

## If America Were a Village



Nearly 22 years ago, David J. Smith, a middle-school social studies teacher in Cambridge, Mass., had a brief conversation that would change his life.

A student came to him with a simple question: Would it be smarter to take French or Spanish in seventh grade?

Smith said both were important languages, so the student asked, "If our classroom were the world, how many people would speak English, how many would speak French and how many would speak Spanish?"

It was a revelation: What if teachers, Smith thought, could help children understand the world by reducing it to a small group of people? Kids may not be able to wrap their minds around a number like 5 billion, but they can understand 100.

It was an appealing way of helping kids understand not only an abstract idea like a percentage, but, more important, how people live — what they do, what they own, how they worship.

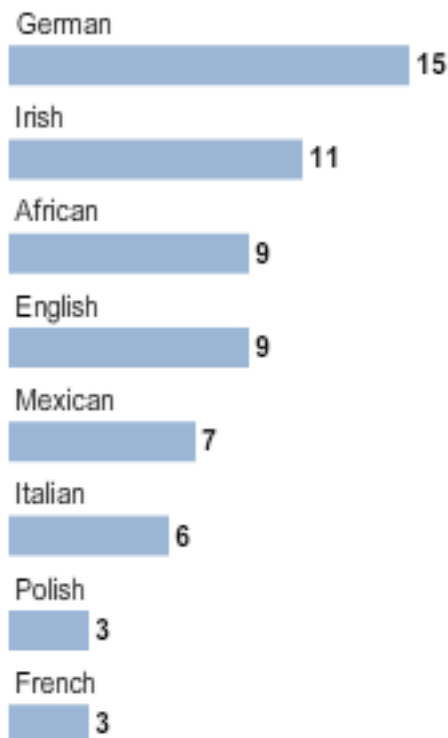
So, what is the United States was a village of only 100 people? Here's how it might look:

- 50 of 100 live in just nine states (12 of them in California).

### ■ USA AS A VILLAGE OF 100

#### Where do we come from

America is a country of immigrants. Almost every person in the USA can trace ancestors back to another part of the world. America's ancestry if it were a village of 100\*:

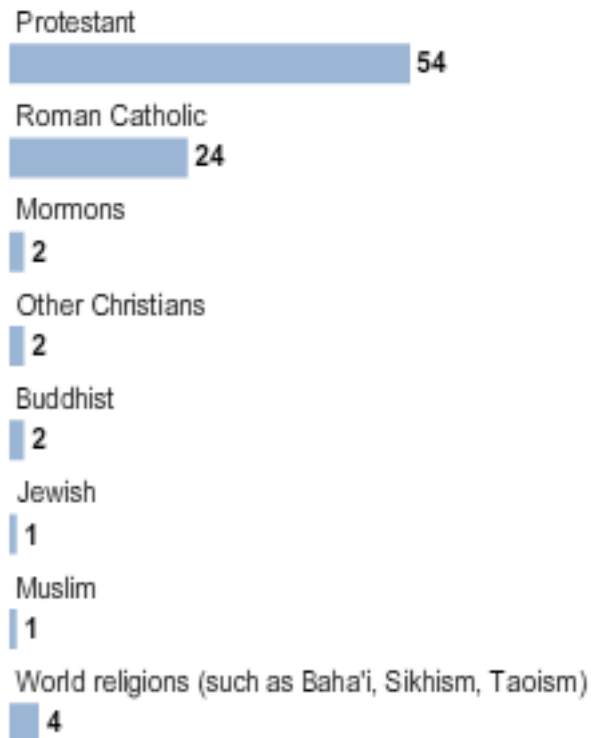


\*There'd also be 1 Scotch-Irish, 1 Swedish and 26 of other backgrounds

- The combined populations of five rural states — Alaska, Vermont, Wyoming, North Dakota and South Dakota — amount to just one person. (Each "person" equals more than 3 million people.)

#### What religions do we practice?

If you asked the people in the village of 100, about 40 people would attend religious service weekly, 10 would be non-religious and 82 would be Christian. Here's a further breakdown:



Source: *If America Were a Village: A Book about the People of the United States* by David J. Smith

In terms of our economy:

- Five people share more than half the USA's wealth
- One person controls more than 30%
- The 60 poorest share about 4%

The poverty figures, Smith notes, are actually rising, and like other stats will likely be updated in the next edition. "A lot of people are really shocked by the fact that 'people living in poverty in the U.S.' is increasing."

As for the student, his name is Kelefa Sanneh, and he ended up taking French. He became a journalist and now works as a staff writer for The New Yorker. He has fond memories of Mr. Smith, but absolutely no memory of the seminal conversation.