

Nashville becomes more integrated

Neighborhoods reflect white, black moves, Hispanic growth

By **Michael Cass** • THE TENNESSEAN •
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Davidson County neighborhoods have become more racially diverse and integrated since 2000, and the city's Hispanic population has grown significantly, according to new, detailed census [data](#) released Tuesday.

In 2000, most of the county's white residents lived in neighborhoods that were more than 80 percent white, and most African-Americans lived in majority-black neighborhoods. **That's no longer true** for either group, reflecting **national trends**, data from the American Community Survey show.

Arnett Bodenhamer, a retired military man and former NAACP branch leader who has lived in Nashville most of his 77 years, said commuting each day from a suburban home to an urban [job](#) has become "kind of difficult" for some people.

"I just think folks are moving back into town," he said. "We just rented a house across from our church on 32nd Avenue to a white family. They're moving back from Franklin.

"It's not on the scale of white flight (from cities to suburbs after schools integrated 40 years ago). But you can see some of the white flight coming back."

The data seem to confirm what some politicians have been saying for years: Nashville is becoming a more multi-hued place with fewer racial and ethnic divisions. On Monday, Mayor Karl Dean asked state lawmakers not to hurt the city's economic development cause by adopting legislation on illegal immigration that could turn away convention and tourism [business](#).

The race trends also hint at the upcoming political and legal wrangling over the **2010 Census** figures, to be published beginning Tuesday. The numbers will be used to reallocate congressional districts, drawing new political boundaries.

"The political implications of these trends are great in the long run — majority-black districts will become harder to sustain, while more majority-Hispanic districts will emerge, especially for state and local positions," said John Logan, a sociologist at Brown University who has studied residential segregation.

Based on an annual sample of people living at about 3 million addresses, the **American**

Community Survey offers five-year estimates of demographic, social, economic and housing characteristics for cities, counties and even neighborhoods.

The numbers released Tuesday are for 2005 through 2009 and are meant to complement the 2010 Census population counts due next week, as well as more detailed demographic data coming in February, the U.S. Census Bureau said in a news release.

In 2000, almost 53 percent of Davidson County's black residents lived in majority-black neighborhoods. That number dropped to 45 percent in the new survey.

Similarly, almost 56 percent of the county's white residents lived in neighborhoods that were more than 80 percent white 10 years ago. Now that number is down to 46 percent.

Joe Cornelius, a retired Tennessee State University education administration professor, agreed with Bodenhamer, saying the struggles of **commuting**, including high gas prices, have caused some people to "come to the notion this is nonsense."



Arnett Bodenhamer thinks the commute from the suburbs has gotten to be too much for some people.

Nationally, the average white person now lives in a neighborhood that is 79 percent white, compared with 81 percent in 2000. The average black person lives in a 46 percent black neighborhood, down from 49 percent. For Hispanics, however, their average neighborhood last year was 45 percent Hispanic, up slightly from 44 percent.

Hispanic numbers rise

The survey also shows Nashville's Hispanic population nearly doubling since 2000, from about 26,000 residents then to almost 50,000 now. Students in Metro schools are now 16.75 percent Hispanic, compared with 5 percent in the fall of 2000, according to data provided by the school district.

Renata Soto, **executive director** of Conexion Americas, which helps Latino families in Middle Tennessee, said many people find the quality of life better here and jobs easier to find than in other cities.

Hispanic families also are becoming more established in Nashville and Middle Tennessee, Soto said. Men who get settled and "get the hang of how life here works" are bringing their families here to join them.

"You're seeing now more whole families, as opposed to just the dad sending money home," she said.

Growth has been especially strong in Antioch and other parts of southeastern Davidson County; Madison; and pockets of West Nashville. Councilman Michael Craddock of Madison said a large stock of rental property probably has more to do with it than any other factor.

"When you come here from another country and you're a blue-collar worker, it's hard to buy a house," he said. "The alternative is to rent."

Craddock and Councilman Robert Duvall, who represents part of Antioch, said they haven't noticed any tensions between racial and ethnic groups as a result of the increasing diversity.

"The community works very hard together," Duvall said. "As far as I'm concerned, we're all American. I don't care if you're Hispanic or German or black or white."

Mike Hodge, programs manager for the Neighborhoods Resource Center, said settlement in an area by one group of people tends to attract their friends and relatives, a natural "affinity group."

As that happens, neighborhoods have to be cognizant of everyone's needs and find common ground underlying their differences.

"One of the issues it raises is the same that's always been there: How do you make sure to include people in decision making?" Hodge said. "You have a much stronger organization when you're able to include as many people as you can."

Database editor Lisa Green and The Associated Press contributed to this report. Contact Michael Cass at 615-259-8838 or mcass@tennessean.com.