

# A Demographic Profile of the University Community



Keith Lucas  
*Principal Investigator*

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## Introduction

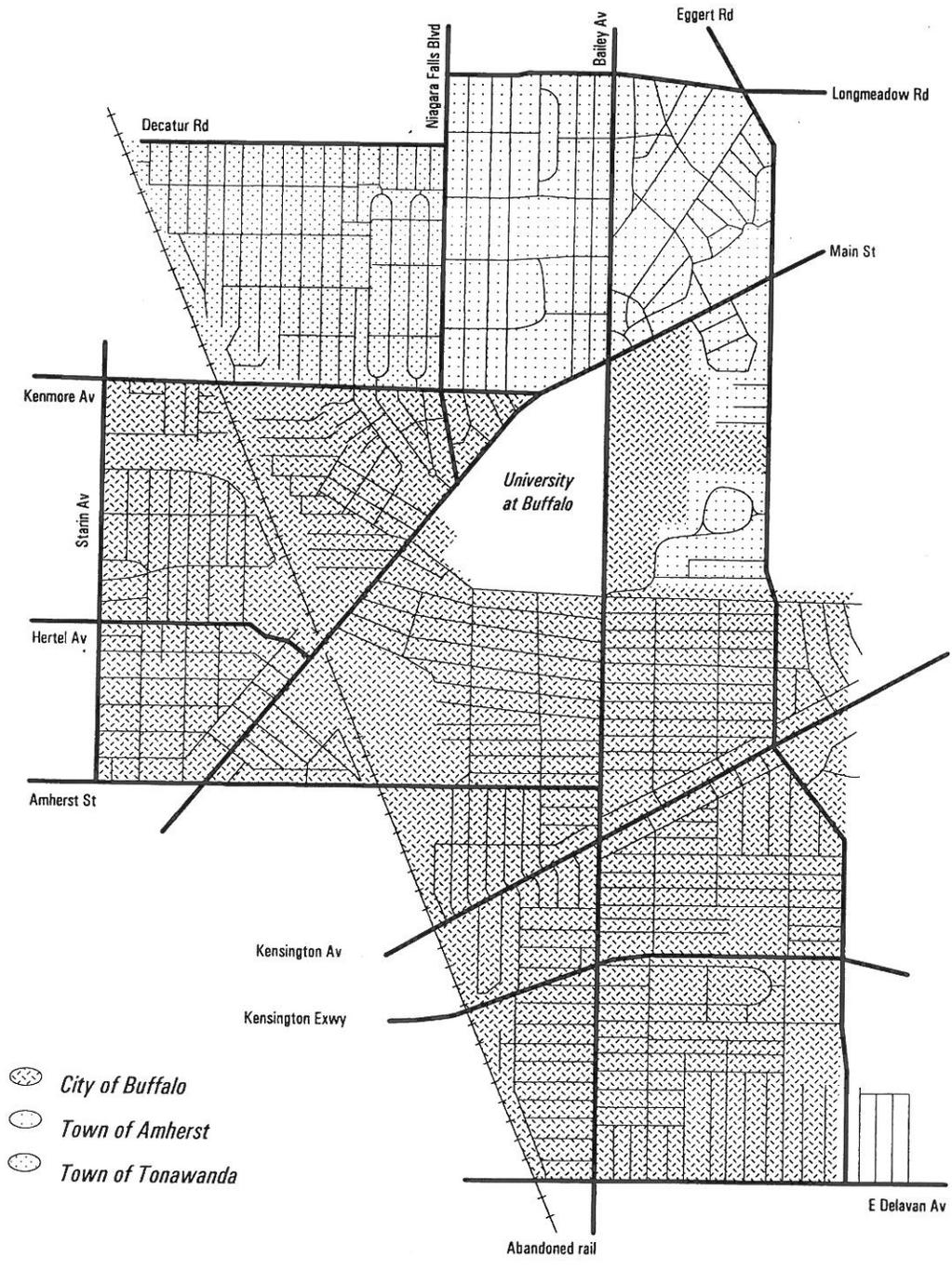
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A greater number of geographic inconsistencies were evident at the neighborhood level (Map 3). Again, the same mismatches existed in the town of Amherst (part of neighborhood 6), as well as between neighborhoods 1 and 3, neighborhoods 1 and 5, and neighborhoods 3 and 4. None of these differences were significant, however, and should not affect the demographic portrait that has been developed.

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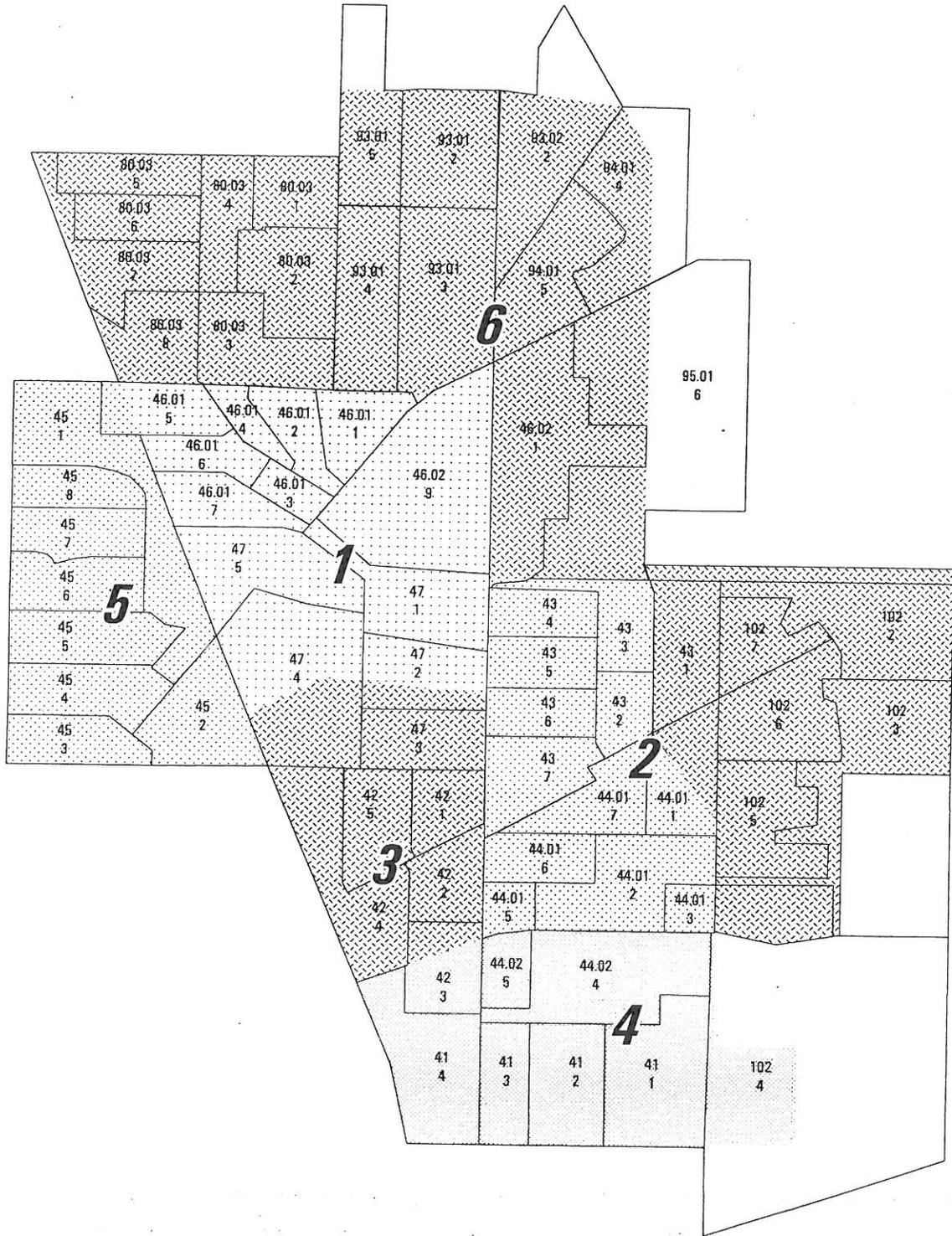
Map 1  
**University Community Boundaries**



-  *City of Buffalo*
-  *Town of Amherst*
-  *Town of Tonawanda*



Map 3  
Block Groups by Neighborhood



## **Changes in the University Community Over Time**

The demographics of the University Community are reflective of its location at the border between the city of Buffalo and the inner ring suburbs of Amherst and Tonawanda. The population in the city section of the University Community peaked in 1950 at 52,400 residents; while the suburban section of the University Community did not peak until 1970, at 16,900 residents (Figure 1). Like the city of Buffalo and suburban Erie County as a whole, both sections of the University Community have been losing population over the past two decades.

