



February 20, 2011

Canton sees increase in white population

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Like anyone who doesn't show his or her age, the population of the greater Jackson area developed few wrinkles in the past 10 years.

While the faces of Jackson's suburb counties of Madison and Rankin in particular have filled out substantially, you'd still recognize them anywhere.

"The city of Jackson is remaining black and its suburbs white," said John R. Logan, a Brown University sociology professor, and director of US 2010, a program researching recent societal changes.

"There isn't a great racial shift in the overall population; it looks like people are in place."

Still, there are some visible signs of maturing, including bumps in the Hispanic and Asian populations, phenomenal rates of growth in a couple of communities, and slight shifts in the racial balance for certain areas, the 2010 census shows.

Canton, for instance, is the only major city or town within Hinds, Rankin and Madison counties where whites saw their share of the overall population go up.

Said Sharon Eller, who moved to Canton with her family a few years ago: "I think it's great that Canton is becoming more diverse."

"Diverse" in the sense that the Madison County city has had a majority black population for decades, and still does - 74.7 percent, down from 80.3 in 2000.

Since the last census, the white population in Canton has increased by almost 7 percent and is now 19.5 percent of the total, compared to 18.6 percent a decade ago.

"We've noticed quite a few white families and couples who have moved into the area, so that doesn't surprise me," Eller said.

"Almost universally, people talk about the small-town atmosphere; some have said you can find more house for your money than anywhere else in Madison County."

A former resident of Baltimore, Eller moved with her husband Alex to Canton in the summer of 2006, and they now have a son, Max, 4.

Sharon Eller grew up in the Jackson area.

"When we came back to Mississippi, we looked for a place in Canton and just fell in love with the

house we finally bought," she aid.

"We love the historic homes here, and Canton is a very welcoming, very friendly town. It has so much potential and room for a lot more growth."

Growth is a given in Madison County, but nowhere moreso than in the city of Madison, which tacked on almost 9,500 residents, a rate greater than 64 percent.

At 24,149, Madison's population now exceeds that of its neighbor and rival Ridgeland (24,047), which grew by a much smaller 26.4 percent.

"We have grown this city for families," said Madison Mayor Mary Hawkins Butler.

"Housing is our industry, and families are our business.

"We're also focused on the retirement community. A lot of retirees come to the city.

"It's a mixture of people coming to this area."

Madison's population, however, is the least diverse in the county, with an 85.5 percent white majority, compared to 10.2 percent for black residents.

Still, Madison had a white majority of more than 93 percent in 2000. The number of residents in each racial or ethnic group has jumped since then, with Asians recording the biggest leap - 338 percent - for a total of 771.

In the county as a whole, the Hispanic population almost quadrupled, from 742 to more than 2,800, and now makes up 2.9 percent of the total count, compared to 1 percent in 2000.

"The problem with racial and ethnic populations in the census is that they add up to more than 100 percent," said Michael Reinhard, assistant professor of political science at Millsaps College.

"People can choose more than one category of race or ethnicity, or as many as they want. But it doesn't tell us very much.

"As for Hispanics, I believe it's too early to say what the numbers mean - whether it's an influx of people, or it's people who are already here deciding to change what they call themselves."

But Bill Chandler believes it's more likely that a greater number of Hispanics decided to be counted.

"They have an aversion to talking to anybody representing the federal government," said Chandler Jr., executive director of the Mississippi Immigrants Rights Alliance.

That has led to undercounts for the Hispanic/Latino population, he said.

Hoping to help the Census Bureau get a more accurate count, MIRA and other organizations encouraged Latino participation in the 2010 census, Chandler said.

That effort extended to Madison County and especially Canton, which recorded the greatest percentage of Hispanics in the county: 5.5.

"Still there are a lot of glitches in the whole (census) effort," he said, "and I believe that generally the

population here is significantly undercounted."

At any rate, Ridgeland is home to the greatest number of Hispanics in the county - 1,133. That represents a spike of more than 260 percent since 2000.

Ridgeland is also home to the county's largest Asian population - 960 residents, or 4 percent of its total.

The city appears to have the county's most diverse population; the number of African-American residents more than doubled since 2000.

In the county's southwestern corner, the town of Flora lost its white majority of 57.1 percent, adding only one white resident since 2000.

Black residents now make up more than 51 percent of the total, compared to 42 percent in 2000.

Still, Logan said, racial segregation is the rule in most communities.

"People are remaining separate, though not to the same degree as the average across the country.

"It's in the Northeast and Midwest where we see the more separate living arrangements. The movement of African Americans to the South is part of that.

"It's the feeling that there may be a better racial climate there."

Additional Facts

By the numbers

Madison County 2000

- Total population: 74,674
- White: 45,021 (60.3 percent)
- Black: 27,987 (37.5 percent)
- Hispanic or Latino: 742 (1 percent)
- Asian: 973 (1.3 percent)

2010

- Total population: 95,203
- White: 54,270 (57 percent)
- Black: 36,368 (38.2 percent)
- Hispanic or Latino: 2,806 (2.9 percent)
- Asian: 2,040 (2.1 percent)

Canton 2000

- Total population: 12,911
- White: 2,406 (18.6 percent)
- Black: 10,368 (80.3 percent)
- Hispanic or Latino: 56 (0.4 percent)
- Asian: 26 (0.2 percent)

2010

- Total population: 13,189
- White: 2,573 (19.5 percent)
- Black: 9,850 (74.7 percent)
- Hispanic or Latino: 726 (5.5 percent)
- Asian: 81 (0.6 percent)

Flora 2000

- Total population: 1,546
- White: 882 (57.1 percent)
- Black: 650 (42 percent)
- Hispanic or Latino: 5 (0.3 percent)
- Asian: 0

2010

- Total population: 1,886
- White: 883 (46.8 percent)
- Black: 966 (51.2 percent)
- Hispanic or Latino: 67 (3.6 percent)
- Asian: 2 (0.1 percent)

Madison (city) 2000

- Total population 14,692

- White: 13,697 (93.2 percent)
- Black: 719 (4.9 percent)
- Hispanic or Latino: 102 (0.7 percent)
- Asian: 176 (1.2 percent)

2010

- Total population: 24,149
- White: 20,645 (85.5 percent)
- Black: 2,471 (10.2 percent)
- Hispanic or Latino: 279 (1.2 percent)
- Asian: 771 (3.2 percent)

Ridgeland 2000

- Total population: 20,173
- White: 15,544 (77.1 percent)
- Black: 3,719 (18.4 percent)
- Hispanic or Latino: 313 (1.6 percent)
- Asian: 596 (2.95 percent)

2010

- Total population: 24,047
- White: 14,302 (59.5 percent)
- Black: 7,864 (32.7 percent)
- Hispanic or Latino: 1,133 (4.7 percent)
- Asian: 960 (4 percent)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau