

Booming, Suburban, and Black

by William P.
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Black Americans run the gamut from poor to wealthy, and so do their neighborhoods. Most of the people who live in riot-torn South Central Los Angeles are black, for example, but blacks are also a majority in the neighboring middle-class bungalows of LA's Crenshaw district. Majority-black neighborhoods include the District of Columbia's notorious Southeast section, but also the affluent black suburbs of Prince George's County, Maryland. These neighborhoods are often near each other. But as consumer markets, they are worlds apart.

Almost one American in eight is black,

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The Most Blacks

Washington, D.C., is the nation's capital for black suburbs.
(metropolitan areas ranked by the number of black residents living in suburban areas)

metropolitan area	black residents in suburban areas	metropolitan area	black residents in suburban areas
Washington, DC	619,239	Columbia, SC	95,069
Atlanta, GA	462,832	Orlando, FL	89,005
Los Angeles- Long Beach, CA	400,936	West Palm Beach-Boca Raton- Delray Beach, FL	71,460
Miami-Hialeah, FL	291,352	Greenville, NC	71,005
Philadelphia, PA-NJ	240,483	Charlotte-Gastonia- Rock Hill, NC-SC	70,984
Newark, NJ	240,084	Pittsburgh, PA	68,538
Chicago, IL	213,970	Baton Rouge Parish, LA	60,163
St. Louis, MO-IL	182,538	Norfolk-Virginia Beach- Newport News, VA	59,927
Baltimore, MD	169,333	Tampa-St. Petersburg- Clearwater, FL	59,783
Houston, TX	145,581	Raleigh-Durham, NC	58,791
New York, NY	138,243	Fayetteville, NC	58,517
Riverside- San Bernardino, CA	133,690	Jackson, MS	58,279
Detroit, MI	132,740	Birmingham, AL	57,897
Ft. Lauderdale-Hollywood- Pompano Beach, FL	120,462	Bergen-Passaic, NJ	55,379
Oakland, CA	120,347	Mobile, AL	54,105
Cleveland, OH	120,214	San Diego, CA	53,460
New Orleans Parish, LA	120,128	Middlesex-Somerset- Hunterdon, NJ	53,398
Charleston, SC	119,788	Memphis, TN	52,363
Richmond-Petersburg, VA	112,530	Cincinnati, OH	52,341
Augusta, GA	98,489	Dallas, TX	95,803
		AVERAGE FOR 40 AREAS	135,981

Note: List contains only metropolitan areas with at least 50,000 blacks living in suburban neighborhoods.

Source: 1990 census

Black Concentrations

Northern metros may contain more black suburbanites, but southern metros are far more concentrated.

(metropolitan areas ranked by the percent of suburban residents who are black)

metropolitan area	percent of suburban residents who are black	metropolitan area	percent of suburban residents who are black
Fayetteville, NC	29.4%	St. Louis, MO-IL	9.9%
Jackson, MS	29.3	Orlando, FL	9.8
Charleston, SC	28.1	Birmingham, AL	9.5
Augusta, GA	28.0	Houston, TX	9.1
Columbia, SC	26.8	Cleveland, OH	9.1
Miami-Hialeah, FL	22.5	Richmond-Petersburg, VA	9.0
Norfolk-Virginia Beach-Newport News, VA	21.3	Los Angeles-Long Beach, CA	8.7
Washington, DC	19.9	Oakland, CA	7.8
Baton Rouge Parish, LA	19.5	Philadelphia, PA-NJ	7.6
Atlanta, GA	19.3	Dallas, TX	7.2
Mobile, AL	19.3	Chicago, IL	6.8
Newark, NJ	16.7	Riverside-San Bernardino, CA	6.2
New Orleans Parish, LA	16.7	Middlesex-Somerset-Hunterdon, NJ	5.7
Raleigh-Durham, NC	16.7	Bergen-Passaic, NJ	4.9
Memphis, TN	15.3	Cincinnati, OH	4.8
Ft. Lauderdale-Hollywood-Pompano Beach, FL	13.2	Detroit, MI	4.2
Greenville, NC	13.2	San Diego, CA	4.2
New York, NY	11.8	Pittsburgh, PA	4.1
Charlotte-Gastonia-Rock Hill, NC-SC	11.1	Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater, FL	4.1
Baltimore, MD	10.5		
West Palm Beach-Boca Raton-Delray Beach, FL	10.4	AVERAGE FOR 40 AREAS	13.3%

Note: List contains only metropolitan areas with at least 50,000 blacks living in suburban neighborhoods.

