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AFRICAN AMERICAN OUT-MIGRATION TRENDS  
INITIAL SCAN OF NATIONAL AND LOCAL TRENDS  
IN MIGRATION AND RESEARCH ON AFRICAN AMERICANS

Prepared for

Mayors Office of Community Development  
Task Force on African American Out-migration

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this report is to provide the reader with “baseline” information about African American migration patterns in the U.S. and provide a scan of relevant research needed to understand recent out-migration patterns of African Americans in San Francisco. This document provides a summary of the recent trends in African American migration in the US and more specifically in San Francisco. It is not an exhaustive inventory of research or a complete literature review of research on African American out-migration. Rather, we provide a synthesis of the research on these trends as a way to more fully understand African American migration patterns of African Americans in San Francisco. Using data from the 1990 and 2000 census, American Community Survey as well as pooled survey data gathered from the San Francisco City Survey 2005 and 2007, this document addresses four guiding questions:

1. What is African American out-migration?
2. How do we understand past trends in African American out-migration?
3. What does research say about African American out-migration?
4. How do we describe recent African American out-migration trends in San Francisco?

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## Overview

Lester Thomas made his first visit to the suburb of Antioch at the age of 63. By the time he returned to San Francisco, this long time resident had decided to leave the city and purchase in Antioch for good (Hendrix, 2001). Enamored with the idea of affordable housing and easy parking, the retired Muni bus driver said leaving city for greener pastures was an easy decision. In June of 2001, he sold his three-bedroom home in the Bayview Hunters Point where he had lived for 43 years and moved into a new two-story, six-bedroom, three-garage house.

Thomas is not alone. His move reflects a growing trend in the Bay Area where increasing numbers of African Americans are abandoning the city for a life in the suburbs. According to Census 2000 figures five of nine Bay Area counties—Alameda, Marin, San Francisco, San Mateo and Santa Clara—have shown decreases in the African American population (U.S. Census 2000). The shrinking African American population is not just a Bay Area phenomenon. According to Andrew Wiese, author of *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century*, “between 1960-2000, the number of African Americans living in suburbs grew by approximately 9 million, representing a migration as large as the exodus of African Americans from the rural South in the mid-twentieth century” (Wiese, 2003). Recent migration trends in San Francisco are a reflection of local, regional and national push and pull factors.

This document provides a summary of the recent trends in African American migration in the U.S. and more specifically, San Francisco. We also provide a synthesis of the research on these trends as a way to more fully understand African American migration patterns of African Americans in San Francisco. Using data from the 1990 and 2000 census as well as pooled survey data gathered from the San Francisco City Survey 2005 and 2007, this document addresses four guiding questions:

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## What is Out-migration?

Out-migration can be described as a movement and/or resettlement of groups of people from one city to another. Out-migration usually refers to movement patterns that result in a rapid decreased population that was once drawn to a particular geographic location. Migration patterns for African Americans can usually be described in four waves.

## **Periods of African American Migration**

The first wave of African American migration occurred from 1840-1890 largely among southern families moving North to seek refuge from racial restrictions and Jim Crow laws in the South. The second wave of African American migration occurred from 1916-1930 and is commonly referred to as the “Great” migration of African Americans from Southern to Northern cities. This wave of migration is largely attributed to need for the decline in the production of cotton in the south and the need for cheap labor in the North due to WWI. By 1930, nearly 43% of all African Americans lived in urban areas in the US. The third wave of migration occurred between 1940-1970 from southern and northern cities to western cities. First, drawn by the transatlantic railroad in 1869, then later in 1941, by industrial and military jobs available in Los Angeles, Oakland, and San Francisco (Bagwell 1982; Crouchett, Bunch et al. 1989).

A fourth wave of migration is marked by African Americans moving from urban cities to the suburbs and returning to the South. According to C. Hocker (2007), author of *“Migration in Reverse”*. “The fact is African Americans desire the same things that all Americans want for their families: employment opportunities with well-paying positions that can keep up with—or stay ahead of—the cost of living; the chance to own affordable homes in safe neighborhoods; quality options for educating our children; and the social and cultural amenities that make it all worthwhile. Right now, the South, more than any other region of the country, is living up to that promise” (Hocker, 2007).

