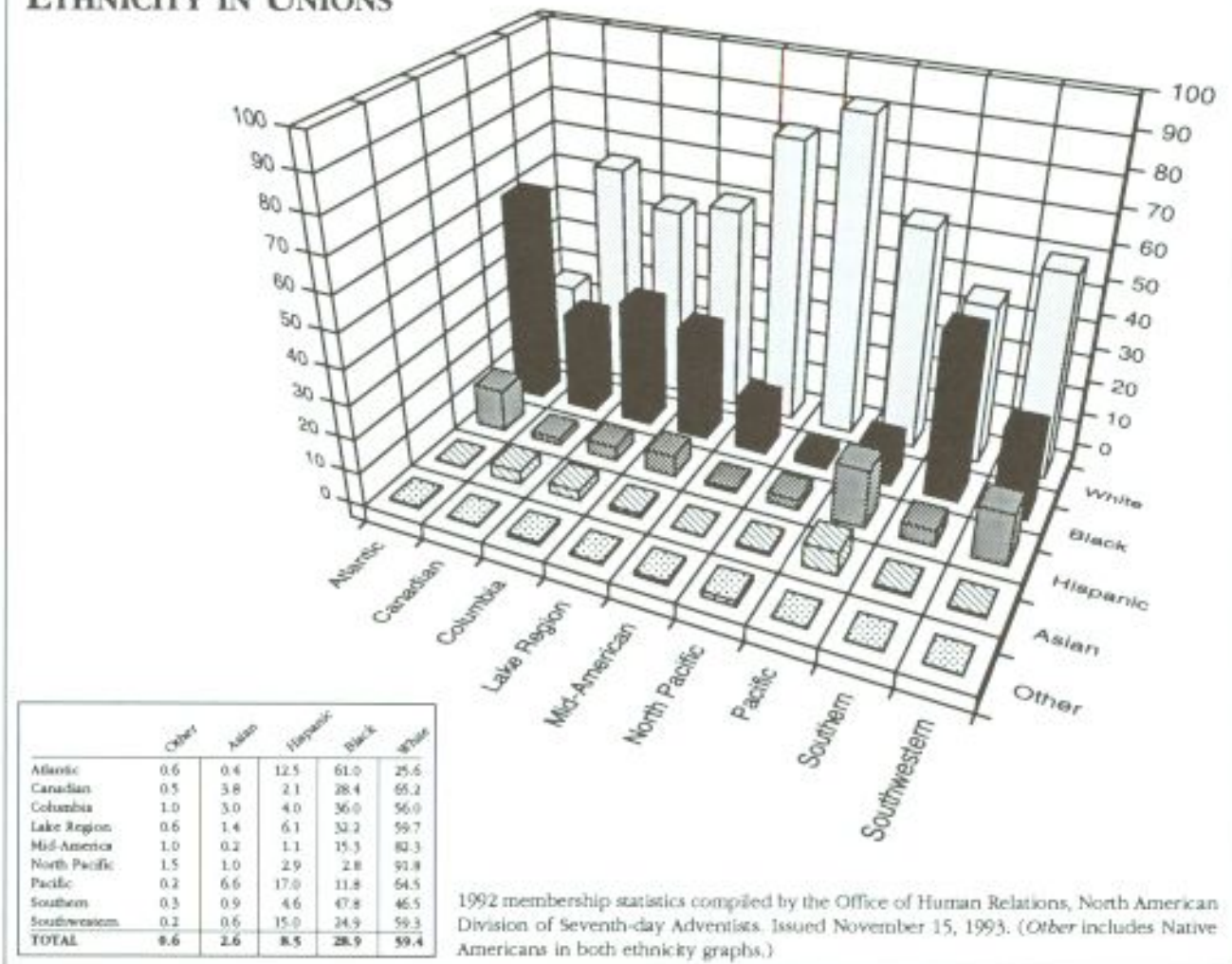
One would not necessarily anticipate that two unions would show less ethnic diversity in membership than can be found in the general population of their regions: the North Pacific Union, with almost 92 percent of its members of Anglo descent; and the Mid-

America Union, with 82 percent of its members Anglos, though, fit this description.

Diversity in Colleges and Universities

These numbers become even more interesting when one compares them to the ethnic breakdown of the universities in North America and the various union colleges. Although the Adventist Church has diminished its emphasis on young members attending college "in union," recruiting is still aimed primarily at academy students within each union.