From its peak of 66,500 residents in 1970, the University Community had fallen to 54,800 by 1990, a loss of 17 percent. This decline is bracketed by a loss of 15 percent in the city and 26 percent in the suburbs (Figure 2). In a reversal of the trend that is occurring in Erie County, where the city is losing population at a much faster rate than the suburbs, the suburban section of the University Community has been losing a greater share of its population than the city section.

### ***Population characteristics***

Much of the relative success the city section has had in maintaining its population appears to be the result of the changing racial composition of the University Community. Until recently, blacks and other minorities made up a very small percentage of the population in the community, in both the city and suburban sections. In 1950, there were only 46 blacks living in the University Community. By 1970, this number had risen to 1,565; although it still represented only two percent of the total population of the University Community.

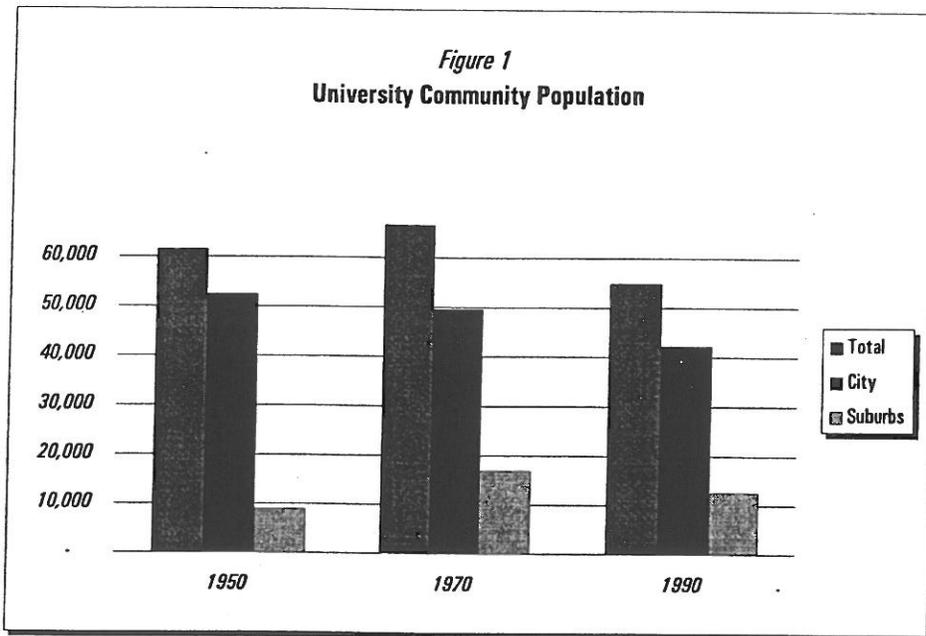
Between 1970 and 1990, the black population of the University Community increased dramatically, climbing to 17,770 residents, or 32 percent of the total population (Figure 3). This was accompanied by a decrease in the white population of almost 30,000 residents, leaving the share of white residents in 1990 at just over 60 percent. The racial composition of the community shows a similar pattern to that of Erie County: the city section is 40 percent black, while the suburban section is only six percent black. Of the total black population in the University Community, 96 percent reside in Buffalo, an even greater proportion than the 92 percent of blacks county-wide who live in the city.

When broken up into age groups, the University Community closely approximates the county as a whole. The primary exception is in the 18 to 24 year old age group, which includes 17 percent of the residents of the University Community, compared to 11 percent of county residents. This appears to underscore the community's attractiveness to college students, both at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Given the loss of almost 12,000 residents between 1970 and 1990, it is significant that the number of persons 25 to 34 increased by 2,200, while those 35 to 44 grew by 1,500 (Figure 4). These gains of 47 and 25 percent, which are in contrast to an overall population loss in the community of 17 percent, represent the movement of the "baby boom" generation into these age ranges.

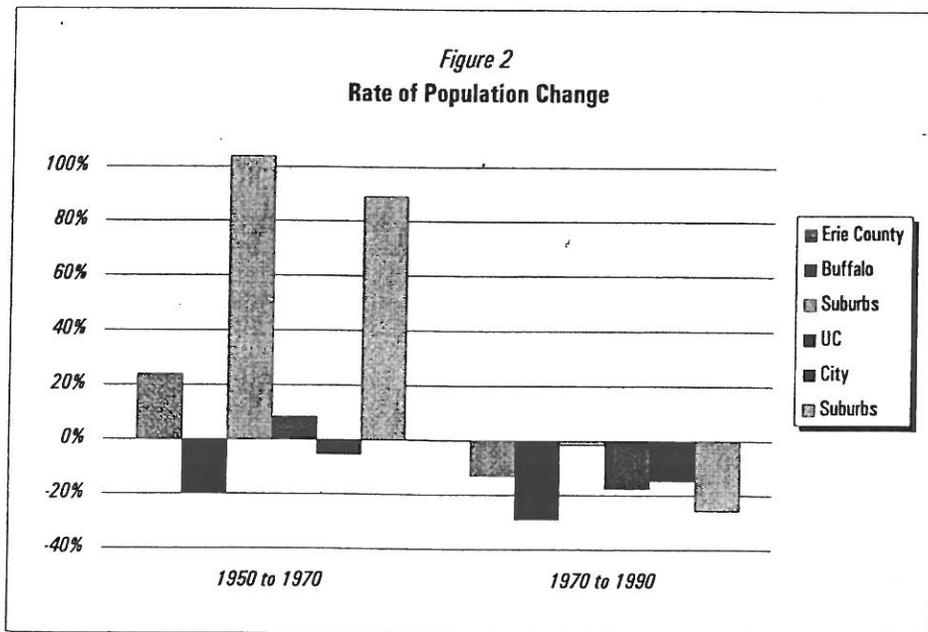
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Changes in economic indicators in the University Community have largely mirrored those of Erie County, with the main difference being the order of magnitude. The community's labor force participation rate – the number of persons in the civilian labor force as a percentage of the total

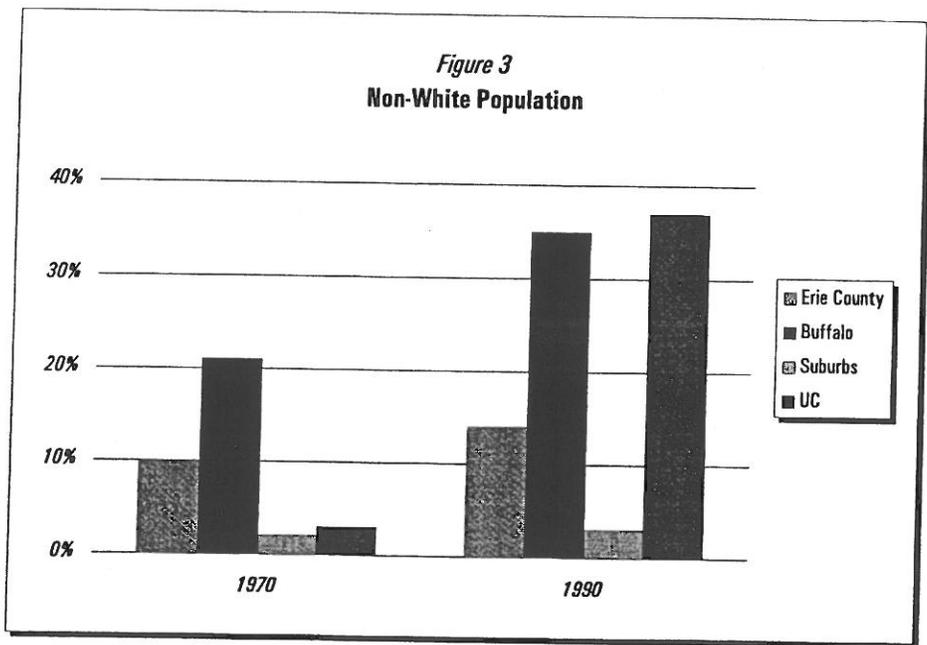
*Figure 1*  
**University Community Population**