Many working and middle class families are moving to the suburbs where schools are better, neighborhoods are safer, and they can actually afford to buy a house (Clark, 2007; Massey, Gross, Shibuya 1994). At the other end of the spectrum, however, are African Americans who are returning to the South because of more supportive business opportunities for African American entrepreneurs (Hocker, 2007).

During the period between 1995 to 2000, urban areas in New York, California, Illinois experienced a dramatic decline in their African American population; respectively losing 165,366, 63,180, and 55,238 of the population. Simultaneously, suburban areas in southern states including, Georgia, North Carolina, and Florida had experience the largest gain (Frey, 2004). Combined regional Black out-migration in the Northeast and West during this period totaled 590,621 whereas Black in-migration to the Southern region was 680,131 resulting in an absolute gain of 89,510 for the South.

## **Research on African Americans that Move from Cities**

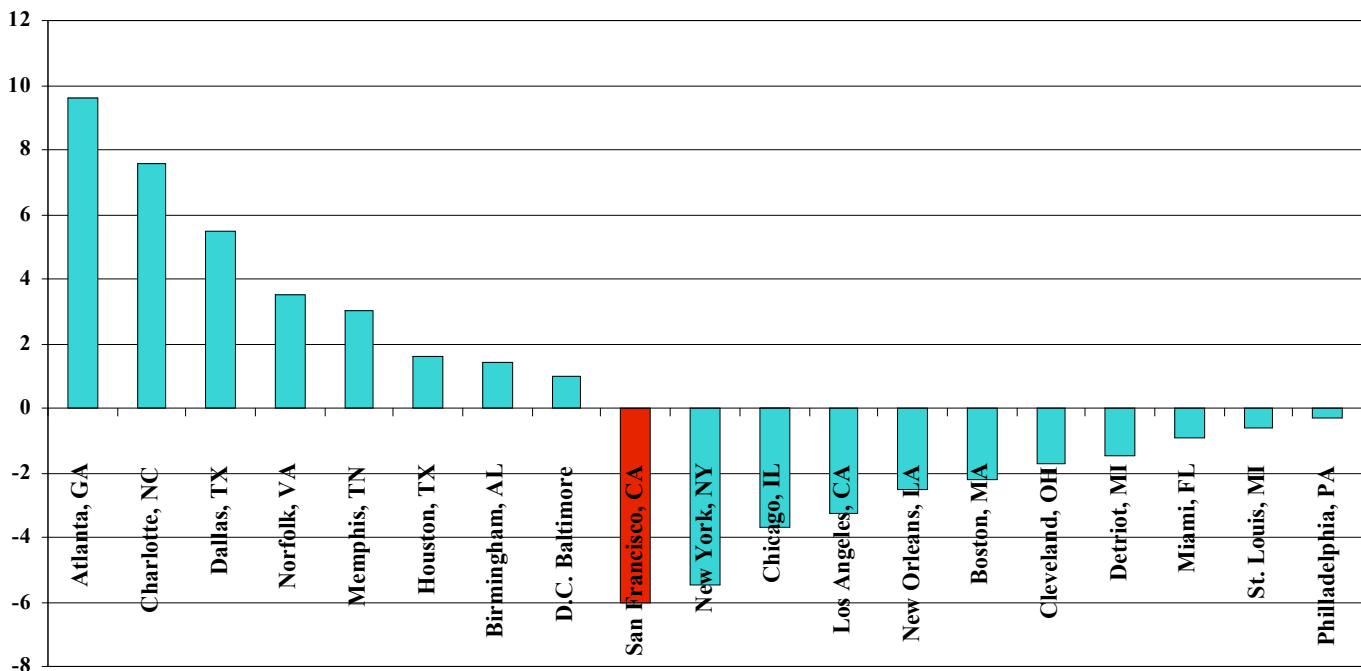
Recent research on out-migration has explored many aspects of Black suburbanization in the late twentieth and twenty first century. These include studies of migratory streams (Hocker, 2007), push/pull factors (Self, 2003); crime and delinquency (Shihadeh, E. S., Ousey, G. C., 1996), civil rights legislation (Stahura, John M. 1986), and the politics of gentrification on African American out-migration (Patillo-McCoy, 2000). There are two general themes that emerge from these studies:

- *African American out-migration tends to be most likely among the middle class*

Information gathered from the 2000 census suggests that African Americans who live in the suburbs have jumped by five percent points which estimates nearly 14 million people, between 1990 and 2000 which is approximately 39 percent of all African Americans (Whelan, 2001). Research suggests that African Americans who have moved to the suburbs experience greater economic wealth once they are there (Whelan, 2001). The increase in economic status has enabled many African Americans homeowners to sell their houses and take the profits to the suburbs (Hendrix, 2001). This new buying power has enabled African Americans to choose where they want to reside (Payton 2006) instead of being restricted as in times past.

