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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

WSJ.com

U.S. NEWS | MARCH 23, 2011

Detroit's Population Crashes

Census Finds 25% Plunge as Blacks Flee to Suburbs; Shocked Mayor Seeks Recount

By KATE LINEBAUGH



DETROIT—The population of Detroit has fallen back 100 years.

The flight of middle-class African-Americans to the suburbs fueled an exodus that cut Detroit's population 25% in the past decade to 713,777, according to Census Bureau data released Tuesday. That's the city's lowest population level since the 1910 census, when automobile mass production was making Detroit Detroit.

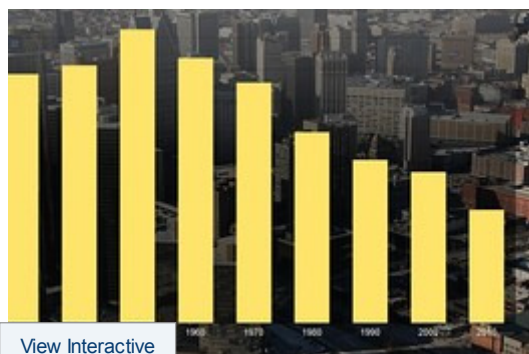
The decline, the fastest in city history, shocked local officials, who had expected a number closer to 800,000. Mayor Dave Bing said the city would seek a recount.

"If we could go out and identify another 40,000 people that were missed, and it brings us over the threshold of 750,000, that would make a difference from what we can get from the

federal and state government," Mr. Bing said at a news conference Tuesday.

In all, the city lost more than 237,000 residents, including 185,000 blacks and about 41,000 whites. The Hispanic population ticked up by 1,500. Meanwhile, the black population in neighboring Macomb County more than tripled to 72,723, constituting 8.6% of the county's population in 2010, compared with 2.7% a decade earlier. Oakland County's African-American population rose 36% to 164,078.

Detroit's Population Crash



See the city's population since 1900.

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Detroit's population has fallen steadily since the heyday of the auto industry in the 1950s, when it peaked around two million, but the declines have accelerated in recent years as manufacturing jobs have disappeared and the mortgage crisis has devastated even stable, middle-class neighborhoods. The number of vacant housing units doubled in the past decade to nearly 80,000, more than one-fifth of the city's housing stock, the Census Bureau reported.

"For those of us who have been out in the neighborhoods, we knew that the foreclosures and the abandonment were really extreme and accelerating," said Lyke Thompson, director of Wayne State University's Center for Urban Studies. "The question is, can you put a bottom under it?"

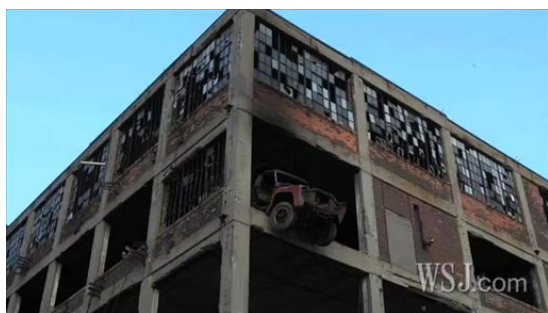
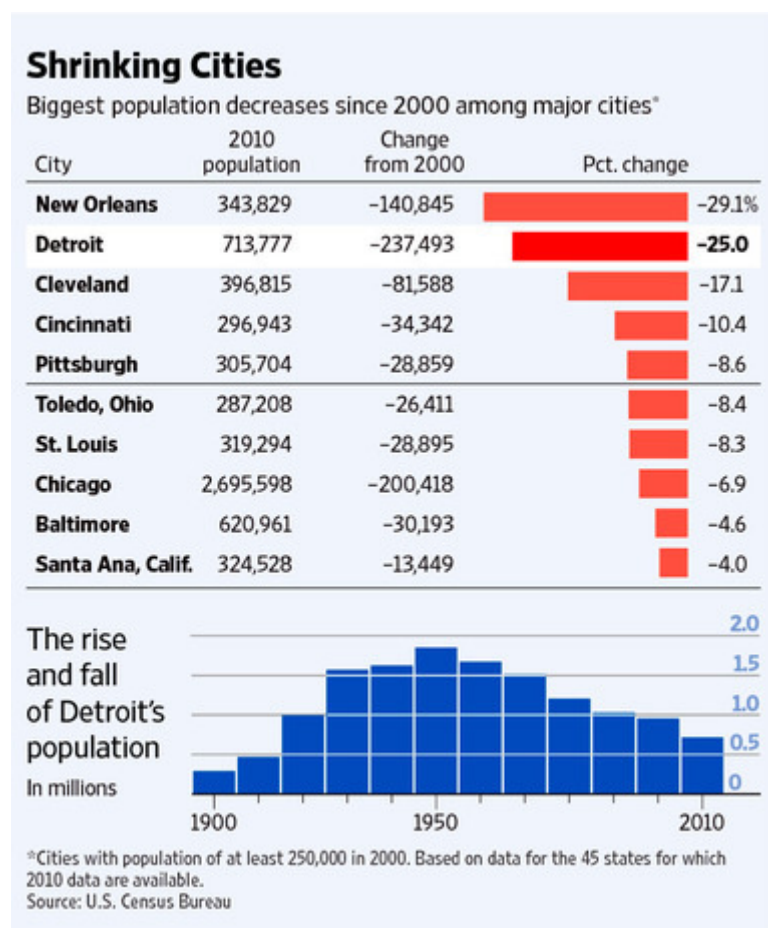
In 1950, Detroit was the fifth-largest city in America, behind New York, Chicago, Philadelphia and Los Angeles, and it was in the top 10 as recently as the 1990 Census. Now, Detroit is likely to fall to 19th, behind Indianapolis and Columbus, Ohio.