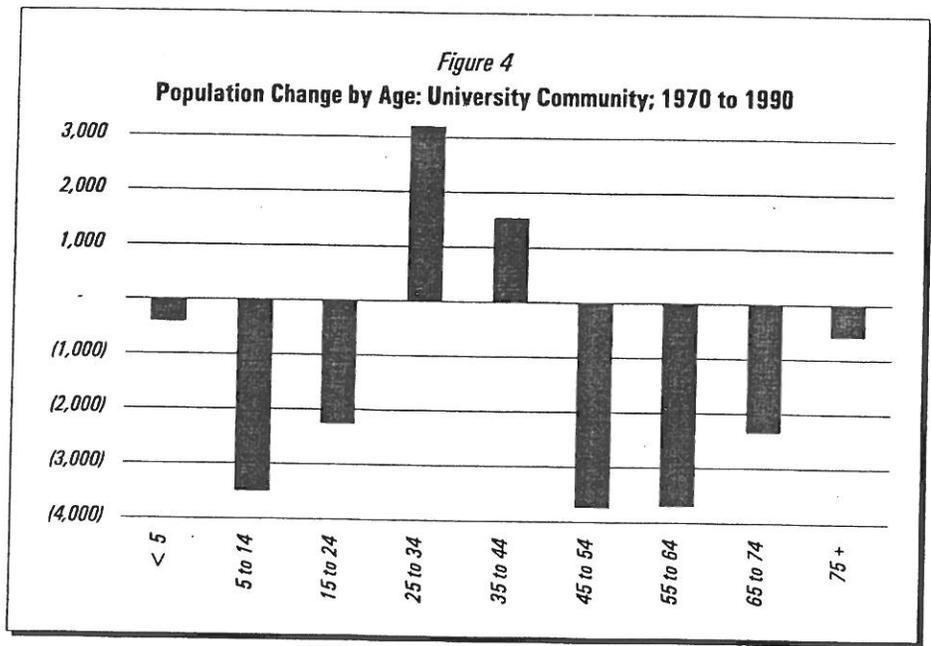
*Figure 2*  
**Rate of Population Change**



**Figure 3**  
**Non-White Population**



**Figure 4**  
**Population Change by Age: University Community; 1970 to 1990**



number of persons 16 years and older – rose between 1970 and 1990 from 52 to 63 percent. This was due to an increase in the number of women in the labor force, which went from 38 to 59 percent during this period. The overall labor force participation rate for the University Community matches that of the county as a whole.

Unemployment rates, which provide a measure of the state of the local economy at the time of the census, increased from 4.1 to 8.4 percent from 1970 to 1990. However, the more critical issue is how the unemployment rate in the University Community compares to that of Erie County. Between 1970 and 1990, the unemployment rate for the county rose from 4.7 to 7.0 percent, with the city of Buffalo experiencing a rise from 6.0 to 11.6 percent, and the suburbs from 3.7 to 4.9 percent (Figure 5). Taken as a percentage of the county-wide figure, the University Community's unemployment rate was 15 percent lower in 1970, but 20 percent higher in 1990.

This trend is supported by changes in household incomes and poverty rates. In 1970, the median household income in the University Community was \$8,200, which was 94 percent of the county-wide median of \$8,800. By 1990, the median income in the community had risen to \$25,800, but this was now only 92 percent of the county-wide median of \$28,000 (Figure 6). Relative to the county, household incomes in the University Community declined slightly during this 20 year period, although not quite as much as the city of Buffalo, which saw a drop from 75 to 70 percent of the county-wide median.

The University Community's poverty rate almost doubled between 1970 and 1990, going from 9 to 18 percent (Figure 7). The number of persons living below the poverty line rose from just under 6,000 to over 9,600, an increase of 60 percent at a time the community's population was declining by almost 20 percent. This dramatic increase in the poverty rate was largely limited to the city of Buffalo, which saw an increase from 15 to 26 percent. The poverty rate in suburban Erie County effectively held steady over this 20 year period, at slightly over 5 percent.

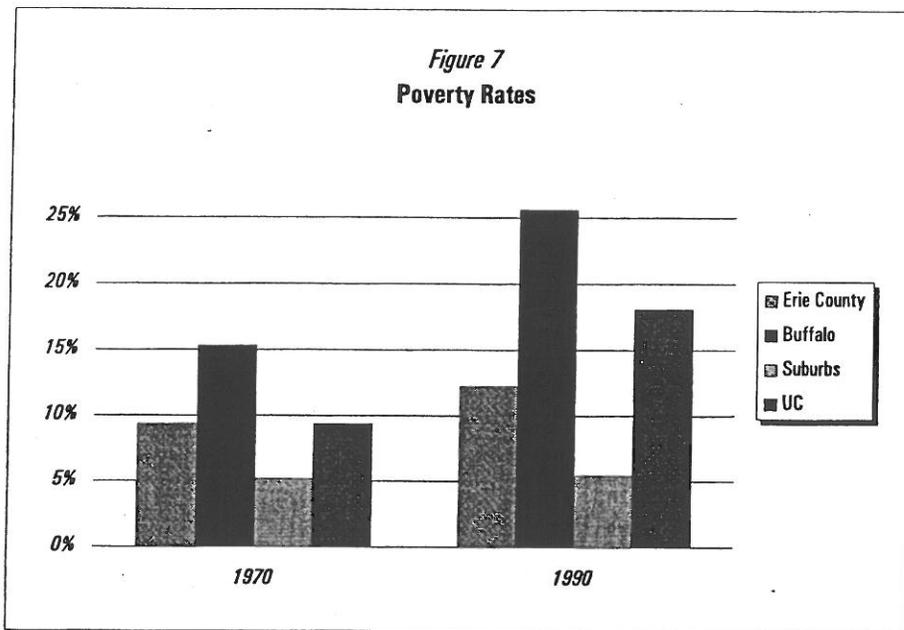
### ***Household structure***

Although the population of the University Community has fallen sharply since 1970, the number of households has declined far less rapidly. Households fell from 22,330 in 1970 to 21,430 in 1990, a loss of just four percent. Within the city section, the number of households declined by just under four percent, while in the suburban section the loss was five percent.

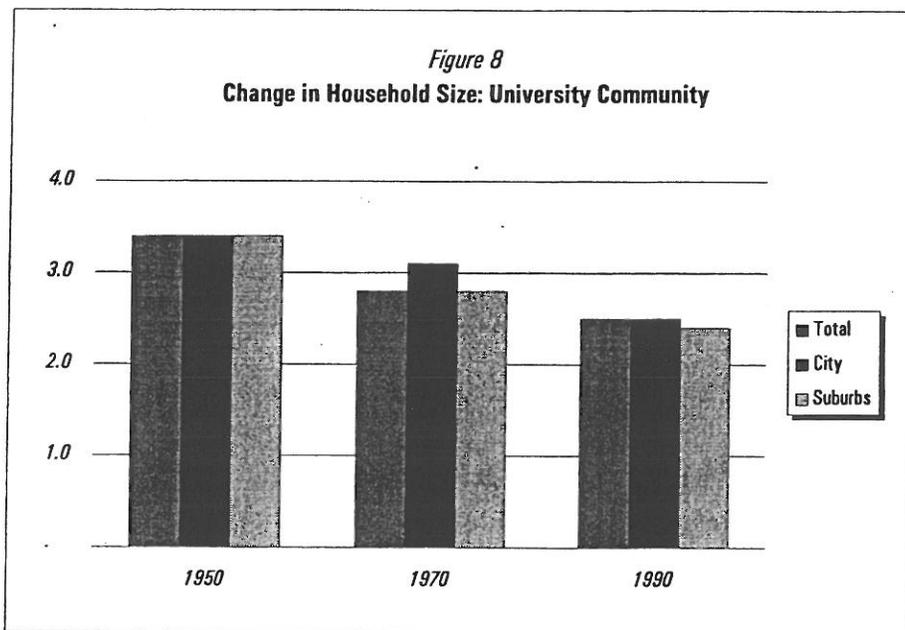
The differences between losses in population and households can largely be attributed to declining household sizes in the University Community. In 1970, the average household size in the community as a whole, and in both the city and suburban sections, was 3.4 persons (Figure 8). Less than five percent of all households consisted of a single person, while over two-thirds had three or more persons. By 1990, the average household size in the University Community had fallen to 2.5 persons, with single persons accounting for almost 30 percent of all households.