Similarly research suggests that African Americans are able to move to the suburbs because they are obtaining post-secondary education in greater numbers. According to the 2000 Current Population Survey, African Americans with college degrees were at 17 percent, which is up from 15 percent in just one year (Whelan, 2001). The ability to find and obtain better paying jobs is a key issue. Therefore, as more companies are choosing to leave the cities relocate in suburban communities, an increasingly large number of skilled and highly educated African Americans are following these job opportunities.

**Net 1995-2000 Black Migration as Percentage of 2000 Black Population**



Source: The Brookings Institution, 2004

- *African American generally move from cities to the South or to suburbs*

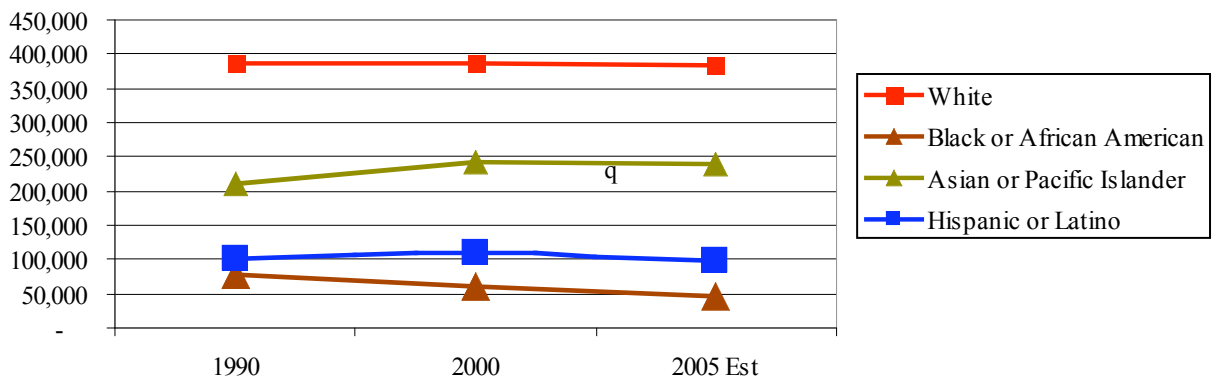
In recent decades, Census data suggests that there has been significant African American out-migration from Northern and Western metropolitan cities to the suburbs and back to the South. The South has seen a record gain of the African-American population, while the rest of the U.S. has experienced a decline (Frey, 2004; Hendrix, 2001; Hocker, 2005; McHugh, 1987; Payton, 2001). According to Frey's study, *The New Great Migration: Black Americans' Return to the South, 1965-2000*, Southern metropolitan areas, especially Atlanta, became a magnet for African-Americans in the late 1990s. According to Brown and Padgett (2007), the top ten cities for African Americans in 2007 include Jacksonville, Atlanta, Washington D.C., Raleigh-Durham, Houston, Nashville, Dallas, Charlotte, Indianapolis, and Columbus.

California has also experienced a major decline in the African American population especially in metropolitan cities, including San Francisco and Los Angeles (Frey, 2004; Fulbright, 2007; Hendrix, 2001). In general, African-Americans from the Bay Area are moving out of East Palo Alto, Berkeley, Oakland, and San Francisco and relocating to the suburbs of Antioch, Pittsburg, Brentwood, and Stockton (Hendrix, 2001). Some middle class African American families, who can afford the cost of living, are moving to white suburbs (Payton, 2006).