Source: 1990 census

and this proportion should increase to almost one in seven within 20 years. Most blacks are not affluent: 62 percent of black households have incomes of less than \$25,000, according to the Census Bureau, compared with 40 percent of whites. But 12 percent of households headed by blacks have incomes of \$50,000 or more, up from 8 percent in 1980. This growing economic diversity among black Americans is one reason for the rapid increases in blacks moving to suburban areas.

Suburban blacks are an important consumer market because they tend to have greater educational attainment and more disposable income than blacks who live in

cities. In metropolitan areas with populations of 1 million or more, black families who live in the suburbs have an average income of more than \$32,000, according to the 1990 census. That is 55 percent higher than the average income of black families living in the central cities of those metropolitan areas.

Affluent blacks have distinct consumer preferences. They spend heavily on expensive clothing and are two and a half times more likely than the national average to buy a convertible, according to Claritas/NPDC of Alexandria, Virginia. They are far more likely than the average American to own an American Express

card, purchase imported brandy, or have a sailboat. Suburban blacks pursue the good life with the enthusiasm of someone who's just discovered it.

The census shows that black suburbanization is much more advanced in some metros than in others. Businesses that serve the unique consumer needs of affluent blacks need to study these differences.

LARGEST AND MOST CONCENTRATED

In 1990, there were 40 U.S. metropolitan areas with at least 50,000 black suburbanites, defined as blacks living outside of the central city. The largest suburban black population by far is found in Washington, D.C.; if considered by themselves, Washington's 619,239 black suburbanites would form a metro area larger than Toledo, Ohio. The second-largest market is Atlanta, where 462,832 suburban blacks cluster in such neighborhoods as Brook Glen, Panola Mill, and Wyndham Park. The third-largest market is Los Angeles, with 400,936 suburban blacks.

Part of the reason for Washington's substantial black suburban population is its historically large black middle class. Another reason is that unlike most central cities, the District of Columbia's boundaries cannot expand to accommodate urban population growth. In most other cities, the heavily black areas in Prince George's County, just over the District line, would have been annexed long ago.

The ten metros with the largest suburban black populations are all major population centers, and they follow national patterns of black population distribution. Just over half (53 percent) of all blacks in the U.S. live in the South, for example, and five southern metros are in the top ten for suburban blacks: Washington, Baltimore, Atlanta, Houston, and Miami. The list also includes Los Angeles, along with four northern industrial metros: Philadelphia, Newark, Chicago, and St. Louis.

Targeting suburban blacks doesn't always mean doing business in Chicago's Auburn Park or Miami's Rolling Oaks district, however. Reaching them in smaller metros can be just as cost-effective, if the

smaller suburbs contain high concentrations of blacks. The 40 metros are ranked by the percent of the suburban population that is black. Eighteen of the top 20 are in the South. The national leaders are Fayetteville, North Carolina, and Jackson, Mississippi, where over 29 percent of the suburban population is black. More than one-quarter of suburban residents are black in Charleston, South Carolina; Columbia, South Carolina; and Augusta, Georgia. More than one in five suburbanites is black in Miami and Norfolk, Virginia.

The high proportion of blacks in the suburbs of medium-sized southern metros is probably related to the South's high proportion of rural blacks. Many formerly rural areas of the South are now included in the suburbs of medium-sized cities, but these areas are less densely populated than the traditional suburban ring seen around most cities of a million or more. As a result, black families that have stayed in the same rural area for generations are now counted as suburban residents.

Another reason is that Fayetteville and other medium-sized southern metros have not seen a lot of white in-migration from other cities. White in-migration tends to offset the large number of suburban blacks that are prevalent in other areas of the South.

