

A Comparison of Neighborhood Development Over Time

Nicholtown and Brutontown in Greenville, SC

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Abstract

Furman University is a leading partner in the Poinsett Corridor Revitalization project (Poinsett Project), a collaborative venture involving the City of Greenville and local businesses to revitalize the Poinsett Highway corridor. Brutontown is located along the Poinsett Highway corridor and, as a result, has received considerable attention from the local community. This study was conducted in order to contribute to the Poinsett Project Coalition's knowledge base on Brutontown and to gain a better understanding of the nature of the change that has taken place in both Brutontown and Nicholtown between 1990 and 2010. Nicholtown was included in the study because of its social and economic similarities to Brutontown. Data was collected on race, education attainment, and median household income for Nicholtown, Brutontown, and the immediate surrounding areas from the US decennial censuses and the American Community Survey and compared over time using ArcGIS software. This study found that Nicholtown and Brutontown have continued to follow their historic trend as being predominately Black communities. A distinct racial boundary exists around the two neighborhoods, which can also be seen in the differences in education attainment and median household income between Nicholtown and Brutontown and the surrounding communities. In contrast to education attainment, median household income was found to actually decrease over time. These results indicate that, like most of Greenville, these neighborhoods were significantly affected by the economic crisis in the late 2000s. However, both Brutontown and Nicholtown continue to be economically and racially divided from the surrounding communities indicating existing inequality issues. Understanding the history of Brutontown and Nicholtown's recent changes will help decision-makers within the Poinsett Project make more educated decisions regarding community services and economic development and also provide a backdrop to which future studies can be compared.

