



**MARKETPLACE**  
classifieds • shopping • more

[Jobs](#) • [Cars](#) • [Homes](#)

- [Classified Ads](#)
- [Interactive Print Ads](#)
  - [Newspaper Ads](#)
  - [Coupons](#)
  - [Special Sections](#)
- [ISO - Online](#)

[Personals](#)

- [Place a Classified Ad](#)

**Lehigh Valley News**

- [Allentown](#)
- [Bethlehem](#)
- [Easton](#)
- [Lehighton](#)
- [Quakertown](#)
- [Columnists](#)
- [Police](#)
- [Special Sections](#)

- ▶ [US/World News](#)
- ▶ [Milestones](#)
- ▶ [Sports](#)
- ▶ [Opinion](#)
- ▶ [Business](#)
- ▶ [Features](#)
- ▶ [Entertainment](#)
- ▶ [Photo Journal](#)
- ▶ [Special Reports](#)
- ▶ [Weather](#)
- ▶ [Shopping](#)
- ▶ [Customer Service](#)
- ▶ [Subscribe](#)
- ▶ [Archives](#)
- ▶ [Register With Us](#)
- ▶ [Sitemap](#)
- ▶ [Feedback](#)

**THE MORNING CALL**  
101 North 6th St.  
Allentown, PA 18101  
(610) 820-6500

From The Morning Call -- September 25, 2002

In Allentown, blacks earned most African-American gains in census buck trend across nation.

By Edgar Sandoval  
Of The Morning Call

In what is believed to be the first time in Allentown's history, blacks earned more money than whites at the end of the last decade, according to new Census figures on median household incomes.

Elsewhere in the Lehigh Valley, whites still earned more than blacks and Hispanics, but those minority groups were closing the income gap. Asians had the highest median household income in the Valley and six surrounding counties, except Montgomery County.



Higher-paying jobs for blacks, particularly in high-tech and financial fields, and white flight to the suburbs are fueling the trend, those familiar with urban issues speculated.

"It is quite an unusual situation," said Karl Haub, demographer for the Population Reference Bureau, a nonprofit demographic information group in Washington, D.C. "Some areas in the country, like Washington, D.C., suburbs, have seen blacks reporting higher incomes than blacks nationwide, but not higher incomes than whites."

Asians, who historically have earned more money than blacks, had the second-highest median household income in Allentown, followed by whites, then Hispanics.

Median income refers to the exact middle of the income range, with half of the incomes higher and half lower.

Blacks in Allentown reported a median household income of \$42,142 in 1999, up \$9,211 from 1989. Whites reported a median household income of \$34,479 in 1999, a decrease of \$453 in 10 years.

"That is new news," said Kevin Easterling, who created the Lehigh Valley Black News Network, an e-mail newsletter. "Usually, African-Americans are the poorest in most cities. We must have been doing something right in Allentown."

Once the poorest group in the city, blacks are living a middle-class lifestyle as they buy homes and work at better-paying jobs, black leaders said. In 2000, there were 852 more black households in Allentown than 10 years earlier, according to the census figures being released today.

[Email this story](#)

[Printer friendly format](#)

Photos



[Duane Tolso](#) (DOUGLAS BENEDICT/TMC )  
Sep 25, 2002

Slide Show



[PhotoJournal](#)

Special Report

### Home Delivery Info

Local: (610) 820-6601

Toll-free: (800)  
666-5492

- [Subscription Form](#)
- [No paper this morning?](#)
- [Vacation Options](#)

Many new arrivals contacted the African-American Chamber of Commerce and are making inroads in the black community, said Mary Ellen Griffin, the chamber's president. They moved to the city and region from different parts of the state and country to work at companies such as Agere Systems, PPL Corp., Air Products and Chemicals and area hospitals, she said.

Blacks in Easton and Bethlehem saw smaller gains in median household income. In Easton, their median income rose to \$31,389, up \$1,302, and in Bethlehem, their income rose to \$28,669, up \$6,141.

"Allentown is where all the high-tech industries are located. We are going in the right direction," Griffin said.

For example, Agere Systems of Allentown hired thousands of workers, including many minorities, a few years ago.

"We hired a lot of people in the late 1990s because we were growing," spokesman Jack Molets said. "We did consciously make an effort to hire a diverse base of minority candidates."

It's been a different story for the company in the last two years because of a startling drop in the electronics and telecommunications industries.