Changes in household type have contributed to the decline in household size, with non-family households in the University Community increasing from 25 to 38 percent of all households between 1970 and 1990 (Figure 9). Female headed households with children under 18 also increased from four to 12 percent, while decreases occurred among married couples with children under 18 (30 to 18 percent), and married couples with no children under 18 (34 to 22 percent). Although the suburban section of the University Community has retained a higher percentage of

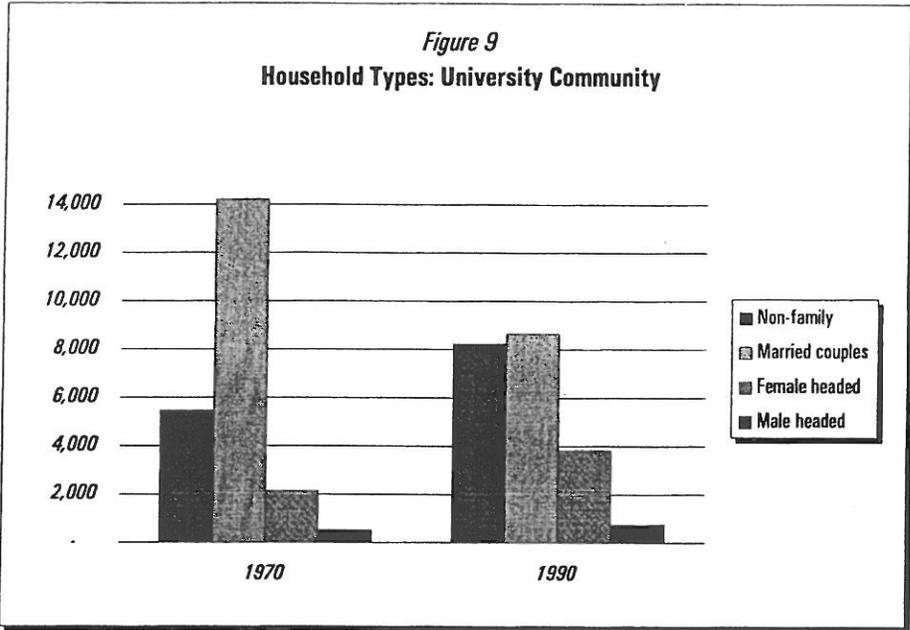
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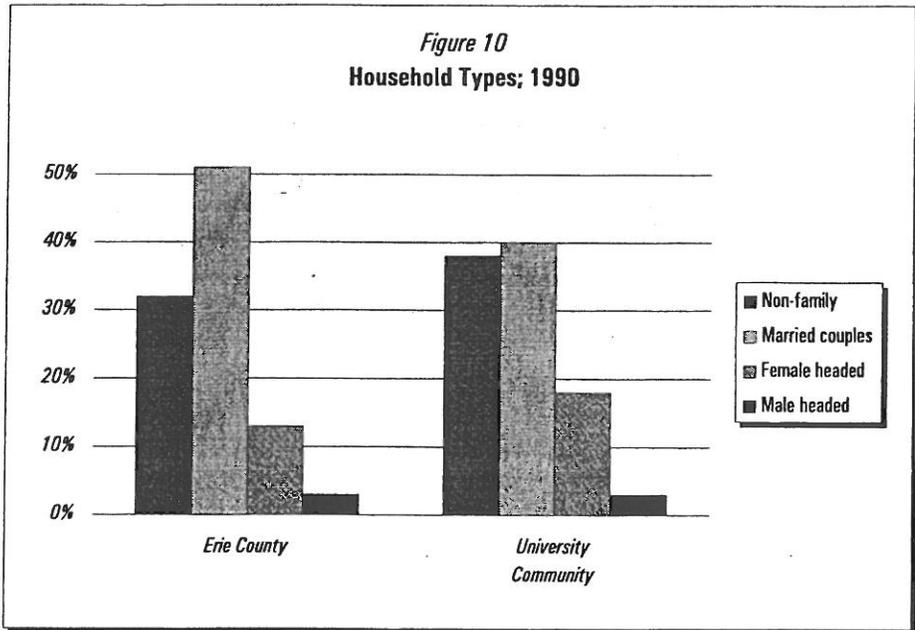
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**Change in Household Size: University Community**



