

## Who Are We?

By *Herman F. Greene*

If we are to answer “Where are we?”, it is important to ask “Who are we?”

In a set of statistics, often attributed to Phillip M. Harter of the Stanford University Medical School, the human population was described this way:

### **The Earth as a Village**

If we could shrink the earth’s population to a village of precisely 100 people, with all the existing human ratios remaining the same, it would look something like the following. There would be:

- 57 Asians
- 21 Europeans; 14 from the Western Hemisphere,  
both north and south
- 8 Africans
- 52 would be female
- 48 would be male
- 70 would be non-white
- 30 would be white
- 70 would be non-Christian
- 30 would be Christian
- 89 would be heterosexual
- 11 would be homosexual
- 6 people would possess 59% of the entire world’s wealth  
and all 6 would be from the United States.
- 80 would live in substandard housing
- 70 would be unable to read
- 50 would suffer from malnutrition
- 1 would be near death; 1 would be near birth
- 1 (yes, only 1) would have a college education
- 1 would own a computer

When people inquired of Dr. Harter where he obtained his numbers, he replied that, like others, he had first received them by e-mail.<sup>1</sup> The President of Stanford, Gerhard Casper, asked people at the university to check out the numbers and they found them sufficiently close that President Casper later used them in a speech.<sup>2</sup>



Balu, Engleken & Grosso of England, using available statistical sources, undertook to research the numbers in the Harter e-mail. Here is what they found:

### **The Global Village<sup>3</sup>**

If we could shrink the earth's population to a village of precisely 100 people, with all the existing human ratios remaining the same, there would be:

60 Asians  
 12 Europeans  
 15 from the Western Hemisphere (9 Latin Americans, 5 North Americans, and 1 Oceanian)  
 13 Africans

Source: UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division [World Population Prospects: The 2000 Revision]

50 would be female  
 50 would be male

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census International Data Base [Table 094: Midyear Population by Age and Sex 2001]

80 would be non-white  
 20 would be white

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census International Data Base [Table 001: Total Midyear Population 2001] (assuming the populations of South America, Asia, and Africa are 'non-white' and those of North America, Europe, and Oceania are 'white.')

67 would be non-Christian  
 33 would be Christian

Source: Britannica Book of the Year 1999 - Religious Population of the World, 1998 (reprinted at infoplease.com, using numbers from the 'Christians' heading only for the Christian percentage)

20 people would earn 89% of the entire  
 world's wealth

Source: The International Herald Tribune - February 5, 1999 (cited in the World Income Inequality table)

25 would live in substandard housing

Source: Habitat for Humanity International [Why Habitat is Needed]

17 would be unable to read

Source: UNICEF [The State of the World's Children 1999]

13 would suffer from malnutrition

Source: UN Food and Agriculture Organization report (cited at OBGYN.net)

1 would die within the year  
 2 would give birth within the year

Source: U.S. Census Bureau [World Vital Events Per Time Unit 2001]

2 would have a college education

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, World Education Indicators [Gross Enrollment Ratio by Sex]

4 would own a computer

Source: UN Human Development Indicators [Access to Information and Communications 1995]

<sup>1</sup>Rekha Balu, "Please Don't Forward This E-mail! The story of an Accidental Web Celebrity," available at [www.fastcompany.com/articles/2001/05/email.html](http://www.fastcompany.com/articles/2001/05/email.html), (accessed 7/19/04.)

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Balu, Engleken & Grosso, "The Global Village," available at [www.davidbrown.co.uk/nota-bene/the-global-village.html](http://www.davidbrown.co.uk/nota-bene/the-global-village.html) (accessed 7/19/04).