

What's Behind the "Growth" of Whites in United States Cities?

By [Abayomi Azikiwe](#)

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A recently released census report indicates that white populations are starting to increase in United States urban areas.

Although showing signs of a slight growth in white persons living in cities where many fled decades ago, does not necessarily translate into the improvement of the social conditions of the African American and Latino communities inhabiting municipalities, the numbers in fact reflect a further lessening of commitment to the maintenance and well-being of people of color communities which are being forced to re-locate.

This phenomenon was played up in the Detroit News daily publication which has been a major proponent of the restructuring of the city based upon the interests of the banks and multi-national corporations. Detroit and other large urban areas fell-victim to decades of job losses, predatory lending and hostile racist public policies which have closed schools and forced greater numbers of people into poverty and political marginalization.

Since Detroit was railroaded into the largest municipal bankruptcy in U.S. history during 2013-2014, the "re-building" of the city which is championed by the ruling class press is based upon the notion in part of a reverse migration of whites coupled with measures forcing African Americans, Latinos and poor people in general out.

Even the Washington Post took notice of the corporate media articles related to the growth in whites living in cities. In collaboration with William Frey, a demographer at the Brookings Institution, the census data was analyzed in light of migration patterns over the last sixty plus years in major urban areas.

The International Business Times said of this shift that "The media has covered white populations moving to cities individually in the past, often writing about the trends on an individual basis as certain neighborhoods change due to gentrification. Especially with the 10-year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina in August, many outlets wrote about the changing demographics in New Orleans." (September 25)

The reports goes on saying "But now that this looks like a broader trend, Frey told the Washington Post he doesn't believe that means it will be a long term pattern in the same way white flight was in the 1950s. 'It's not something to say we're going to move 180 degrees in the other direction,' Frey said. And the white population isn't growing as rapidly as it used to anyway. But it is an indicator that whatever kind of city revival — whether it's short-term or long-term that we're seeing — is involving whites.'"

The Poorest City Being "Revitalized"

The city of Detroit was cited as an example where it was said that 8,000 more whites have moved into the municipality. However, just the week before another report was issued noting that the city, which has an African American population of over 80 percent, is also the most economically underdeveloped and deprived through impoverishment of the people.

The same Detroit News which cheers and advocates on a daily basis the disempowerment and exploitation of the majority population in the city, was forced to report on September 16 that despite all of the ruling class propaganda of a revival, that Detroit remains the poorest large city in the country. This is the case despite the bankruptcies of two of the automakers in 2009 and the city itself over the last two years.

An article published in the News said "Michigan is among 12 states that saw a decline in the percentage of people living in poverty in 2014 though the state's poverty rate remained higher than the national average, according to a U.S. Census Bureau report released Wednesday.

Detroit was the most impoverished major city in America with 39.3 percent living below a poverty line of \$24,008 for a family of four. But Flint topped the list of Michigan's poorest cities with 40.1 percent of residents living in poverty."

Both Detroit and Flint were hubs of the automotive industry during the 20th century where the UAW and various labor unions fought battles to win recognition for bargaining rights and other concessions granted by the corporate owners and bosses. During the latter decades of the 20th century hundreds of thousands of jobs within the industry were lost to automation and capital flight. Other sectors of the economy related and non-related to auto shed millions of jobs as well creating ongoing instability within the labor market and a drastic decline in household income and wealth among the working class, particularly among African Americans and other oppressed communities.

Making matters even worse during the last years of the 1990s a deliberate program of predatory lending by the banks targeted African Americans and Latinos draining their limited wealth obtained through home equity and meaningful employment. Working people were forced to bail out the banks and insurance magnates in 2008. Nonetheless, the world capitalist system remains unstable as evidenced by the precipitous decline in oil and commodity prices along with the volatility of the various stock markets internationally.

The rebuilding of the cities on a sound basis will take much more than the migration of thousands of whites from the suburbs. Infrastructural improvements in power systems, bridges, roads, streets, public transportation, senior services, healthcare, public education, housing, water services and other areas are required and these developments would necessitate the investments by the federal government and the corporate community to the tune of trillions of dollars.

Political Impact of Demographic Shift Towards Urban Migration and Mass Poverty

The question is what are the social, racial and class implications of this emerging demographic shift? Corporate media interests suggest that the whites moving back into the cities are from higher socio-economic strata and this is necessary for redevelopment.

Whereas in Detroit and in other cities, African American and Latino populations have been systematically disempowered by the banks and corporations through job losses, predatory

mortgage and municipal lending, tax increases, water shutoffs, utility terminations, property tax foreclosures, state repression, attacks on public education and other services. Access to bourgeois democratic reforms is being rapidly eroded in favor of corporate and bank-led municipal governments which routinely ignore the needs and aspirations of the workers and the poor.

In order to reverse this trend of coercive removals and impoverishment there must be an alliance of popular forces led by the working class among the oppressed to reclaim their rights to the cities. The banks must be compelled along with the federal government to rebuild the cities based on the interests of the people who live there.

Under capitalism the system of profit maximization fueled the outmigration of whites from the urban areas during the post-World War II period. Government funding and insuring of mortgage lending, so-called "slum demolitions programs", and massive highway construction ripped apart African American and oppressed neighborhoods taking away housing, schools, small businesses, churches, community centers and burgeoning political bases.

Ultimately the construction of socialism provides the only sustainable solution to the crisis of the cities. Resources which are wasted on prestige projects built largely through the expropriation of public funding can be utilized for the purpose of genuine revitalization where youth, workers, seniors, people living with disabilities and others are given priority over banks and real estate investors.

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