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Donna Terek / The Detroit News

Detroit resident Tim Trainor visits stores in Harbortown on Jefferson Avenue. Detroit's white population has grown in a handful of areas, particularly along the Detroit River.

Whites make small gains in Detroit

By Gordon Trowbridge / The Detroit News

Across the United States, an influx of white residents to neighborhoods that had been nearly all-black has led to lower segregation levels.

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Like many demographic trends, this gentrification has largely bypassed Detroit, and there is little confidence among experts that trends here will change much in the coming decade. But even incremental increases in the white population of some city neighborhoods could help reverse decades of white flight.

It's surprising, perhaps, that the white population actually rose in about 10 percent of census tracts in the city. Most of the increases were small,

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but along the Detroit River, in the area surrounding the Harbortown development, the white population more than tripled in the 1990s. Still, that's only 500 whites.

Fred Stielow, 55, moved to Harbortown about 18 months ago when he and his wife came to the area from suburban New York.

"We liked the river, and we wanted to commit to Detroit," Stielow said. "It's a mixed community here. It's very friendly, like all Detroit and the Midwest. And I'm looking out at the Belle Isle Bridge when it's lighted up -- it's spectacular."

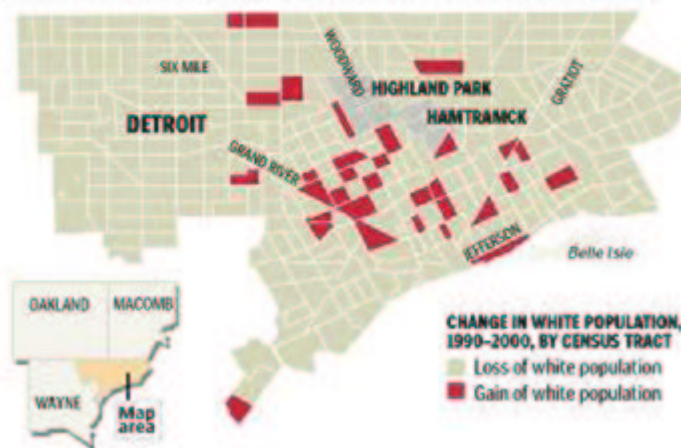
The University of Michigan's Reynolds Farley sees more potential for drawing whites to the city in the core of health-sector jobs at the city's hospitals; the coming of the Compuware headquarters; and the sprinkling of new upscale housing developments in the city.

There are hints more could be coming: In a study by The Brookings Institution and the Fannie Mae Foundation for USA Today, 18 of 24 big-city downtowns, including Detroit's, gained population in the 1990s. Nationally, that growth has been spurred by whites, usually either young singles and couples or older empty-nesters. Often they're drawn by sports, entertainment and cultural facilities such as those that have popped up in Detroit in recent years.

But experts agree that until Detroit can convince suburbanites that crime is conquered, city services are up to par and taxes are coming down, attracting large numbers of whites to the city will be hard, if not impossible.

Whites in the city

Detroit's white population continued to fall in the 1990s, but a handful of city neighborhoods, such as the Harbortown area along the Detroit River, actually attracted new white residents.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

The Detroit News

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