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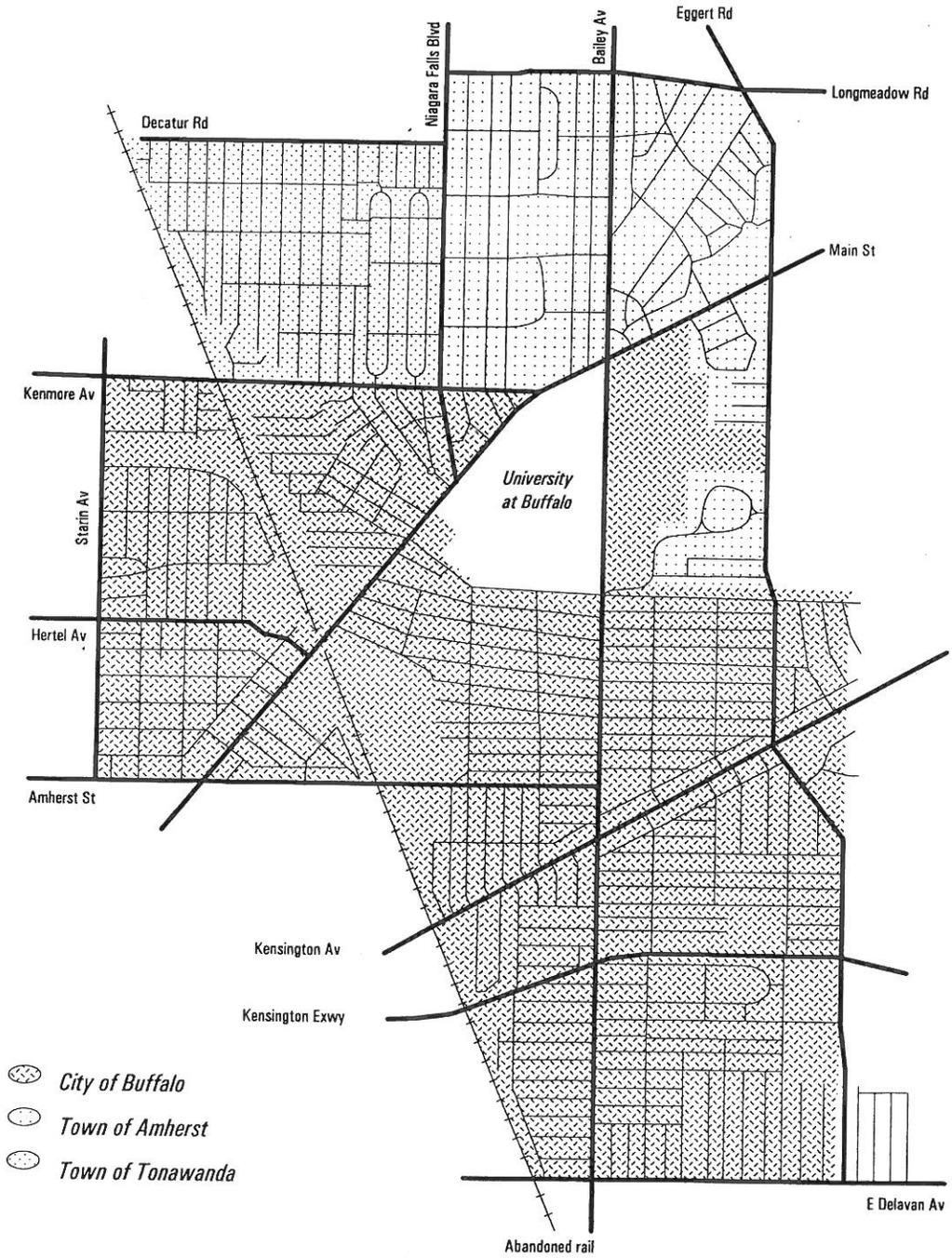
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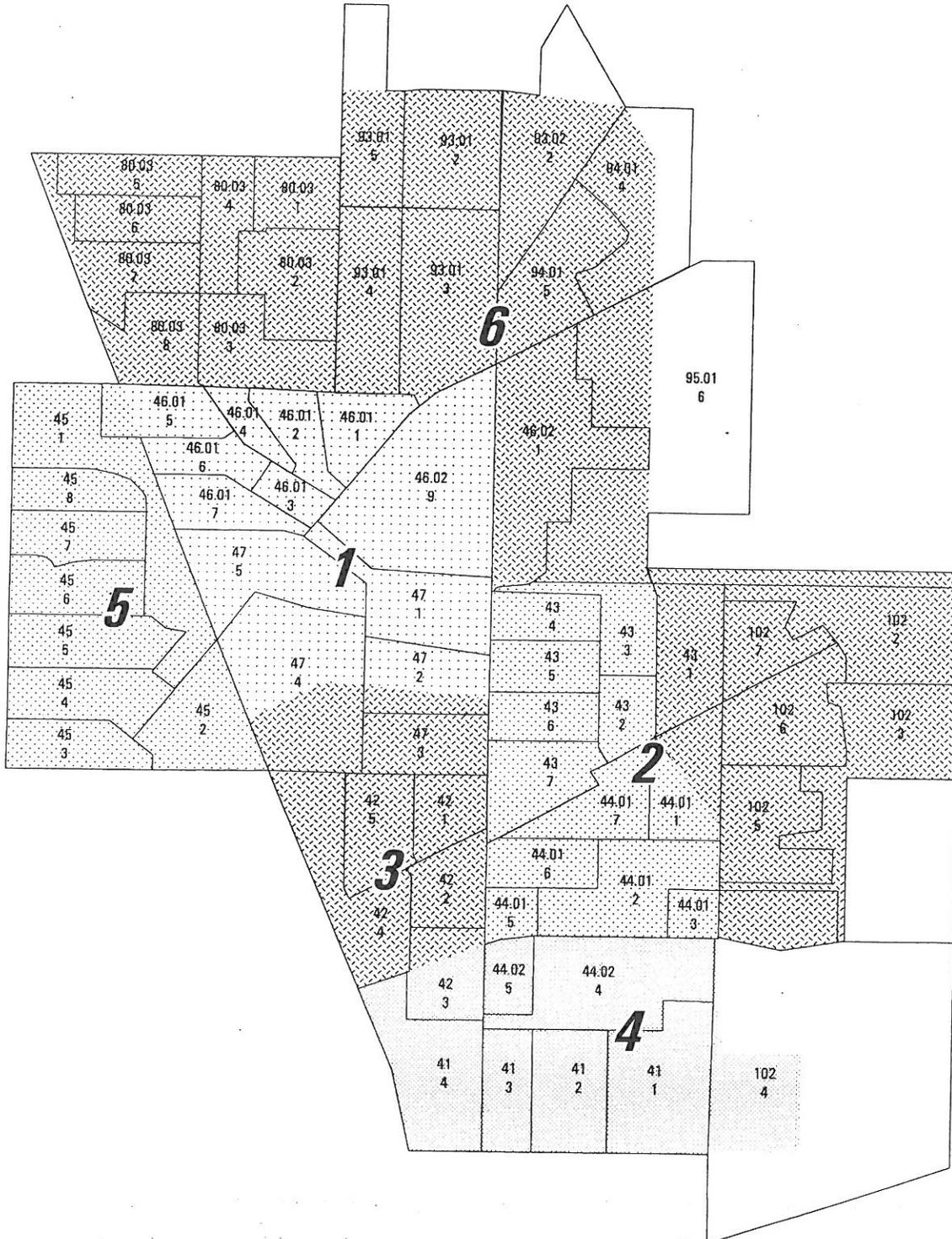
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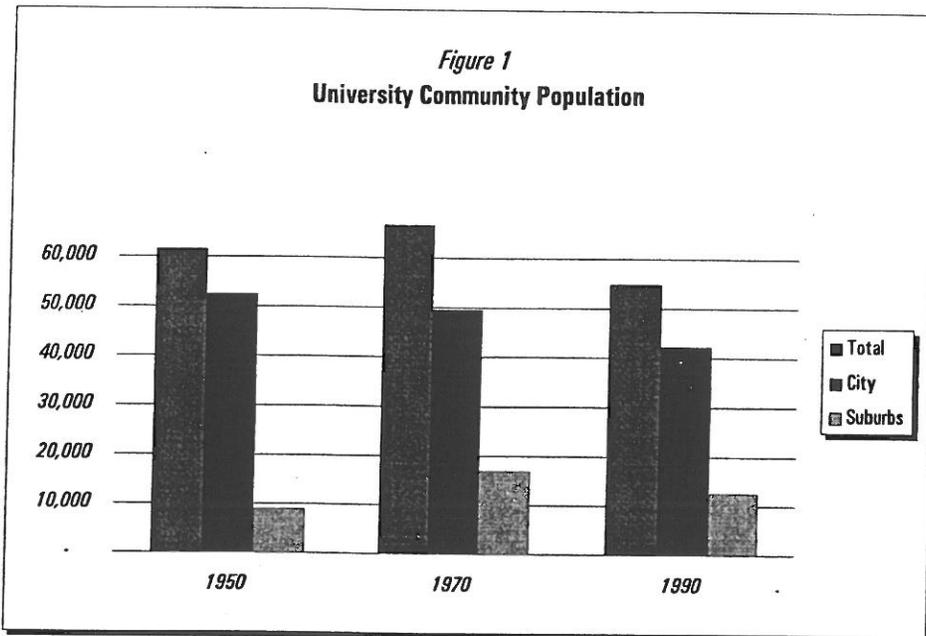
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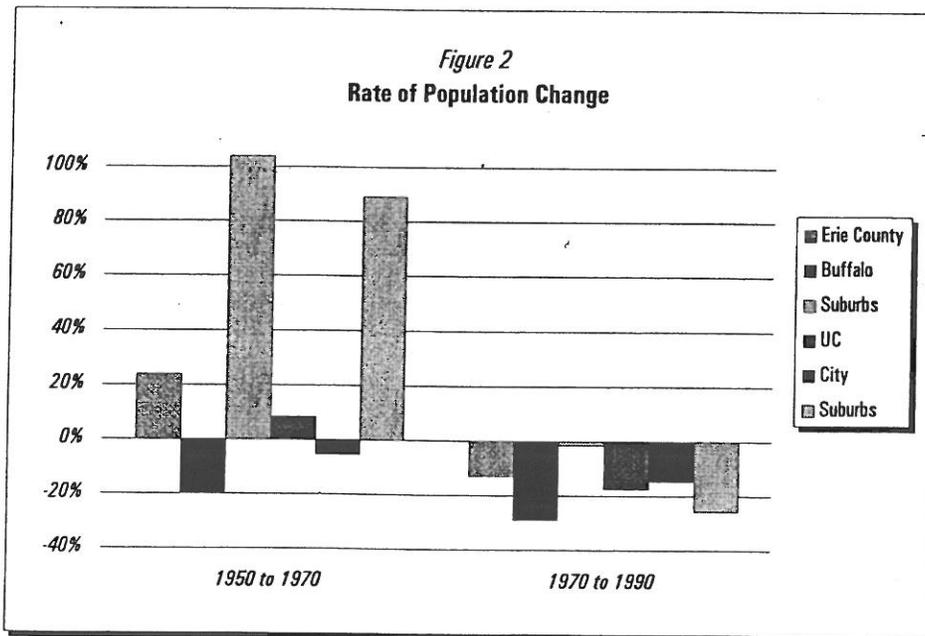
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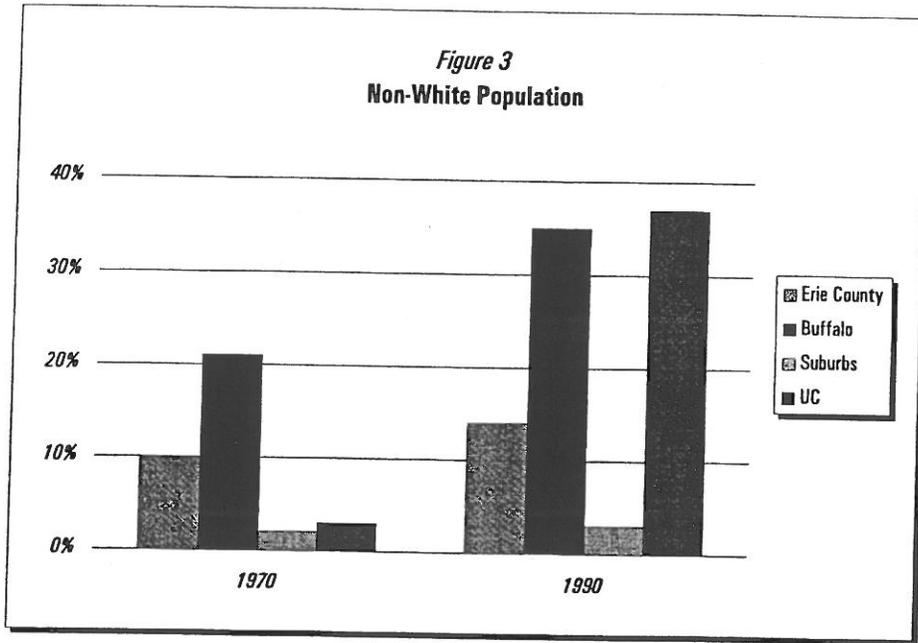