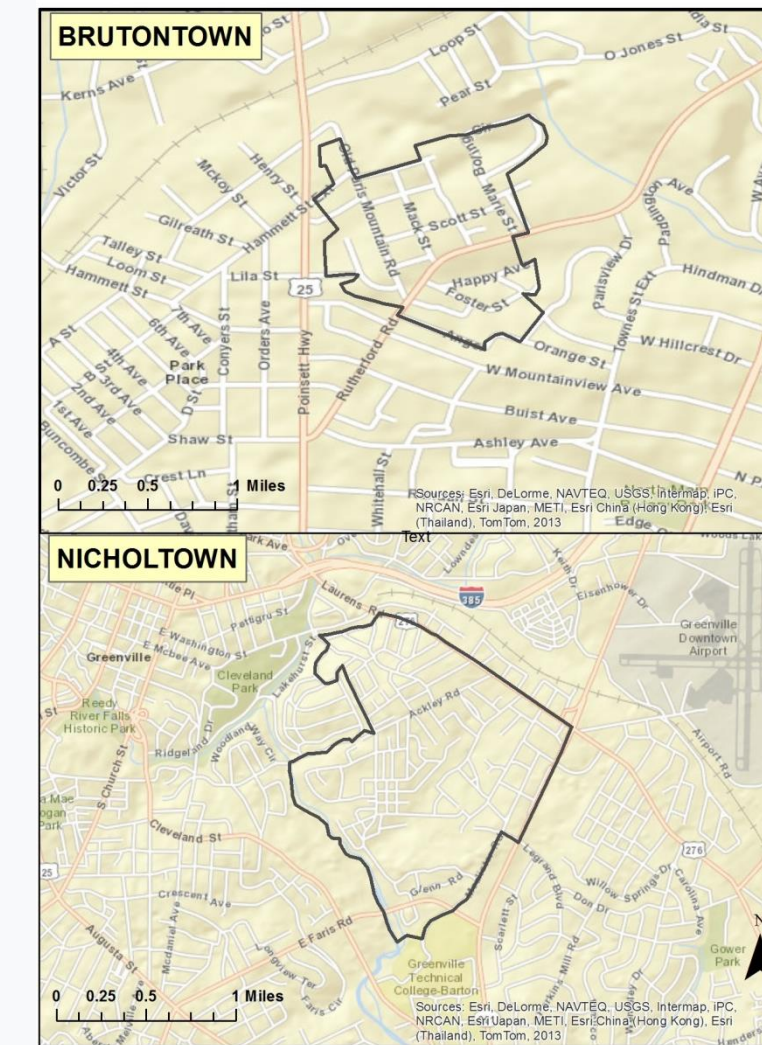
Introduction

Neighborhood redevelopment is inherently a contentious topic as it usually is a catalyst for overall social change and has an impact on people's residences. One of the main concerns of neighborhood redevelopment is gentrification, the process by which members of the middle and upper-middle classes – usually white- move into an inner-city area and renovate existing properties (Kendall 574). Gentrification is an extremely complex issue that is not limited to a simple binary of "working class (black)" versus "middle-class (white)", as it is widely viewed (Boyd). An example of this complexity is the case study of Douglas/ Grand Boulevard, a Black community on Chicago's South Side. There, Blacks engaged in "defensive development" to protect the neighborhoods from "White elites" by forming a community organization geared at business association development, historic building restoration, and place marketing. However, the actions of the organization were found to ultimately promote gentrification; because the organization neglected to preserve affordable housing in the area, the neighborhood's most economically vulnerable residents found themselves politically and physically marginalized (Boyd). Another common misconception is the linkage between historical preservation/ designation and gentrification. In a study comparing urban neighborhoods within Fort Worth, Texas, Coulson and Leichenko found that there was no significant changes in neighborhood demographic composition, vacancy rates, or rates of owner-occupancy during the decade following the historical designation. However, property values for the neighborhoods with historical designation did increase (Coulson and Leichenko).

The objectives of the Poinsett Corridor Revitalization project are very similar to that of the community organization in the Douglas/ Grand Boulevard case study in which gentrification occurred; to develop 1. a sense of place, 2. economic development, and 3. recreational facilities and parks ("Poinsett District"). This study aimed to determine whether gentrification is or will be an issue for Brutontown and Nicholtown in light of the recent formation of the Poinsett Corridor Revitalization Coalition, of which Furman University is a key member. It is believed that changes in education attainment, white population, and median household income may be linked to gentrification. Therefore, a consistent increase in these factors from 1990 to 2010 may be consistent with increasing gentrification.

Brutontown: Originally known as Bruton Town, it was founded in the 1800s as a Black settlement located off modern day Poinsett Highway and Paris Mountain Road. The namesake for the neighborhood comes from Bruton's Shop, a blacksmith forge that was a popular destination for the rural community. In the 1970s, the Greenville County Redevelopment Authority began to renovate Brutontown and established a community center. Today, Brutontown is part of the area of focus for the Poinsett Corridor Revitalization project ("History of Brutontown").

Nicholtown: Nicholtown's origins can be traced back to the portion of plantation (located around modern day Laurens Road) willed to Dorcas Green by her father, Elisha Green. This land was subsequently split apart by individuals outside of the Green family over the next 30 years. During the 1970s, nine African American families settled on these properties establishing what is now known as Nicholtown (Urban Collage Inc. et al.). According to Anna Lee, a staff writer for the Greenville news, the average sales price of a home in the city of Greenville increased from \$161,068 in 2003 to \$184,449 as of Aug. 31, 2012. Based off of interviews conducted with residents, Lee found that Nicholtown has experienced significant changes in homeowner demographics and increase in property value (Lee 2).



Methods

Neighborhood development was measured in this study by observing changes in race, education attainment, and median household income over time.

Racial populations were obtained at the census block level from the 1990, 2000, and 2010 decennial censuses. Percentages for Hispanic, Black/ African American, and White populations were determined by comparing the total population within each block to the populations listed for each block that fell within the neighborhood boundaries of Nicholtown and Brutontown. The US census underwent several changes between 1990 and 2010 that made side by side data comparison difficult. In the 2000 decennial census, the term "Latino" was added to the question wording and response options "Spanish/Hispanic/Latino" (United States). In 2010, the definition of Hispanic or Latino was revised to refer to a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race. For all years, "Other" was calculated for this study as the difference between the total population and the sum of the population that identified themselves as Hispanic or Latino, Black, or White.

Education attainment data was determined as the percent of population 25 years and older with a high school degree or higher at the census tract level for 2000 and 2010 and the census block group level for 1990 due to data availability. A high school degree included those who graduated from high school or obtained their GED. Questions regarding education attainment were originally included on the census Long Form (SF-3). In 2010, this form was replaced by the American Community Survey (ACS), an ongoing statistical survey. As a result, educational attainment data was gathered from the decennial censuses for 1990 and 2000 and from the 2006-2010 ACS for 2010.

