



Homeownership Rates For Mass. Blacks Stalled

By Kimberly Adams, Aug 18, 2011, 3:40 PM

Despite efforts by the state and federal government, rates of minority homeownership are pretty much stuck where they were a decade ago.

New data out Thursday from the U.S. Census Bureau shows some growth in the rates of homeownership among Hispanic and Asian households in Massachusetts, but African-American homeownership barely moved.

According to the census data, 33.5 percent of black households in Massachusetts were homeowners in 2010, up from 31.6 percent in the last census in 2000. Asian households, in contrast, increased from 41.6 percent to 49.5 percent. Latino (“Hispanic”) households increased from 21.8 percent to 24.8 percent.



Adeline Odney and her daughter in their home (Kimberley Adams for WBUR)

“What’s surprising here,” said John Logan, a sociologist at Brown University, “is that although minority homeownership was the official reason for many of the housing policies that were introduced in the last decade in Massachusetts and in fact across the country, black homeownership only increased just a little bit.”

Logan leads the U.S. 2010 Census Project at Brown University and reviewed some of the census data for WBUR.

But the numbers don't tell the whole story. For African-Americans, there was actually a boost in homeownership early on in the decade, which is when Dorchester resident Adeline Odney bought her home.

"It was a good feeling to be a homeowner," Odney said of her 2004 purchase.

In what has become a familiar story, she, like many other people across Massachusetts and the country, didn't understand the details of their subprime mortgages. Odney lost her home to foreclosure in 2008.

"One payment was \$800, another was \$1,200," Odney said. "And it continued to go up until it was \$1,900 a month, almost \$2,400. And I couldn't keep up."

Subprime lenders targeted minorities, according to Peter Melewski of MassHousing. He says their slick marketing campaigns made it tougher for him to attract minority borrowers to his more affordable loans in the early 2000s.

"So what happened as a result, is that a lot of minority borrowers found their way into lenders that simply put them into inappropriate loans," Melewski said.

Although the new census data showed a small overall increase in black homeownership in the last decade, the situation in recent years is actually worse, according to Valerie Wilson, the vice president of research with the National Urban League Policy Institute who studies housing trends in the African-American community.

"What has happened since the bubble burst is that the decline in black homeownership has actually been greater than the increase during the housing bubble," Wilson said.

Logan, the Brown professor, says the new census data also shows there hasn't been much change in racial disparities in homeownership. According to his analysis of the census data, while about two-thirds of non-Hispanic whites in Massachusetts own homes, only about 30 percent of African-Americans do. That's about where things stood in the last census, which surprised Logan, given all the federal and state efforts to increase minority homeownership.

The gray, four-bedroom colonial Odney now shares with her husband, Joseph Jeanjaques, in Dorchester is also in foreclosure, but the family is working with a lawyer to try to save it.

Wilson, of the Urban League Policy Institute, says it's even harder for black families to buy homes now, or to find banks willing to refinance.

"We went from it being too easy to now it being too difficult," Wilson said. "And really, the market needs to correct itself and to come somewhere in the middle again."