GROWTH IN BLACK SUBURBS

During the 1980s, some metropolitan areas saw explosive growth in the number of black suburbanites. In general, metros with the largest absolute gains also had the largest black suburban populations in 1980. In Atlanta, which ranks second in the absolute number of suburban blacks, a quarter of a million blacks were added to the suburban population during the 1980s. The number of blacks added to the suburban population was almost as great in Washington, D.C. Each of these two metros gained more than twice the number of suburban blacks as did third-place Miami, where just over 100,000 blacks were added to the suburbs.

Some metros experienced slow growth in the suburban black population, how-

The Fastest-Growing Black Suburbs

Riverside-San Bernardino is the 12th-largest black suburb, but it grew fastest during the 1980s.
(metropolitan areas ranked by growth of black suburban population, 1980-90)

metropolitan area	growth of black suburban population	metropolitan area	growth of black suburban population
Riverside-San Bernardino, CA	179.1%	Norfolk-Virginia Beach-Newport News, VA	24.1%
Dallas, TX	120.0	Columbia, SC	23.1
Houston, TX	108.2	Bergen-Passaic, NJ	22.7
San Diego, CA	101.9	New Orleans Parish, LA	21.8
Atlanta, GA	94.5	Newark, NJ	21.7
Ft. Lauderdale-Hollywood-Pompano Beach, FL	78.8	Cincinnati, OH	21.2
Orlando, FL	70.6	New York, NY	21.1
Middlesex-Somerset-Hunterdon, NJ	67.6	Augusta, GA	21.1
Chicago, IL	64.6	Greenville, NC	21.0
Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater, FL	64.4	Charleston, SC	18.4
Washington, DC	53.3	Fayetteville, NC	13.1
Miami-Mialeah, FL	53.1	Los Angeles-Long Beach, CA	12.8
Oakland, CA	44.6	Memphis, TN	12.2
Baltimore, MD	42.8	Raleigh-Durham, NC	8.9
West Palm Beach-Boca Raton-Delray Beach, FL	40.9	Jackson, MS	7.7
Richmond-Petersburg, VA	33.0	Pittsburgh, PA	6.7
St. Louis, MO-IL	30.2	Baton Rouge Parish, LA	4.6
Detroit, MI	28.7	Charlotte-Gastonia-Rock Hill, NC-SC	4.4
Cleveland, OH	27.5	Mobile, AL	-0.3
Philadelphia, PA-NJ	24.8	Birmingham, AL	-12.0
		AVERAGE FOR 40 AREAS	40.1%

Note: List contains only metropolitan areas with at least 50,000 blacks living in suburban neighborhoods. Source: Census Bureau

ever. Nationally, the number of black Americans grew by 13.2 percent during the 1980s. Ten of the metros we measured failed to match this growth rate in their suburban black populations. Surprisingly, nine of them were in the South. In Mobile and Birmingham, Alabama, the number of blacks living in the suburbs actually declined during the 1980s. The probable cause is that many blacks left the more rural parts of the suburban counties around these two cities, while relatively few blacks moved into the inner suburbs.

The list of metros with the fastest-growing black suburbs is dominated by rapidly growing Sunbelt cities. In California's Riv-

erside-San Bernardino and San Diego metropolitan areas, the number of blacks living in the suburbs actually doubled during the 1980s. The same is true of Texas's two largest metros, Dallas and Houston. Among the top ten cities ranked by this measure, only Chicago and Middlesex-Somerset, New Jersey, are not in the Sunbelt.

There are few pockets of rapid black suburban growth in the Northeast and Midwest. In three of the counties that form a ring around Boston—Essex, Plymouth, and Norfolk, Massachusetts—the number of blacks more than doubled during the 1980s. The number of blacks also doubled in Kansas City's Johnson County,

Changes in Black Suburbs

In most metros, black suburbs are growing fast. But Mobile and Birmingham actually lost suburban blacks during the 1980s.