Median household income was obtained at the block group level using the ESRI Community Analyst which drew its data for 1990 and 2000 from the decennial censuses. Like educational attainment, median household income data was a part of the census Long Form and was subsequently transferred to the ACS in 2010. ESRI used the 2005-2009 ACS report to estimate 2010 median household income. Since the boundaries Brutontown and Nicholtown covered multiple block groups, the median value of the intersected block groups was taken to represent the overall median household income.

Conclusion

This study found that both communities continue to follow their historic trends as Black neighborhoods with a distinct racial boundary between the neighborhoods and the surrounding communities. The decrease in median household income may be attributed to the economic recessions that took place in the late 2000s.

Though it does not appear to be occurring as of 2010 (or is still in the early stages), gentrification is especially pertinent to Brutontown and Nicholtown given their rich history and the recent formation of the Poinsett Corridor Revitalization (PCR) Coalition. Active attempts to revitalize both neighborhoods have only begun in the last few years and the true impacts of these revitalization projects may not be seen for another decade (Passell). As shown by the case study of Douglas/ Grand Boulevard in Chicago's South Side, community revitalization is delicate process. If preserving Nicholtown's and Brutontown's culture is a priority for the PCR Coalition, care must be taken to ensure that efforts to develop the area do not end up undermining this goal.

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Race Data: 1) 1990 from Minnesota Population Center. National Historical Geographic Information System: Version 2.0 Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota 2011 based on data from U.S. Census Bureau SF1 (1990). 2) 2000 from U.S. Census Bureau SF1 (2000). 3) 2010 from US Census Bureau SF1 (2010).
Education Attainment: 1) 1990 from U.S. Census Bureau SF3 (1990). 2) 2000 from U.S. Census Bureau SF3 QT-P20 (2000). 3) 2010 from U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates (2006-2010), (2007-2011).
Median Household Income Data: 1) 1990, 2000, and 2010 from data compiled by the Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI) Community Analyst (2013) based on data from U.S. Census Bureau (1990) (2000) and ACS 5-year estimates (2005-2009).

