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NEWS

'The New Migration': What's Behind Black People Leaving Traditional Urban Cities?

By Kavontae Smalls | March 25, 2022 Comments (0)

What were once traditional hubs of a bustling Black populations, urban metropolitan areas like Chicago, Detroit, New York, and even Washington, D.C., are seeing drops in their Black populations over the past two decades, according to the latest census data. One possible reason behind the population shift is a modern-day migration of Black people leaving urban cities for the suburbs for better economic opportunities.

What's Behind Black People Leaving Traditional Urban Cities?

Research and marketing firm Development Counsellors International, or DCI, may have an explanation for the population shift after it combed through cities or metro areas that all have initiatives of some kind specifically targeting Black

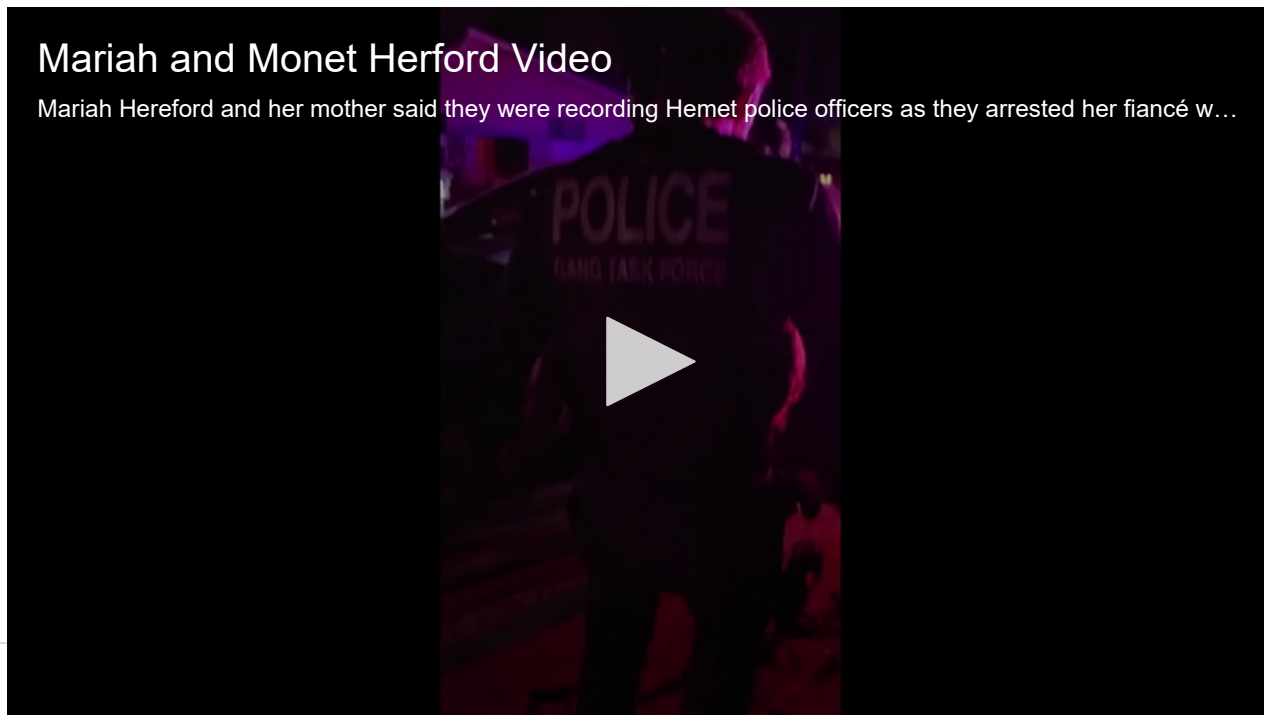
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The cities include Tulsa, Oklahoma, Fargo, North Dakota, Fayetteville, North Carolina, Jacksonville, Florida, Colorado Springs, Colorado, Cincinnati, Ohio, Charleston, South Carolina, Carolina Core, North Carolina (Winston-Salem, Greensboro, High Point metro area). Some of the cities listed have seen growth in their Black populations while others remained steady, and a few cities saw slight drops.