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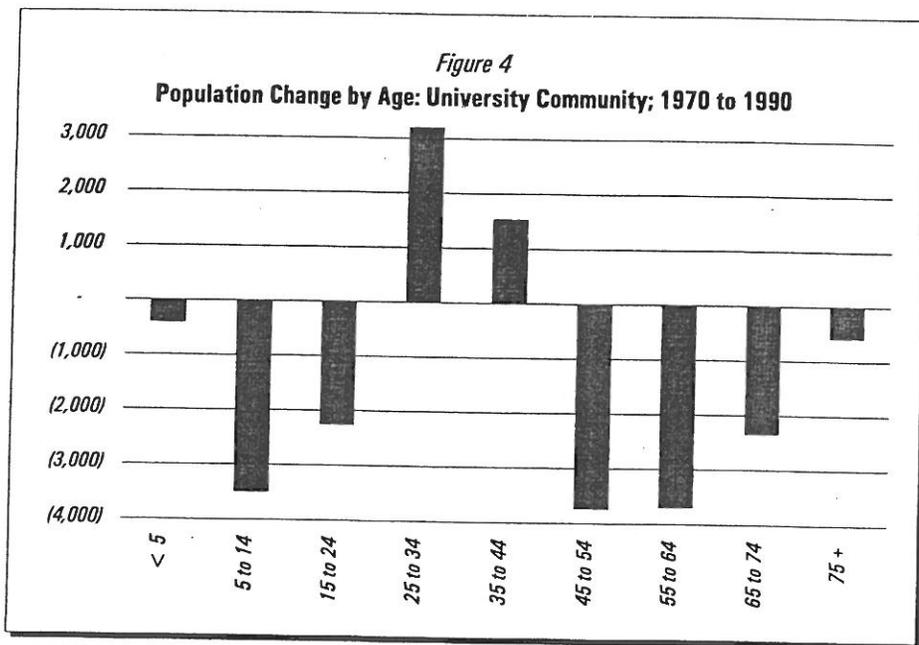
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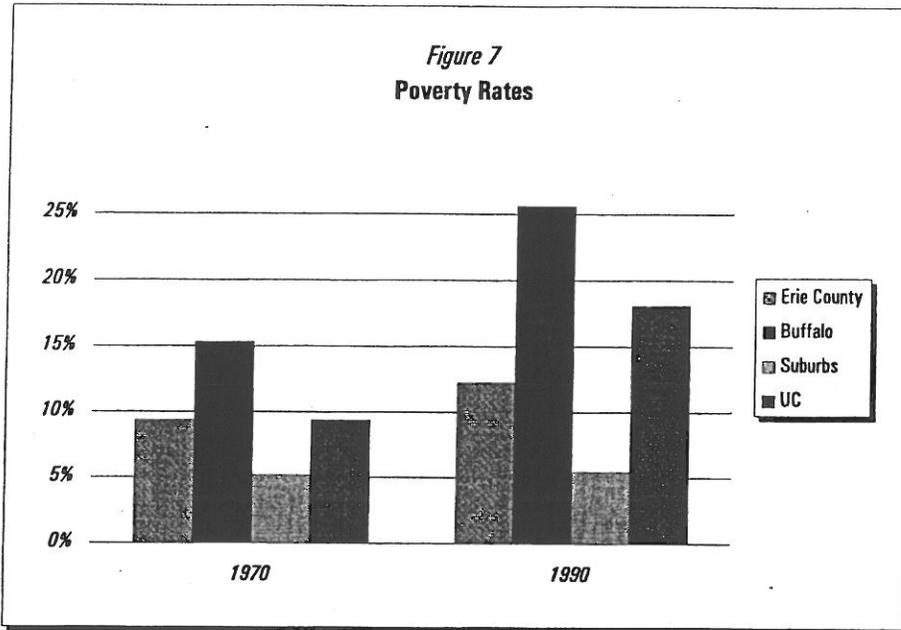
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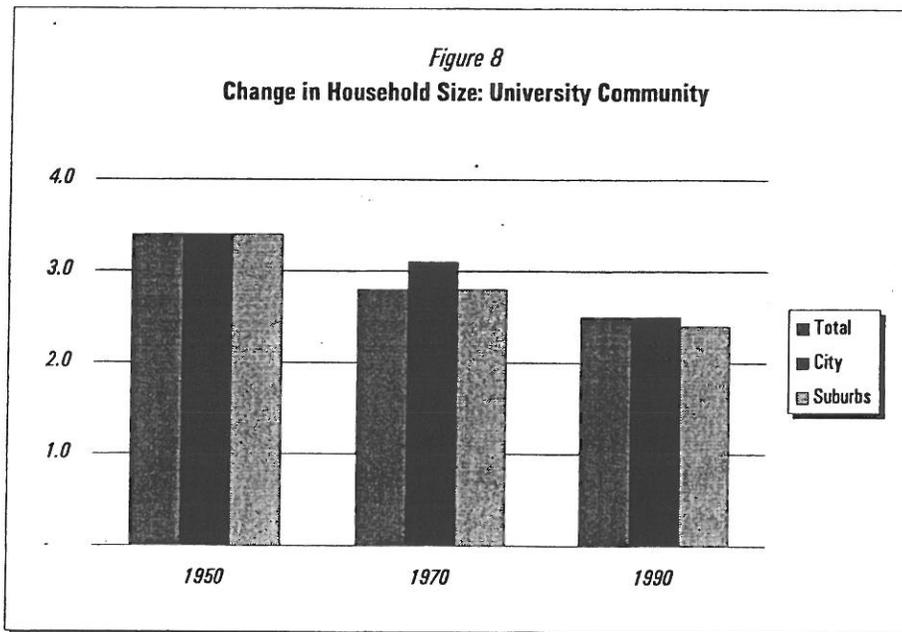
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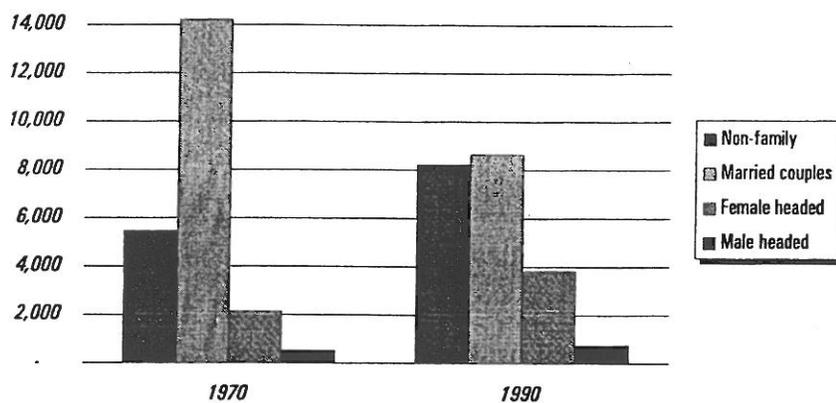
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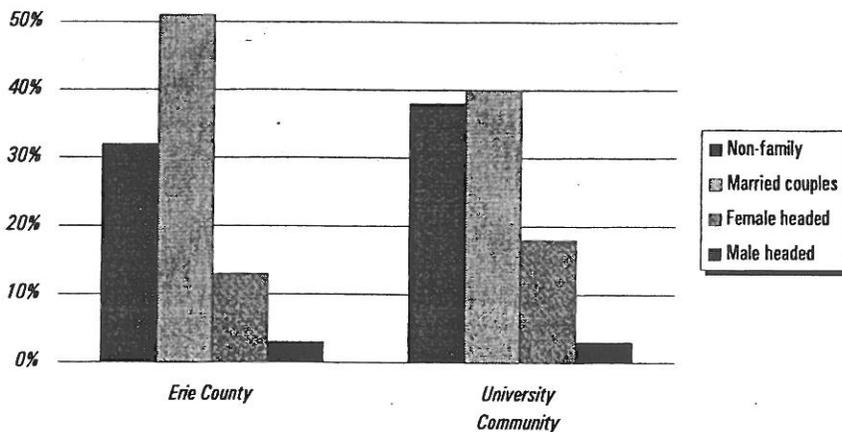
**Figure 8**  
**Change in Household Size: University Community**



