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## Local News

## Black Ohioans closing income gap

Census data show disparities reverse in some areas

By Mara Lee and Ken McCall  
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Dayton Daily News

In the '90s, the salaries of blacks in Ohio grew 15.8 percent as whites grew 10.1 percent. The gap between the median, or midpoint, income of white and black households shrank 8.4 percent during the decade.

That's a good sign, said John Logan, director of State University of New York-Albany's Lewis Mumford Center, which studies demographic trends.

But by the end of the decade, the median household income for Ohio's white households was still \$16,000 more: \$42,899 vs. blacks' \$26,619. Asian-American households have higher salaries than any other group—the Ohio median income figure was \$49,266 in 1999.

Ohio's Census data was taken from the long form, which went to one in every six households. Today's release follows earlier releases of Census data from California, Illinois and some Northeastern states, where blacks fell farther behind because whites' incomes rose faster.

Logan hopes there are more states where blacks narrow the gap. "Those would be very hopeful figures for the nation," he said.

Montgomery County, which was 19.9 percent black in 2000, had the smallest racial income disparity of Ohio's six large urban counties. In Miami and Greene counties, which have experienced growth in expensive housing, the disparity between white and black incomes grew by a little more than 8 percent. In Warren County, which has a tiny black population of 683 households, the median black household income at \$59,125 was 2.4 percent higher than the white household income.

At the local level, there are some townships and cities where black households were more well-off than whites. Clayton, which was 9.9 percent black in the 2000 Census, has a median black household income of \$61,838, and a median white household income of \$60,684.

"Communities that are able to attract a racially and ethnically diverse population in the same range of social classes are very fortunate, because these are the best conditions to build relationships across the races," Logan said.

James Wilson Jr., and his wife Erica, both 31, agree that integration is comfortable in Clayton. They

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moved to an apartment complex there in 1998 when they first married, choosing the townhouse over places in Harrison Twp., Trotwood and Kettering.

They bought their 1984 three-bedroom bi-level with a two-car garage in 1999. Their son, James Wilson III, was born 11 months ago.

The couple grew up in northwest Dayton, in Upper Dayton View, and they were more comfortable living north.

Their street has about seven black families and about 20 white families, they estimated.

While it's not as social as life was in Dayton View and at first, strangely quiet they like their neighborhood.

"It seemed child-friendly, the neighbors are nice," Erica said.

They shopped for houses in Dayton, Harrison Twp., Trotwood and Clayton, and liked this one best. Both Dayton public school graduates Erica teaches kindergarten at Loos Elementary said the Northmont school district didn't play a role in the decision.

They think they will stay in Northmont, trading up to Clayton or Englewood, however. James said, "They believe in levies out here."

Since they moved to their street, two of James' co-workers at Reynolds and Reynolds' Germantown Street site have bought houses on the street. One had visited him before buying there.

In 10 years, James thinks there will be twice as many blacks in Clayton. "I think they're doing better on their jobs, and want newer homes. I don't think we'll see people doing like they did in other areas white flight."

Trotwood has been a destination for upwardly mobile black families for decades. That trend continued in the '90s.

In Trotwood, the 1999 median income for black households was \$36,798, and for whites it was \$32,720. Jefferson Twp., another traditional black suburban destination in the region, was \$32,416 for blacks, \$30,338 for whites.

Age differences explain quite a bit of Trotwood's income gap. Logan said in communities where the racial balance shifts Trotwood went from minority black to 60 percent black in 2000 middle-aged and elderly whites are the least likely to move.

Trotwood Mayor Donald McLaurin said the white population in Trotwood has gotten older. But young middle-class black families continue to move in.

"When you look at migration from the city of Dayton, few suburbs attract blacks, and Trotwood happens to be one of them," he said. "You don't have to travel far from immediate families (still in Dayton)."

He said earlier migrants influence friends and relatives who see how happy they are in Trotwood. "People have a sense of belonging, a sense of friendships," he said.

Why doesn't the white middle class continue to move in? "They don't know what they're missing," McLaurin

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said. He said many young whites rent near the region's entertainment and retail hubs east and south of town. "Once you get caught up into a community you like, you tend to stay there," he said.

Logan said segregation, like that seen in Dayton suburbs, should be viewed through a wider lens than choices based on comfort and familiarity. Even college-educated affluent suburban blacks tend to live in areas where there's more poverty, more vacant housing, fewer college graduates than whites of the same income level, he said.

He said their neighborhoods may have stagnant housing values, because studies have shown that whites are less likely to buy from blacks, so there's a smaller pool of buyers.

Trotwood, however, does not follow that trend. Census estimates of housing appreciation in the '90s put the suburb at about 12 percent higher than Centerville, Englewood and Huber Heights, and not far behind Kettering.

Logan said higher concentrations in poverty often translate into lower quality schools, and that disparity is a problem for everyone, not just those who live there.

McLaurin said Trotwood-Madison's school district has had troubles, but the city knows schools are one of a community's most important features, and he said he has faith in the system's upward path.

The new superintendent two years ago changed the culture, and the residents passed a bond issue for new schools, he said. "You're going to see great things out of the Trotwood-Madison schools and in Trotwood. More educated parents will be moving to our community."

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[From the Dayton Daily News: 09.04.2002]

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