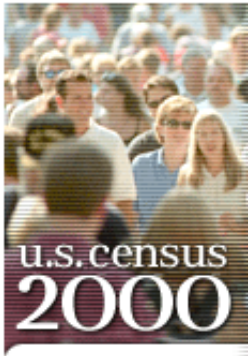


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Minnesota minorities mark big gains in the '90s

David Peterson

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Minnesota's minorities recorded tremendous gains in the '90s.

Just ask Rex Mhiripiri.



"I have black customers who have purchased in the last four to five years more than \$50,000 worth of art from me," he said from his Edina gallery, which specializes in African stone sculpture. "I have attorneys, judges, car dealers, Ph.D.s, who will spend \$5,000, \$10,000, \$40,000."

Hispanic professionals teeing off.

Kyndell Harkness
Star Tribune

For instance:

- Asian household incomes shot up by 52 percent and are nearing parity with whites.
- The growth rate in American Indian income was more than twice that of whites, propelling the state's Indian community from among the nation's poorest Indians to the middle ranks.
- Poverty rates among blacks and Hispanics dropped significantly, even as a middle class solidified in both of those communities: The total number of people in those two groups with at least a bachelor's degree more than doubled, from 12,000 to 25,000.

"The bad news is, there are still differences," said the state demographer, Tom Gillaspay. "The good news is, there appears to be some convergence."

Ramone Leone was willing to sit down and talk about all of this in his office on Monday. But he really couldn't: He was due out at River Oaks golf course in Cottage Grove for the 1 p.m. shotgun start of a tournament sponsored by the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Minnesota.

Might that be a place, he was asked, to find some of the more than 100 Hispanic business owners who in recent years have established themselves along E. Lake Street in Minneapolis?

"Not really," he said. "You're going to find second-or third-generation Mexican-Americans who are professionals, or working for corporations, and will be out there networking."

Things are changing in Minnesota.

The income and education gains each group is seeing results from a combination of circumstances, experts say:

- For American Indians the '90s were the period when a powerful instrument for economic development, the casino, came on line in a big way and in big numbers. The census earlier this year documented those gains on reservations and elsewhere.

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- The black community is benefiting from dramatic progress in education. As recently as 1980 nearly half of all black adults did not have a high school diploma. Today, nearly 90 percent of black Minnesotans in their late 20s have that qualification. Growing numbers are getting college degrees, and growing numbers of educated blacks appear to be staying in and coming to Minnesota.

"This area was almost Wonder Bread white before," said Meg Forney, a fourth-generation Minnesota black woman who lives near Lake Calhoun and leads a neighborhood group west of the lake. "Now there's an explosion of diversity. Young people who left here to go to college are having kids and are coming back from the East and West Coasts. They like the atmosphere here. It's what they were nurtured in and what they want for their kids."

- Asian refugees in Minnesota have now been here in large numbers for 20 years, and a new generation of well-educated young adults, supported by their large extended families, emerged in the '90s.

"When a whole family works and saves and builds for the future and purchases a house," Gillaspay said, "they put themselves into a fairly strong situation."

- A middle-class Hispanic community has existed in St. Paul for decades and is now gradually dispersing into the suburbs even as new immigrants flow into the central cities.

"It is quite a distinctive feature of the Twin Cities area, that Hispanics make a lot more money than blacks," said John Logan, director of the Mumford Center for urban research in Albany, N.Y. "And there was a strong improvement in the '90s in the status of neighborhoods that U.S.-born Hispanics were living in, in the Twin Cities."

Although most minorities still lag statistically behind whites, many contend that the sheer numeric growth in affluent, well-educated people is a positive sign. Provided, Logan said, that "they constitute themselves as a leadership group that seeks to make a difference in the community."

Norman Harrington, development officer for the St. Paul Foundation Diversity Endowment Funds, is one of those thinking a great deal about what role affluent minorities will play.

"There is an emerging African-American community that's become very affluent," he said. "But I think it's too early to determine what the giving patterns are. We know they give, but not to what extent. Are they committed to serving, and giving back? Everyone is trying to figure out how do we begin to reach out to those folks."

Sam Hernandez, a retired St. Paul teacher who lives on seven wooded acres north of Stillwater, asks the same questions about his community.

"I happen not to be Republican," he said, "because I don't think you can be for the needs of the average person and be Republican. But friends of mine who've done well in business are becoming Republican. They're leaving their brothers behind."

Veryle Logan, who came here nearly 20 years ago to work for Dayton's in merchandising, now lives in the north Tyrol Hills area of Golden Valley and works as a relocation specialist. She says the high-status blacks she sees are giving back.

"My own sorority, Delta Sigma Theta, has programs where we develop kids, develop teens, raise money for scholarships. I don't know any African-American people coming here who don't plan to give back or spend time trying to develop kids. I don't know *any*."

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