*Figure 9*  
**Household Types: University Community**



*Figure 10*  
**Household Types; 1990**



married couple families than the city section, the share of these households still dropped from 72 to 52 percent of all suburban households.

When compared to the county as a whole, the University Community had a higher percentage of both non-family households (38 to 32 percent) and female-headed households (18 to 13 percent) in 1990 (Figure 10). Erie County had a higher percentage of married couple households, both with children under 18 (23 to 18 percent) and without children under 18 (28 to 22 percent).

### ***Housing characteristics***

In 1990, there were 22,950 housing units in the University Community. Single-family homes were the dominant type, representing 55 percent of all units in the community. Doubles accounted for another 33 percent, with only 12 percent in structures with three or more units.

The housing in the University Community is generally older than that of the county as a whole, with just under half of the units having been built before 1940, compared to 38 percent in the county (Figure 11). Only three percent of the housing in the community has been built since 1970, in both the city and suburban sections, compared to six percent in the city as a whole and 26 percent in suburban Erie County.

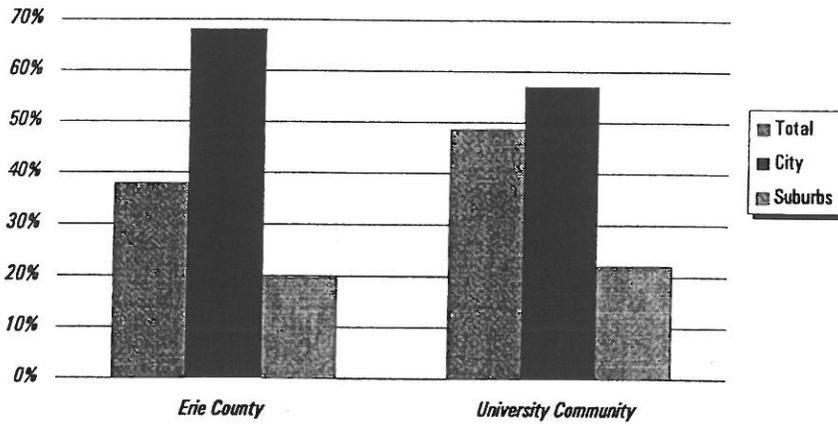
Much of the growth in the housing stock of the University Community took place between 1950 and 1970, with increases of nine percent in the city and 102 percent in the suburbs (Figure 12). Owner occupancy rates, which had held steady at 62 percent between 1950 and 1970, declined slightly between 1970 and 1990 to 59 percent. This decrease resulted from a drop in owner occupancy in the city from 59 to 54 percent, which may have been caused by the conversion of owner-occupied housing into rental units, particularly in neighborhoods adjacent to the university.

Although the city section of the University Community enjoys a higher owner occupancy rate than the city as a whole (54 to 43 percent), tenure in the University Community is largely divided along racial lines. In 1990, 74 percent of all homeowners were white, in comparison to 63 percent of the community's population. Still, the gains made by minorities – particularly blacks – in obtaining homeownership are considerable. In 1970, less than one percent of the homeowners in the University Community were black; by 1990, this figure had risen to 25 percent (Figure 13). County-wide, only 34 percent of black households are owner-occupants, while in the University Community, 48 percent of black households are homeowners (Figure 14). The University Community appears to have become a prime location for black homeownership.

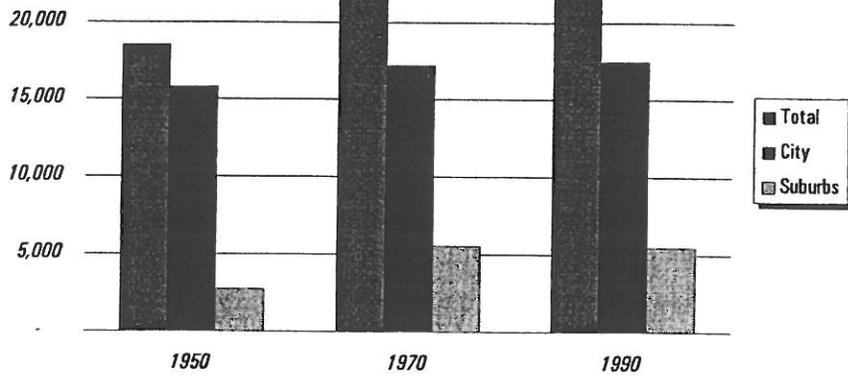
The relative value of owner-occupied units in the University Community slipped slightly between 1970 and 1990, which may have been a contributing factor to the rise in black homeownership. In 1970, the median value of an owner-occupied home in the community was \$16,450, or 89 percent of the county-wide median of \$18,500. By 1990, the median value in the community had risen to \$60,000, but this figure was only 81 percent of the county-wide median of \$74,000 (Figure 15). Within the University Community, there is a fairly wide divergence in value between the city and suburban sections, with the median value of city housing \$50,300, and the median value of suburban housing \$71,500.

Although rent levels in the University Community remain higher than those in the county as a whole, they have also suffered relative declines over the past two decades. Median monthly contract rents, which were 121 percent of the county-wide average in 1970, fell to 110 percent of

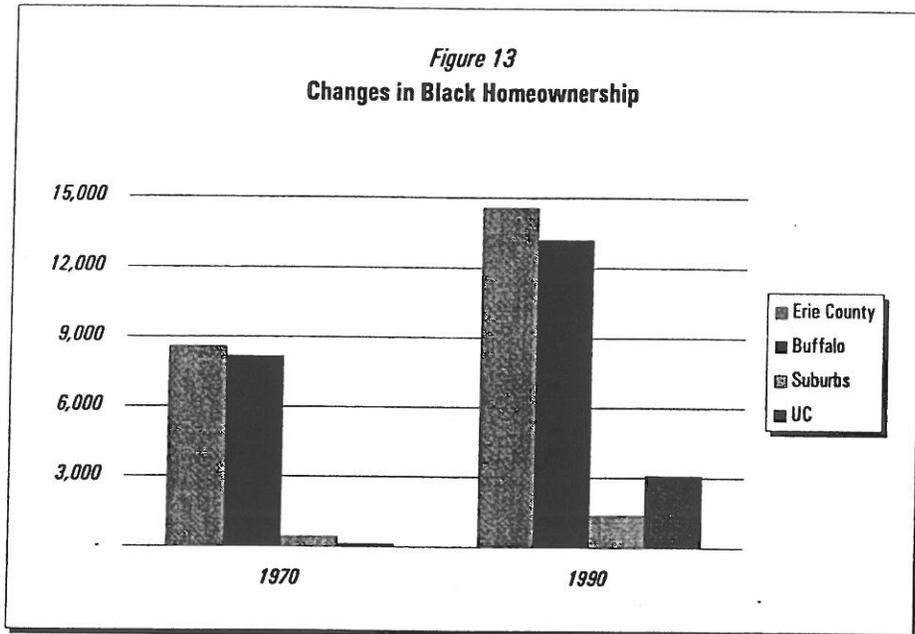
**Figure 11**  
**Housing Built Before 1940**



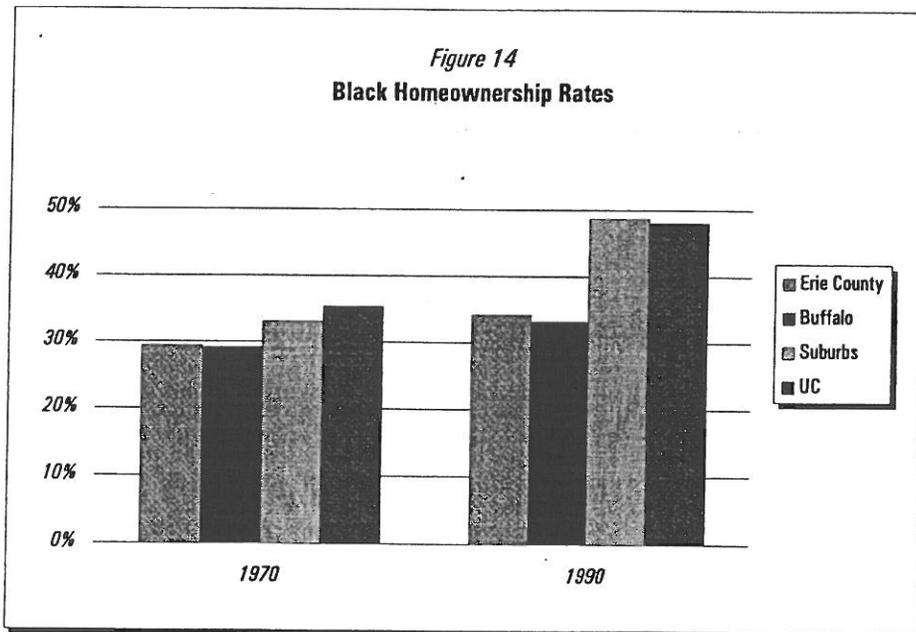
**Figure 12**  
**Change in Numbers of Housing Units: University Community**



