

Black population in South rising

WASHINGTON (AP) - Previous generations left the South to escape slavery and racial tension. Later, other blacks departed for better economic opportunities elsewhere in the country.

Today, the black population is rising faster in the South than any other region of the country, the 2000 census shows.

Blacks came for jobs, the warm climate and cultural opportunities, specifically in booming metropolitan areas like Atlanta and Charlotte, N.C. Those shifts promise to boost the already strong political and social clout of blacks in the region, experts say.

But during the 1990s - a decade of soaring economic and population growth through much of the country - the South held an added attraction for many blacks other regions did not have, University of Michigan demographer William Frey said.

"Coming full circle, the new census shows that blacks ended the 20th century by returning to the region that they spent most of the century leaving," Frey said. Blacks have historical ties to the South and "recognize a much-improved climate in race relations."

Atlanta and other parts of the South are "perceived as a place where a black person can come and really reach their potential," said Jacqueline Taylor, a former Louisiana lawyer and now president of the Black Newcomers Network support group in Atlanta. "It's a snowball effect."

Nearly 18.8 million Southerners identified themselves in the 2000 census as "not Hispanic" and black or partially black, up 20 percent from 1990. By comparison, the African-American population rose 14 percent in the Midwest, 11 percent in the Northeast, and 10 percent in the West.

An additional 463,000 non-Hispanic blacks in the South checked off at least one other race on their form. When adding those responses, the black population increased 23 percent during the decade, again higher than any other region.

This was the first census in which Americans had the option to tell if they were of more than one race. Therefore, direct comparisons to prior censuses were impossible.

Still, it is the first time that the South surpassed other regions in black growth in decades, Frey said in a study to be published next week in *Population Today*, the journal of the Population Reference Bureau. Frey looked at census figures dating to 1960.

In the 1990s, the South was also the only region that saw more blacks move in than move out, he estimated using additional bureau surveys not available in the 2000 census.

The Atlanta metropolitan area, long home to a substantial black population, especially benefited.

While the non-Hispanic black population decreased slightly in the city, it nearly doubled in the suburbs. The main reasons were job growth outside central cities, and the fact that more middle-class black families can afford to move out of the city, said Roderick Harrison, an analyst with the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies.

"Atlanta has really become a black middle-class mecca," Harrison said.

Take Diane Johnson, for example. She had no connections to the Atlanta area when she moved from Detroit last fall.

But she wanted to open a day care center, and thought that Atlanta's burgeoning suburbs were the place to do it. She runs one facility in Clarkston, about 30 minutes from downtown, and has plans to open more.

"The opportunity is here, the need is here," she said while her charges took an afternoon nap. "There is such a tremendous influx of new people here all the time."

Regardless of the economic situation, an easing of racial tensions, and tougher enforcement of civil rights and fair housing laws, have made the South more livable for blacks since the 1960s, said Hilary Shelton, director of the Washington, D.C., chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Ministers

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violence...we are to help each other and love each other," said Pastor S.S. Rogers, Mt. Sinai M.B.C. who had at least 30 of his congregation at the rally. "We are tired and others are tired of our decreasing population (referring to gang activities which are taking people's lives)."

After all was said and done, at least 30 religious leaders were present to march, rally, preach or whatever with the small amount of people who turned out

(100). The long list of dignitaries was cut down to two with a booth available for anyone interested in attending Community College of Southern Nevada.

"We're trying to build community relations," said NLV Councilman John Rhodes who along with NLV Police Chief Joey Tillman attended the rally. "Build peace through the men and women of God."

Founded in '96, the alliance consists of 52 pastors touting a combined membership of a whopping 40,000



Sentinel-Voice photo by Ramon Savoy

March participants pump their fists in solidarity.

plus.

"There is too much killing in our community," said 13-year-old Tivoe Charter of the

Second Baptist Church Boy Scouts. "Its bad because a lot of kids are killed before they can grow up."

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