Acknowledgements

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Results

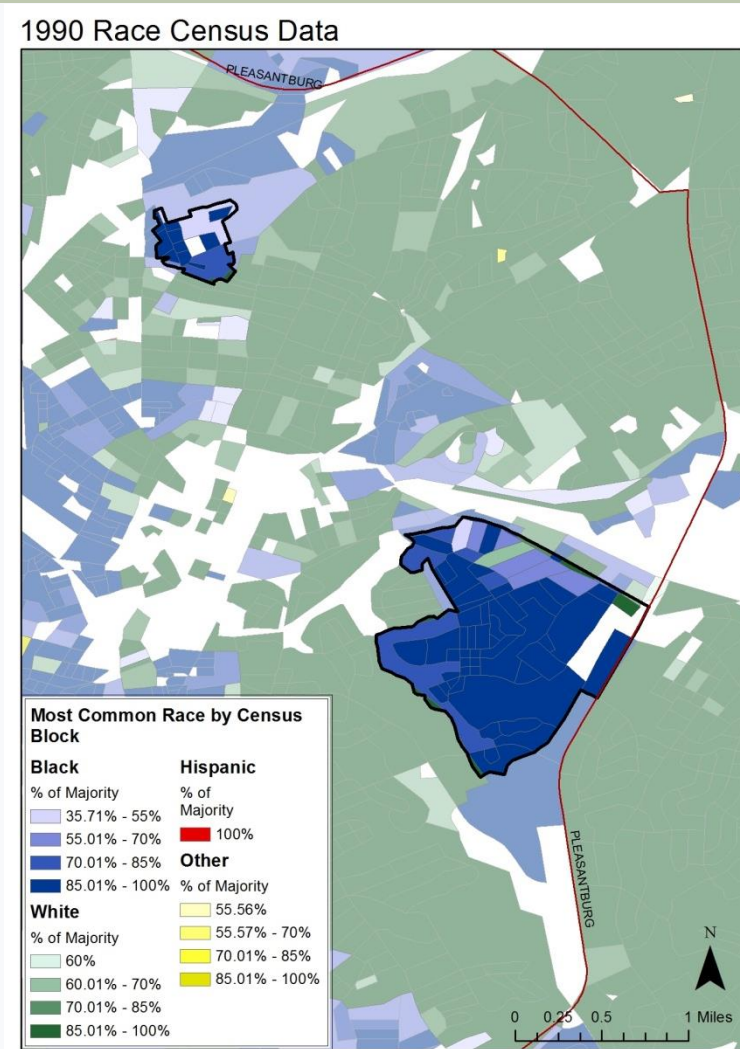


Fig. 1

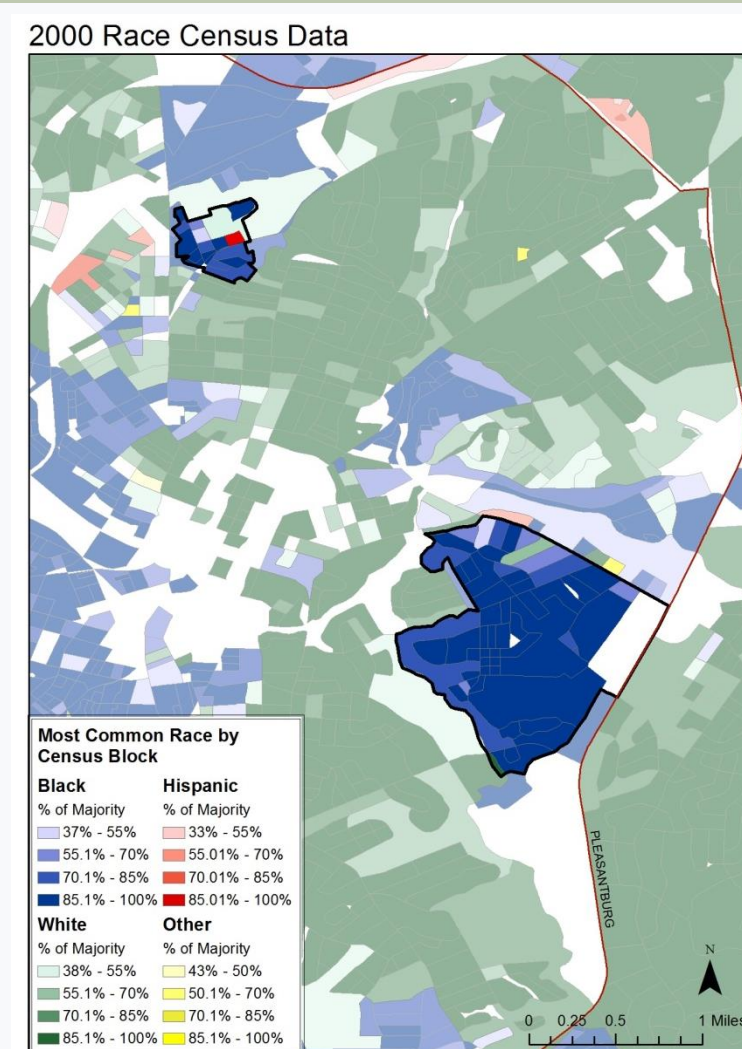


Fig. 2

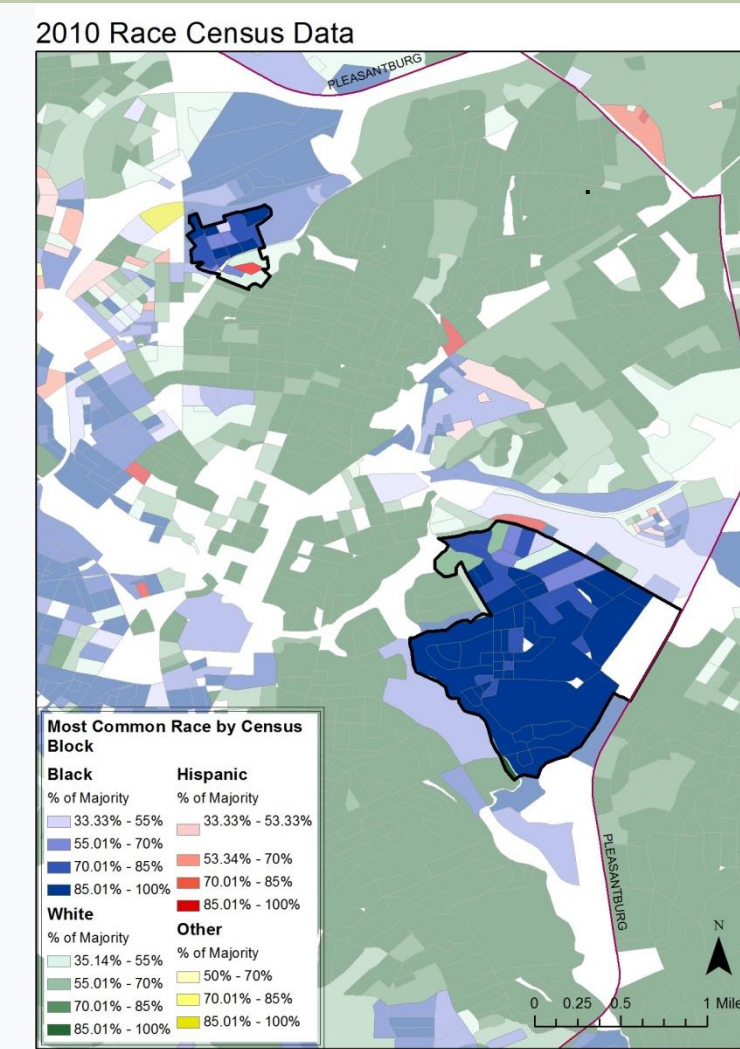


Fig. 3

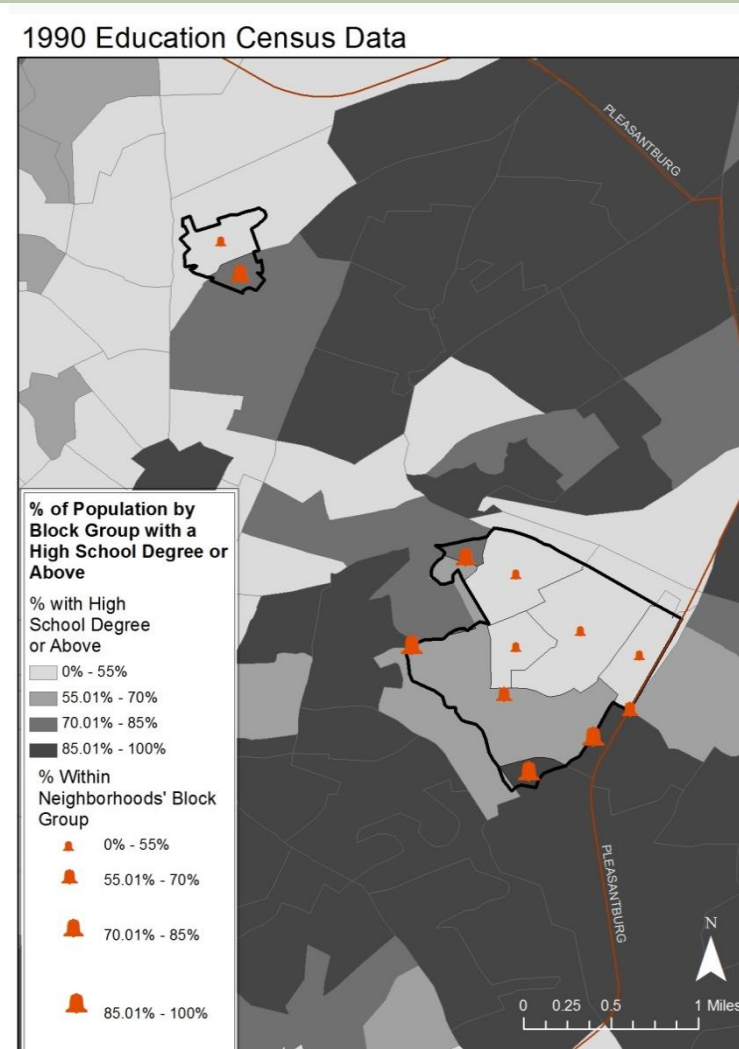


Fig. 5

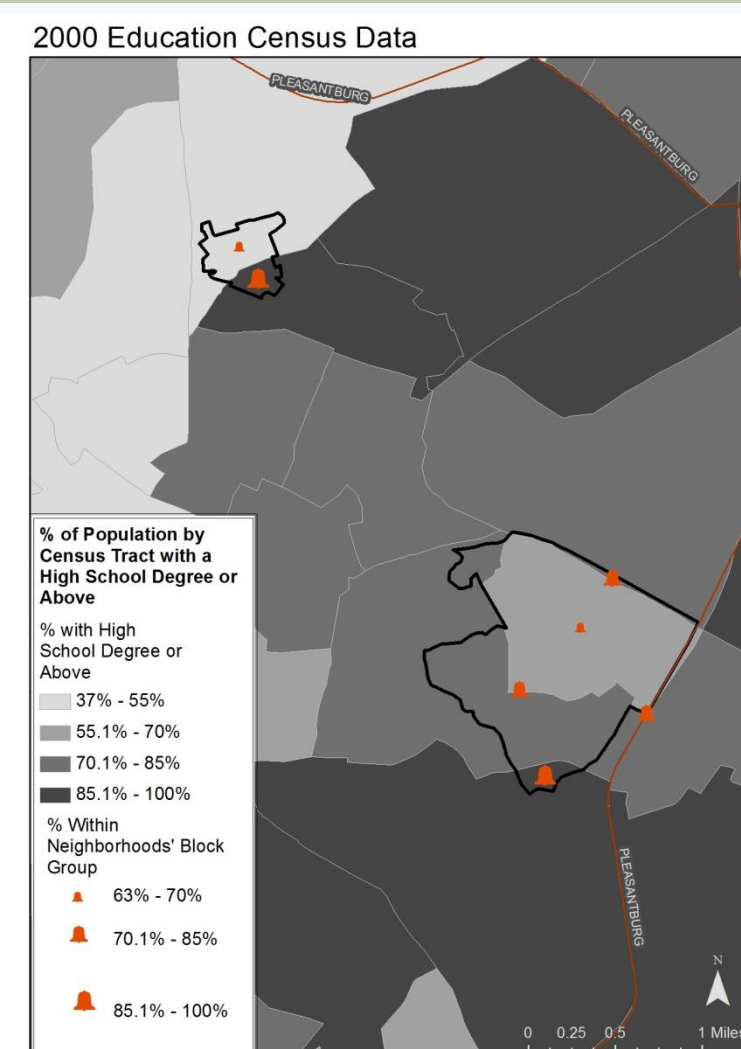


Fig. 6

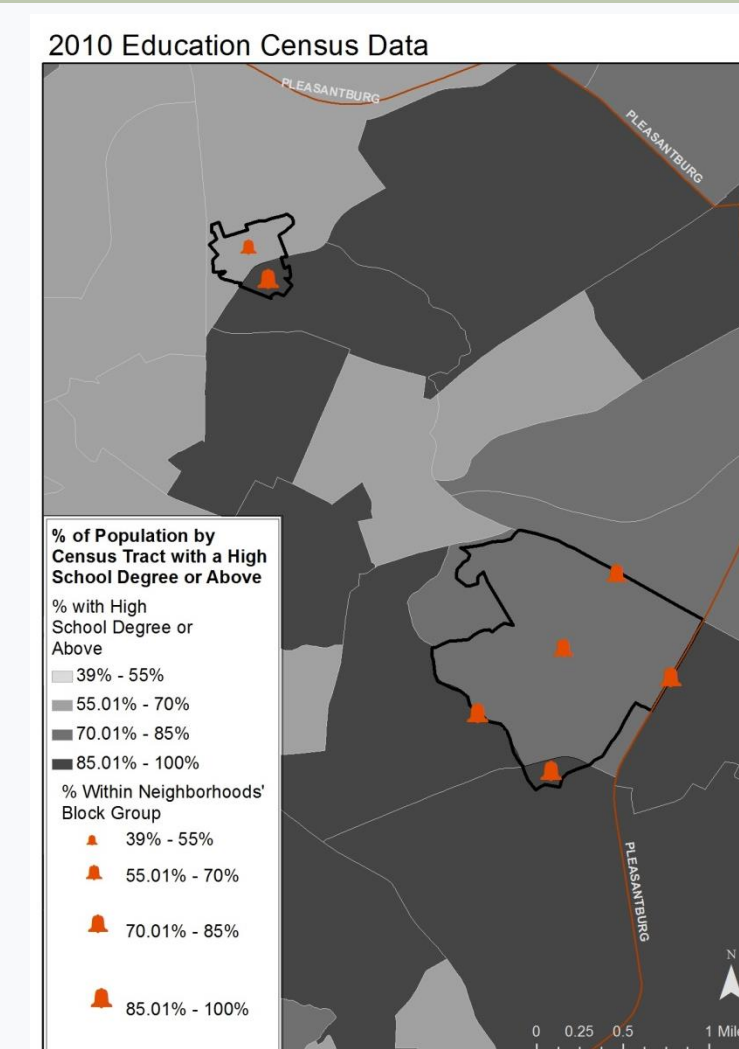


Fig. 7