Agere employed more than 10,000 workers in the Lehigh Valley and Reading areas in early 2001. Its local employment will drop to 2,300 when layoffs are complete next year and it eliminates all manufacturing here. Agere is the world's No. 1 producer of semiconductors used in communication equipment such as wireless computer networks.

Many blacks choose to live in urban settings, where residents are ethnically diverse, they're closer to churches, entertainment and other venues, and they share similar cultural values, said Chris Borick, a professor of urban politics at Muhlenberg College in Allentown. He said blacks tend to live in areas where other blacks reside, whether that's in lower- or middle-class neighborhoods.

Minorities are still moving into the suburbs, census numbers show.

But Borick said some blacks "are a little hesitant to move into a mostly white suburb. The suburbs can be a little more isolated, and they might feel awkward."

Blacks make up 8 percent of Allentown's population of 106,632. That's "a significant number," Borick said. That middle-class blacks choose to stay in Allentown "is definitely a good sign," he said. "We need to keep the wealth in the city."

Duane Tolson, 32, moved to Allentown from Atlanta in 1999 to take a job with D&B (formerly Dun & Bradstreet). He and his roommate, who also worked for D&B, chose the city over a suburb, he said, because they wanted to live in a diverse place with access to entertainment, church and major highways.

"I like the fact that it's close to anything I need, to be plugged in," Tolson said.

Tolson, who unsuccessfully ran for Allentown City Council in 2000, is director of operations at the Lehigh County Senior Center in Allentown. He said his annual salary is in the high 30s.

"The cost of living is better in Allentown," Tolson said.

Despite gains, blacks and Hispanics in the Lehigh Valley and surrounding area still earned less, generally, than whites.

For example, black households in Northampton County made 72 cents for every dollar a white household

### [PUERTO RICO](#)



[The Commonwealth Turns 50](#)

News by e-mail

**This Just In...**  
LATEST NEWS BY E-MAIL!  
[Sign up today!](#)

Feedback

[Contact us](#)

[Recovery defies odds](#)  
Sep 26, 2002

[Zoners have 45 days to decide on pet cougar request](#)  
Sep 26, 2002

[Council approves expansion of center](#)  
Sep 26, 2002

[Satisfied with Palmerton cleanup, EPA says](#)  
Sep 26, 2002

[Torture victim testifies rape accusation is false](#)  
Sep 26, 2002

reported. That disparity was more pronounced for Hispanics, who made 60 cents for every dollar earned in a white household in Northampton County.

Asian household income generally exceeded white household income. However, the number of Asian households in some counties — 24 in Carbon County for example — were so statistically small that comparisons with other groups were, for the most part, insignificant.

Overall, median household income declined in Allentown, Bethlehem and Easton — down 5 percent in Allentown, and down 3 percent in Bethlehem and Easton.

Hispanics, who are among the newer arrivals in the Lehigh Valley, had median household incomes of \$24,019 in Allentown and \$23,409 in Bethlehem. Many work in blue-collar jobs such as at hotels, restaurants and factories.

"Latinos are relatively new to this area, and it will take them generations to move up in the socioeconomic ladder," said Borick, of Muhlenberg College. "That is what happens to new groups."

Planners and educators predict that the cities will continue to see a growth of lower-income minorities and lose higher-earning whites to the suburbs.

Allentown, for example, had 6,451 fewer white households in 2000 than a decade earlier, according to the census. The city's total population remained about the same, largely because of the influx of Hispanics. Bethlehem and Easton also lost whites to the suburbs but saw minority growth.

Whites who moved into the townships took their money and resources with them. For example, the median household income for mostly white Lower Nazareth Township was about \$70,000, according to the census.

"People who have more money want to live in the suburbs," said Frederic Brock, assistant director with the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission. "The more you have, the more options you have where to live."

For the last several decades, low-income people have moved into the cities but leave as soon as their incomes rise, Brock said. They leave in search of bigger houses, space and a perception that they can find better schools in less-dense areas.

"The cities have no vacant land, no room for development, so they have to deal with what they have," he said. "I don't see the cities keeping the people with money."

[edgar.sandoval@mcall.com](mailto:edgar.sandoval@mcall.com)

610-820-6527

Computer-Assisted Reporting Editor James E. Wilkerson and reporter Dan Shope contributed to this story.

Copyright © 2002, [The Morning Call](#)

---

[US/World News](#) | [Health](#) | [Weather](#) | [Obituaries](#) | [PA Lottery](#) | [NJ Lottery](#)  
[News](#) | [Sports](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Business](#) | [Go Guide](#) | [Shopping](#)

© 2002 THE MORNING CALL Inc.

[Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Service](#)