

Is Lansing the interracial love capital of America?

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LANSING, Mich. – In America in 2011, the idea of being “biracial” has taken on a new meaning. The city that may be the best example of this new racial identity is Lansing, which has the highest percentage of blacks who identify with different races.

“It is very [common](#) to see interracial couples here in Lansing,” said Beth Brokaw, a 28-year-old Lansing native. “Race was never an issue when it came to me, my friends, and dating. I knew a lot of people who were attracted to nothing but people from different races.”

Lansing, Michigan’s capital city, is more of a cultural melting [pot](#) than most cities in the state. Just 55 percent of the city’s 115,000 residents are white, the black population has risen 10 percent since 2000, and the Hispanic population — confined largely to the city’s south side — has

tripled in the last decade.

According to the 2010 Census, 4.1 percent of Lansing's black residents, or one out of every 25, identify themselves as being of mixed race. The next closest cities are Tacoma, Wash. and Killeen, Texas at 3.8 percent.

“You always see interracial couples here,” said Brokaw, who is white and has two biracial children. “My kids will tell you that they are mixed with black and white. When [President Obama](#) was elected, my oldest went around telling people that she was mixed like him.”

Most blacks still see themselves as simply black, in spite of their varying cultural makeup and heritage. Tiger Woods became the subject of ridicule in 1997 when identified himself as “Cablianasian” after winning his first Master's title.

“I don't know if it's because of the population or if it has to do with how we grew up,” Brokaw said. “Schools (in Lansing) taught kids that everybody was equal. Lansing is just so diverse.”

“Part of this is [liberal](#) baby boomers marrying outside their race or having kids with people of other races and liberal baby boomers being very vested in raising happy children,” Kristen Renn, an education professor at Michigan State University told the Lansing State Journal. “There is a youth movement around mixed race.”

That youth movement is very evident in Lansing as it is not uncommon at all to see different combinations of couples in relationships. With MSU in nearby East Lansing this also adds to the diversity in the area.

“I think the more we learn about our own families, the more open-minded we become toward other races,” said Tramaine Council, 26, of Lansing. “If we see that we have white people in our family somewhere, we become more comfortable. Also, I think it's a result of our environment. It's become more socially acceptable to intermix.”

While Lansing is not the most cosmopolitan city, the city has become much

more integrated over the last 20 years. The index of dissimilarity measures how evenly racial groups are distributed across census areas. Essentially, it is the degree to which people of different races are mixed into neighborhoods.

On a scale where 100 is complete segregation and zero complete integration, a Brown University study the of 2010 Census black-white segregation in Lansing at 28.

Nationally, the number is 59. The city hasn't always been so integrated, but it had been well below the national average for decades.

Lansing sits 90 miles to the northwest of Detroit and 60 miles west of Flint, two of the most racially segregated cities in the country. Interracial dating in Metro Detroit is still seen as taboo.

“I was mostly in the suburbs — Novi, Farmington Hills, etc. — but you could tell that black folks stuck together in Detroit,” said Council, who used to work in the Detroit area. “I’ve always said that I didn’t feel comfortable in Detroit because of my upbringing here. Plus, I’m all for interracial dating and friendships.”

Nikki O’Brien, a program adviser at MSU who spent years working with minority students, identifies herself as black. She was raised by her white mother and didn’t meet her black father until she was an adult

“You’d think I would be more malleable in my racial identity,” she [told](#) the *State Journal*. “The experience of being different was enough that I constantly knew that I was black and the strength and community that I pulled from that identity just pushed me.”

“Before, the push was from society, from parents, from family, from community, saying, ‘No, we get to define you. You don’t get to define yourself,’” she said. “The push back is, ‘Yeah, you know what, we do get to define ourselves.’”