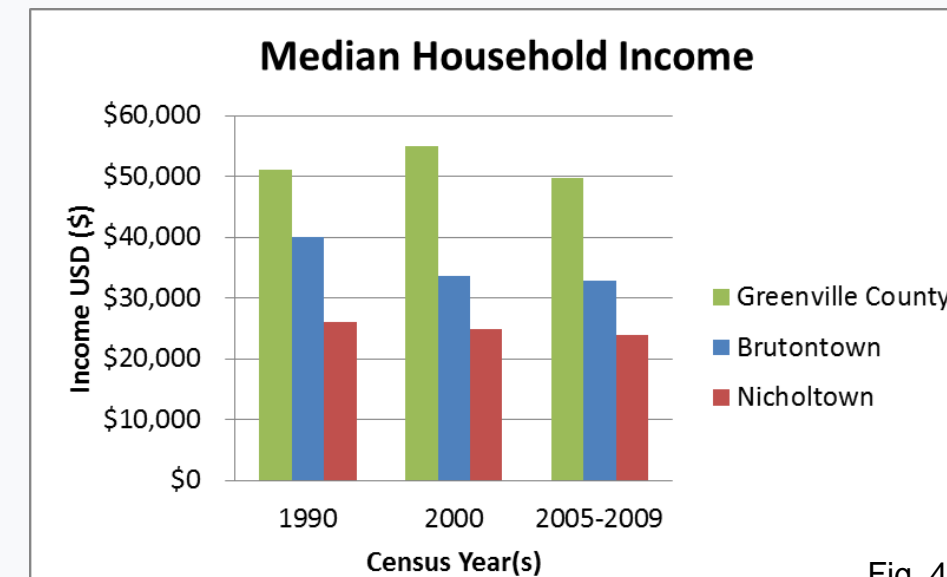


Fig. 4

Figures 1-3. The majority race by population for each census block from 1990 to 2010.

The racial composition of both neighborhoods has remained largely unchanged from 1990 to 2010, though Brutontown experienced a 4.4% decrease in its Black/ African American population (Fig. 1-3). In comparison, the Black/ African American population for the city of Greenville decreased by 8% (Lee).