(metropolitan areas ranked by change in the number of black suburban residents between 1980 and 1990)

metropolitan area	change in number of black suburban residents	metropolitan area	change in number of black suburban residents
Atlanta, GA	224,857	Middlesex-Somerset-Hunterdon, NJ	21,538
Washington, DC	215,395	New Orleans Parish, LA	21,519
Miami-Hialeah, FL	101,065	West Palm Beach-Boca Raton-Delray Beach, FL	20,737
Riverside-San Bernardino, CA	85,793	Charleston, SC	18,628
Chicago, IL	83,944	Columbia, SC	17,866
Houston, TX	75,665	Augusta, GA	17,166
Ft. Lauderdale-Hollywood-Pompano Beach, FL	53,090	Greenville, NC	12,341
Dallas, TX	52,252	Norfolk-Virginia Beach-Newport News, VA	11,626
Baltimore, MD	50,782	Bergen-Passaic, NJ	10,256
Philadelphia, PA-NJ	47,805	Cincinnati, OH	9,152
Los Angeles-Long Beach, CA	45,499	Fayetteville, NC	6,784
Newark, NJ	42,774	Memphis, TN	5,700
St. Louis, MO-IL	42,338	Raleigh-Durham, NC-SC	4,815
Oakland, CA	37,114	Pittsburgh, PA	4,312
Orlando, FL	36,839	Jackson, MS	4,179
Detroit, MI	29,576	Charlotte-Gastonia-Rock Hill, NC-SC	2,974
Richmond-Petersburg, VA	28,511	Baton Rouge Parish, LA	2,670
San Diego, CA	26,984	Mobile, AL	-162
Cleveland, OH	25,915	Birmingham, AL	-7,878
New York, NY	24,091	AVERAGE FOR 40 AREAS	38,448
Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater, FL	23,422		

Note: List contains only metropolitan areas with at least 50,000 blacks living in suburban neighborhoods.

Source: Census Bureau

and they increased 98 percent in Chicago's DuPage County.

In fact, some of the nation's largest metros recorded rapid growth in the number of black suburbanites during the 1980s, while the metros' total population hardly grew at all. The number of suburban blacks grew 65 percent in Chicago, for example, but the total population of the Chicago metro increased a scant 0.2 percent during the 1980s. The same is true of slow-growing Detroit, Cleveland, and Philadelphia, all of which experienced at least a 25 percent in-

crease in the number of suburban blacks.

Suburban blacks even outpaced the total population growth rate in faster-growing metros. In Riverside-San Bernardino, where suburban blacks increased 179 percent, the total population grew 66 percent. In Atlanta, where black suburbanites grew 95 percent, the total population grew 33 percent. Clearly, suburban blacks are a fast-growing market segment within a slow-growing country.

Suburban blacks often live in counties that still show a high degree of segregation at the neighborhood level. In Prince

George's County, for example, 51 percent of the population are black, 43 percent are white, and 6 percent are of other races. But more than half of all census tracts in Prince George's are at least 70 percent white or 70 percent black, according to the Census Bureau.

This segregation is a choice affluent blacks sometimes make for themselves. "We always wanted to make sure our child had many African-American children to play with, not just one or two," says Barron Harvey, a Howard University professor and business consultant who lives in Prince George's County. "We always wanted to be in a community with a large number of black professionals and to feel part of that community," he said in the *New York Times Magazine*.

Discrimination is also a factor in segregating black suburbs. Numerous studies have shown that almost three decades after the Civil Rights Act, blacks and whites are still treated differently when they buy housing.

Middle- and upper-class blacks are a growing force in the American marketplace. Targeting black suburbs is clearly the way to reach this segment, but marketing efforts directed at this group must be handled with care. Today's affluent blacks are enthusiastic believers in the American dream, but they are also proud of their heritage. Businesses that want their money must first gain their respect.

TAKING IT FURTHER

This study contrasts data from the 1980 and 1990 censuses, holding metropolitan area boundaries constant to examine changes over time. For more information, see William H. Frey, "Minority Suburbanization and Continued 'White Flight' in U.S. Metropolitan Areas: Assessing Findings from the 1990 Census," Research Report 92-240, available from the Population Studies Center at the University of Michigan, 1225 S. University Avenue, Ann Arbor, MI 48104; William O'Hare, Kelvin M. Pollard, Taynia L. Mann, and Mary Kent, *African Americans in the 1990s*, published by the Population Reference Bureau, 1875 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 520, Washington, DC 20009; "In the Black," *American Demographics*, November 1989; and "Shades of Black," *American Demographics*, September 1990.