The numbers add new urgency to Mr. Bing's campaign to align the sprawling city's finances and geography with its shrinking population—a process the mayor acknowledges is taking more time than he envisioned. For more than a year, the mayor has been working on a restructuring plan that would end some municipal services in sparsely populated areas. At the same time, the city is working to attract young, educated residents to help stabilize neighborhoods.

"We are going to continue to lose population unless we continue to make cultural changes," Mayor Bing said Tuesday. "We have got to make sure that our neighborhoods are safe, that they are growing, that we have good housing stock and make sure that people have the right services. All those things are very important at maintaining population."

Detroit's Smaller Reality

02/27/2010



In September, 2009, a dump truck got pushed out of the window on the fourth floor of an abandoned Packard

Earlier this year, the mayor announced a program to entice Detroit police officers—more than half of whom live outside the city—to buy homes in the Detroit. The initial response has been strong, Police Chief Ralph Godbee said in an interview last week. Wayne State and two downtown hospital systems have offered a similar program in the city's Midtown neighborhood, the hub of a growing creative community.

Even with these programs, local demographer Kurt Metzger expects the city's population to fall further. High taxes and failing schools in the city, and inexpensive housing in the suburbs, combine to make Detroit a tough sell.

"People are still looking to move out for safety and services," said Mr. Metzger, director of Data Driven Detroit, which compiles Census data for the city. The population-decline numbers, which exceeded his own estimates by 75,000, will only reinforce negative perceptions of the city, he said.

The Census report comes amid signs that the regional and state economies are beginning to stabilize. Michigan added 10,000 manufacturing jobs last year, and unemployment has dropped sharply.

Some pockets of Detroit are seeing growth, led by immigrants, young professionals and artisans, which Mayor Bing sees as an important trend. "We are getting a lot of that 21-to-30 population moving back to the city," he said. "I think that bodes very well for us."

Emily Linn, 33 years old, opened a store in 2009 with her brother in Midtown selling goods from local artists and craftspeople. "Throughout Detroit's history, there has been work on revitalization. It seems like there is kind of a critical mass right now," said Ms. Linn. "In Midtown, we actively notice a lot of new residents."

Detroit's largely Hispanic southwest neighborhood remains stable, helped by new immigration, cheap housing and low barriers of entry, said Angela Reyes, executive director of the Detroit Hispanic Development Corp., a community organization.

Jose Jesus Lopez, 45, started his restaurant Mi Pueblo in southwest Detroit in 2000. Since then, it has grown from 13 tables to 56 tables, plus a separate banquet center. "Southwest

Detroit works as a community," Mr. Lopez said. "The Depression and all the tough times, we made it through, so many businesses survived."

—Matthew Dolan contributed to this article.

Write to Kate Linebaugh at kate.linebaugh@wsj.com

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