Figure 4. Median household income adjusted for US 2012 dollars.

The median household income for both Brutontown and Nicholtown decreased between the 1990 census and the 2005-2009 ACS. In contrast, Greenville County experienced an increase in median household income in 2000.

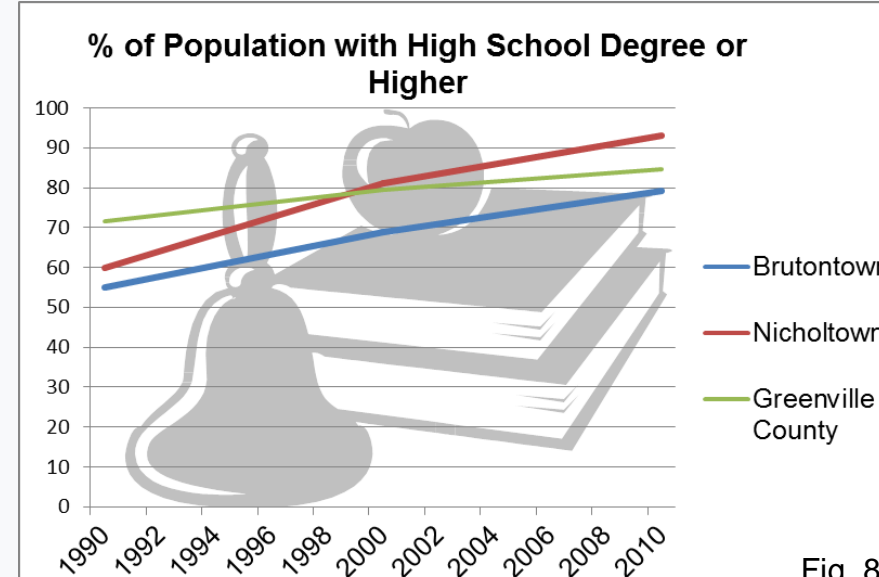


Fig. 8

Figures 5-8. Percent of population 25 years and older with a high school diploma or above from 1990 to 2010.

Education attainment increased steadily from 1990 to 2010 in Brutontown, Nicholtown, and Greenville County. The percent of the population with a high school degree or higher in Brutontown fell consistently below Greenville County while Nicholtown exceeded Greenville County in 2000 (Fig. 5-8).