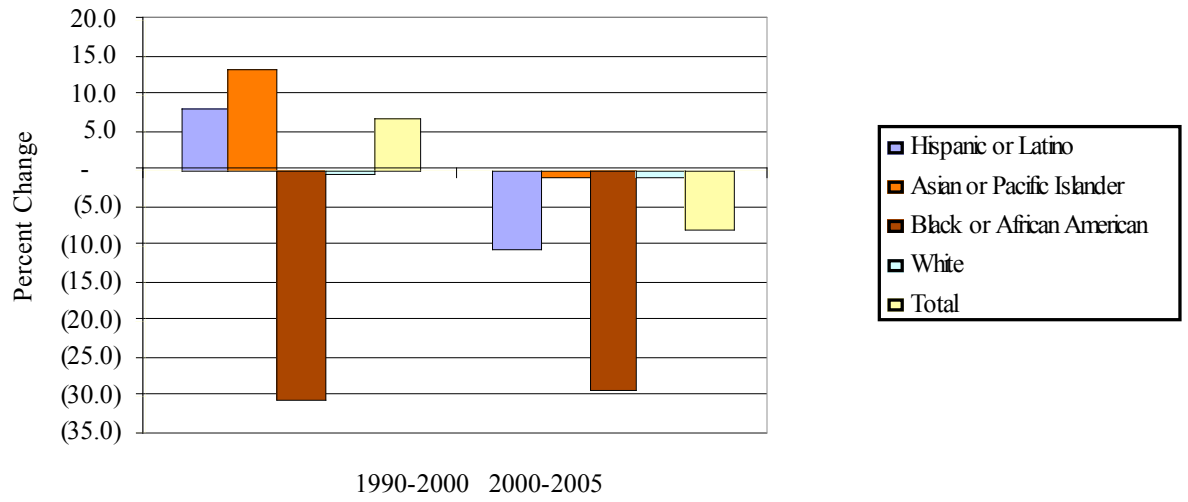
### San Francisco Trends in African American Out-migration

Several sources of data are available to document African American out-migration trends in San Francisco, including the US Census, the American Community Survey, and the biannual San Francisco City survey which was conducted by the Office of the Controller with the Public Research Institute at San Francisco State University. Based on U.S. census data, and American Community Survey data, the following table shows the decline in San Francisco's African American population from approximately 79,000 in 1990 to 47,000 in 1995.

**San Francisco Population By Race 1990, 2000, Estimated 2005**



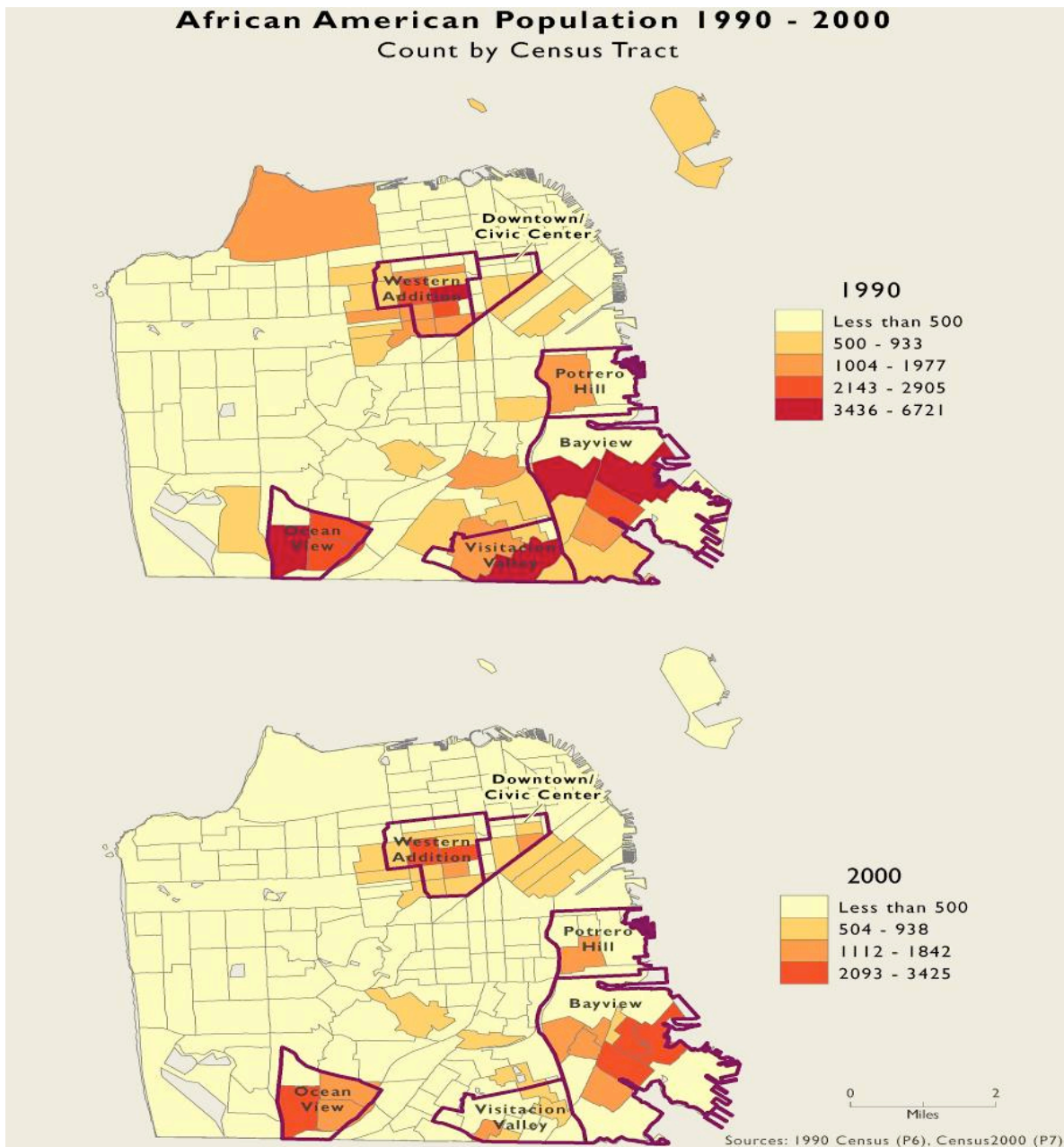
### Percent Change in Population By Race