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“Our goal is wanting to make sure Blacks can benefit from the economic growth. This definitely gave us an opportunity to shine a light on rising cities that are taking major steps to elevate the Black community so that’s through career opportunities, and the overall quality of life,” said Symeria Palmer, DCI Account Manager.

In Tulsa, Arthur Jackson, 39, moved to the city a little less than a year ago to work for the local Chamber. Tulsa is using incentives to attract people include new remote tech-related jobs and programs like Tulsa Remote which pays \$10,000 for people to move into the city. The program is funded by the George Kaiser Foundation and administered by the city and other local organizations.

“Originally, it was \$10,000 grant to move there, and the stipulation is you have to stay a year,” Jackson said of the Remote Tulsa program.

In Charleston, Boeing’s manufacturing plant wants to increase its Black workforce by 20 Percent over the next five years. In Cincinnati, its minority business accelerator program helped 70 Black-owned businesses flourish in recent years creating 3,500 jobs.

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... minority business development program which has served as a national model for minority-owned businesses,” Palmer said.

Palmer says many of the cities were already developing programs to improve the quality of life for its Black residents and attract more Black people well before the 2020 racial reckoning, when many institutions and cities were compelled to review their treatment and standards of living for African-Americans.

In Fargo, North Dakota, the Black population grew from 2.7 percent in 2010 to 8.8 percent in 2020. Palmer cited the emerging Black immigrant community in the northern Plains state as part of the population growth. "There are about 7,000 Liberians living in Fargo, and they also have a strong Somali community there as well," Palmer said.

Terry Hogan is one of Fargo's newer Black residents. He recently moved to the city from Chicago to work as the city's first director of diversity, equity and inclusion. "I'm still seeing people of color who look like me in the various areas, I still have to adjust to their cultural perspective and assimilate somehow," Hogan said of his experience so far in Fargo.

Hogan describes the city of Fargo very urban, something he's familiar with, having moved from the Windy City. "It's very urban as though I'm in Chicago and I can go to various restaurants and I can do the many things I want to do and at the same time too, if I want to go out and do something like hiking, I can do that and feel safe upon doing that," Hogan said.

The economics of these cities also prove attractive, particularly their lower-than-average cost of living. For Matthew Worley, the cost of living, a new job and the growing Black population in Rockford, Illinois, helped entice him to move from Chicago. "The increase in the Black population is attributed to many factors but the cost of living here is amazing," Worley said.

Rockford's cost of living is 18 Percent lower than the national average, the average monthly cost of rent is \$772, and mortgage is \$1,117, compared to Chicago where the average monthly cost of rent is \$1,112 and mortgage is \$1,974 according to census data.

Rockford's aerospace industry is aggressively working to boost its Black workforce and the city saw its Black population grow a little more than 9 percent over the last decade. One of its top aerospace companies, Collins Aerospace, has an African-American employee resource group that's focused on recruitment and retention.



The city also has an emergence of Black professional networking organizations for the newcomers. Worley has visited the city several times before making the move official within the last year. "I hope to see a renaissance here specifically for the Black population to ensure that we can bring better jobs and bring better activities because I think it's coming," Worley said.

Despite the job opportunities presented today, some of the cities listed have a racial past that's proved daunting towards Black people such as Tulsa and the Tulsa Race Massacre that took place from May 31 through June 1, 1921, where a white mob destroyed the predominantly Black neighborhood of Greenwood killing hundreds of people and left many more homeless.

Arthur Jackson, who moved to Tulsa from Austin, Texas, says the city recognizes its past but has made great strides



have come into a community where there's a lot of racial tensions," Jackson said.

Jackson points to the influx of diverse young city leaders and intentional efforts by the city to look out for its Black community which is a little more than 62,000.

"It's been a community effort to focus on North Tulsa and Greenwood district to continue revitalize that but as we look at redevelopment and reuse in a community you want to be careful not to push out and gentrify areas especially historic areas like Greenwood that's been through so much within the last century," Jackson said.

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