ETHNICITY IN UNIONS

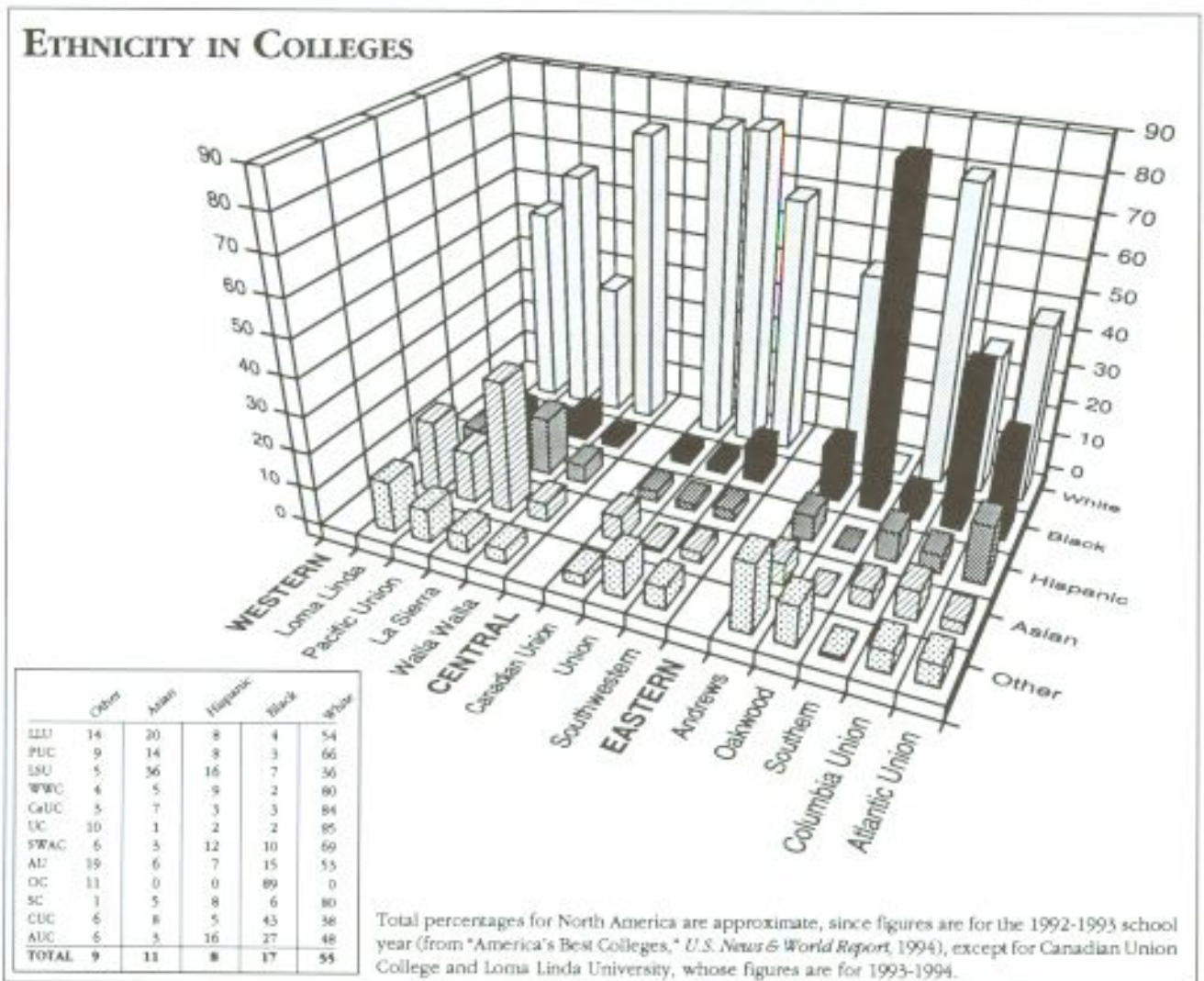


It should be noted that the ethnic composition of a particular college is not necessarily representative of the ethnic composition of the union in which it is located. Four colleges and the one university operated by a union have student populations that are very different, ethnically, from the memberships of the unions in which they operate.

Atlantic Union College, located in a union with a predominantly African-American membership (61 percent), has a predominantly Anglo enrollment. Forty-eight percent of AUC students are Anglo; only 27 percent are African-American. While 16 percent of the college's students are Hispanic, only 12.5 percent of the Atlantic Union is Hispanic. Columbia Union

College, in a union where Anglos have the majority membership (56 percent), enrolls 38 percent of its students from the Anglo community. Conversely, 43 percent of CUC's student body are African-Americans, somewhat more than the 36 percent of the union's membership from that community.

At Southern College of Seventh-day Adventists, Anglos are 80 percent of the student population, although, as we have seen, the union is only 46 percent Anglo. Southwestern Adventist College has a 69 percent Anglo student body, but the union membership is 59 percent Anglo, and while the Southwestern Union is almost 25 percent African-American, the college has only 10 percent of its students



from among African-Americans.

Some of the discrepancies in these four colleges between their racial make-up and that of their parent unions may be attributed to the fact that Oakwood College, a General Conference institution, caters to the needs of African-American students (89 percent of the enrollment) in not only the Southern Union where it is located, but also the whole United States, particularly the Eastern seaboard. Additionally, the three universities in North America—Andrews, La Sierra, and Loma Linda—draw students from all unions in North America and beyond. (That may be one reason why La Sierra University has a smaller percentage of Anglo students—38 percent—than either Atlantic or Columbia Union colleges.)

Elsewhere, Walla Walla College exhibits slightly more ethnic diversity than its parent North Pacific Union, and Union College has less ethnic diversity than the Mid-America Union, where it is located. Both schools enroll a smaller percentage of African-Americans than the ethnic makeup of their respective unions would indicate.

The Pacific Union's two schools of higher education have very different profiles. Pacific Union College, in northern California, is 66 percent Anglo (higher than the 64 percent of the Pacific Union membership), while La Sierra University, in Southern California, is only 36 percent Anglo. Pacific Union College en-

rolls only eight percent of its students from the Hispanic community; La Sierra enrolls twice that percentage of Hispanics. At Pacific Union College, 14 percent of its students are Asians (compared with 6.5 percent of the union membership), while 36 percent of La Sierra University's student body come from the Asian community.

Andrews and Loma Linda universities are both General Conference institutions, drawing significant numbers of international students. However, they are located in North America, and their student bodies roughly approximate the percentage of two ethnic groups found in the membership of the North American Division: Anglos and Hispanics. Both universities enroll significantly fewer than the 29 percent of the North American Division membership that is African-American (Andrews 15 percent, and Loma Linda 3.5 percent), though an ethnic breakdown of their large number of international students might raise those percentages.

This look at North American Adventism reveals that geography mightily effects ethnic diversity. Adventists in the North Pacific (92 percent Anglo) and Great Plains (82 percent Anglo) are by far the most ethnically homogeneous in North America. Colleges in these areas reflect this ethnic uniformity. Schools of higher education on the Atlantic and Pacific coasts are the most ethnically diverse.