

## Shifting Population

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With 26.3 percent of its current population classified as black or African American (one race), Alabama is the seventh state in the nation in terms of percentage of black population.

The District of Columbia is No. 1 one with 55.4 percent black population, followed by Mississippi (37.4 percent), Louisiana (31.6 percent), Georgia (29.8 percent), Maryland (28.9 percent) and South Carolina (28.6 percent). The state of Montana has the lowest percentage of black population in the nation (0.5 percent). The corresponding national estimate is 12.4 percent.

What about black males in our state?

When the Center for Demographic Research published *The Black Male in Alabama* brochure in November 1988, there were less than 500,000 black males in the state. At that time black males counted for 11.9 percent of the total population. Back in 1930, black males represented 17.3 percent of the state population.

The black male population passed one-half million for the first time in 2000, with an estimate of 535,994, or 12.1 percent of the state population. Although this is an increase in absolute numbers, the current figure actually represents a relative decline because black males counted for 17.3 percent of the state population in 1930 and they represent only about 12.1 percent of the total population today.

The Center for Demographic Research is currently examining the trends and characteristics of the new black population of Alabama. We plan to produce a brochure documenting such changes and their socio-demographic implications. Here are some highlights from our current black population project with special focus on black male population's age structure:

Age structure is a very important indicator of population dynamics because it affects marriage market, spatial mobility or migration, mortality, including homicide, and many other socio-demographic factors.

Our preliminary analysis of age structure shows that the number of black men aged 0-14 years declined consistently between 1970 (163,657) and 1990 (143,948), before increasing slightly in 2000 (151,326).

Nonetheless, in terms of proportion, the black male age structure has observed a persistent decline in the last 30 years. Those aged 0-14 represented 38.7 percent of the black male population in 1970, 32.6 in 1980, 30.7 in 1990 and 28.2 in 2000. The same trend is observed among black females, as well as white females and white males. This reduction in the percentage of younger populations is largely the result of the fertility decline.

However, such a lower fertility seems not to translate into noticeable gains in black males' longevity. In Alabama, the percentage of those aged 65-plus among all black males decreased from 9.3 in 1970 to 8.3 in 2000. In contrast, the percentage of white men aged 65-plus increased from 8.3 in 1970 to 13.1 in 2000.

Can we explain some of the changes in age structure of the black male population in terms of migration and homicide? Migration and homicide can impact age structure, but their effects are really minimal in the present case.

Let's consider migration. Because those most likely to move are young adults (usually 18-35 years), the current reduction in younger and older age categories suggests that there would be some in-migration streams that occurred among black males in the recent decades.

This can be attributed to employment opportunities in military and other sectors that may have attracted young black males to Alabama. In other words, if anything, the current age structure indicates in-migration rather than out-migration for black males in Alabama.

A look at homicide statistics indicates that black males are more likely to be murdered than their counterpart whites. For example, of the 353 people reported killed in Alabama in 2006, 47 percent were black males; white males came second with 20 percent of homicide cases.

Yes, these figures suggest that homicide plays some role in the changing age structure of the black male population, but this is really a negligible number compared to the total black population. Homicide alone can not explain the current trends in black males' age structure.

In short, the number of black males has not increased much in the past 70 years. But, there are important changes in black males' age structure. These changes are mostly due to fertility decline, in-migration, and other related socio-economic factors that can have profound effect on marriage, occupational opportunities, and health.

We will explore these transformations in some of our future articles and in the new *Black Population of Alabama* brochure.

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