- *African Americans neighborhoods in San Francisco are diminishing*

Based on census data tracking the percentage of African Americans in San Francisco neighborhoods has consistently diminished since 1990. The chart below illustrates the counted number of African Americans living in San Francisco census tracts in 1990 and 2000. This map represents an estimated 23% decrease in the number of African Americans living in San Francisco from 1990 to 2000.

### African American Population 1990 – 2000 Count by Census Tract



In 2005 and 2007, the San Francisco City Survey included the question, "How likely are you to move away from San Francisco in the next three years?" Of 350 African American survey respondents across the two surveys, 36% indicated that they were very likely or somewhat likely to leave San Francisco within three years. In an analysis controlling for factors such as age, education, and income, African Americans were twice as likely as Whites to say that they were likely to leave San Francisco within three years.

- ***African Americans 45 and under are three times more likely than older African American residents to say they are likely to leave San Francisco.***

In the same analysis, controlling for age, time lived in San Francisco, education, gender, and income, the only significant predictor of leaving San Francisco is age. Respondents younger than 45 were nearly three times more likely than older African American respondents to say that they expect to leave the city within the next three years.

- ***Lower income residents are as likely as middle income residents to leave San Francisco.***

A second important result of this analysis is that lower income status is not a good predictor of expectations to leave the city. Using indicators for household income of \$25K or less low income status was no more predictive of expectations of leaving SF than was higher income status of 50k or more. Nearly 41% of all African American respondents in the survey earned \$25K or less per year.

- ***Residents who lived in San Francisco for 20 years or more are less likely to indicate that they would move within three years.***

Based on survey results, 32% of the respondents who have lived in San Francisco 20 years or more were less likely to indicate that they would move from San Francisco in the next three years. In fact, nearly 52% of residents who have lived in San Francisco less than 20 years indicated that they were likely to move within three years or less.

### **Guiding Questions to Consider**

The information included in this report reflects an initial scan and analysis of census data, research and survey responses. It is clear from the material reviewed that African Americans in San Francisco are leaving at a higher rate than other metropolitan cities. We find it interesting however, that contrary to the literature on African American out-migration, and the report titled "[The Unfinished Agenda: The Economic Status of African Americans in San Francisco 1964-1990](#)", it appears that income is not a primary predictor for moving from San Francisco. Given these initial findings, we encourage the taskforce to consider the following questions;

1. Where are African Americans from San Francisco moving and why are they moving? What are the primary reasons for selecting the city where they now reside?
2. How do we describe the push and pull factors African Americans which contribute to out-migration?
3. What are the primary reasons that African Americans give that encourage them to continue to reside in San Francisco?
4. What are local policies that contribute to an “African American” friendly city?

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