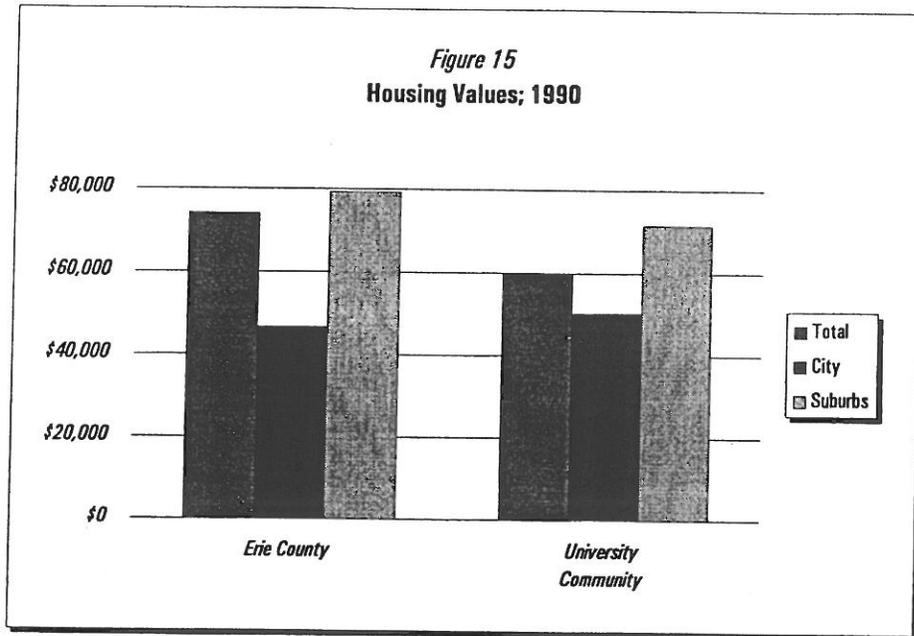
**Figure 13**  
**Changes in Black Homeownership**



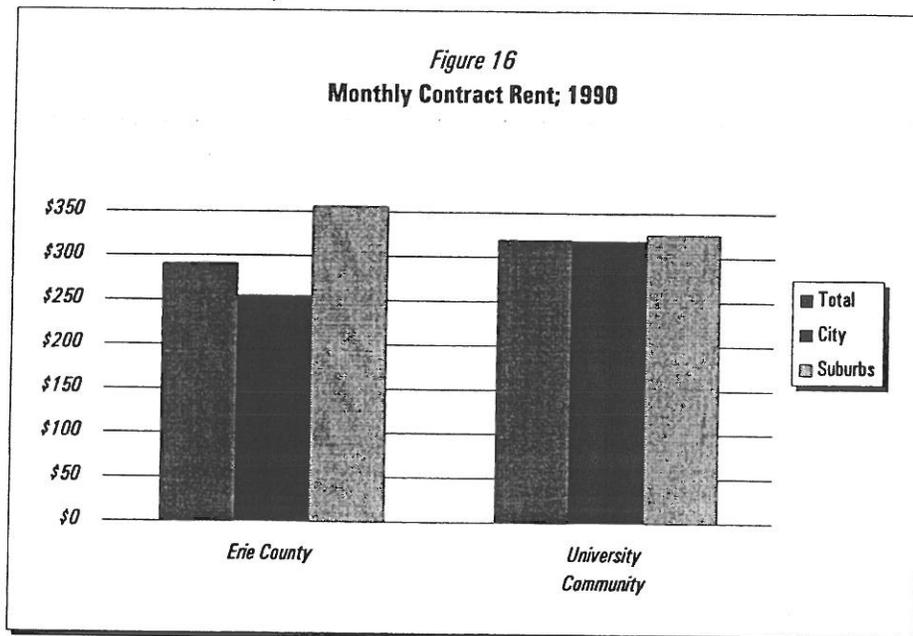
**Figure 14**  
**Black Homeownership Rates**



*Figure 15*  
Housing Values; 1990



*Figure 16*  
Monthly Contract Rent; 1990



the county level by 1990 (Figure 16). This seems to indicate that as more rental housing was built in the suburbs between 1970 and 1990, the demand within the University Community declined. Still, the large student population looking for housing near the campus continues to keep rental prices high.

## **Differences in the University Community Across Place**

Viewing the University Community as a single entity obscures many of the significant differences that are apparent across its geography. Each of the six neighborhoods that comprise the community has its own demographic profile, and it is instructive to examine both the similarities and differences among neighborhoods. The lack of adequate data prior to 1990 prevents a longitudinal study of change in the neighborhoods of the University Community, but the snapshot provided by data from the 1990 census allows for interesting comparisons to be made.

### ***Population characteristics***

Although the University Community has a remarkably well-balanced racial mix, with 63 percent of its population white, 32 percent black, and 4 percent Asian, this pattern is not replicated in any of its six neighborhoods. Only neighborhood 2, which is 54 percent white and 39 percent black, approaches the racial balance of the community as a whole. Of the remaining neighborhoods, three have white populations above 75 percent, while two have minority populations exceeding 67 percent (Figure 17). The racial integration of the University Community may in fact be transitory, given recent trends that indicate a continuing loss of whites and growth in minority populations.

Similarly, the large share of 18 to 24 year olds in the community is primarily a result of concentrations of college-age youth in the neighborhood surrounding the university. Three of the six neighborhoods in the University Community have 18 to 24 year old populations at or below the level found in the county as a whole; while neighborhoods 2 and 3 have populations slightly above the county average; and neighborhood 1 has over 40 percent of its population in this age group (Figure 18). This would indicate that issues relating to student populations would be of greatest concern to residents of neighborhood 1, while residents of other neighborhoods would not be as impacted.

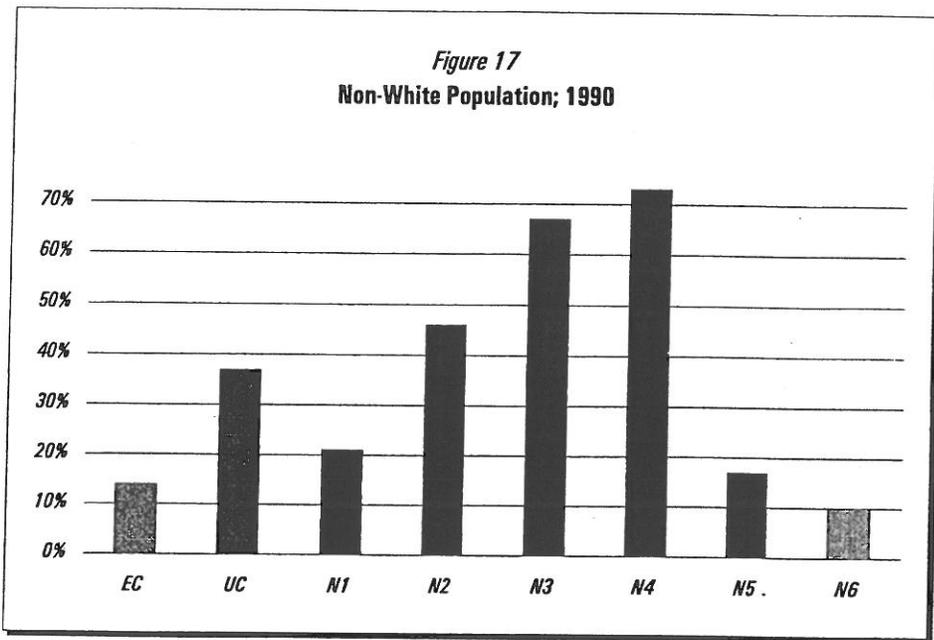
### ***Economic characteristics***

Economic indicators for the six neighborhoods of the University Community varied widely in 1990. Neighborhoods 5 and 6 were typically in better shape than the county as a whole, while neighborhood 4 was consistently in the poorest condition. Unemployment rates in 1990 ranged from a low of 3.4 percent in neighborhood six to a high of 13.4 percent in neighborhood 4 (Figure 19). Neighborhood 1 had a relatively high unemployment rate of 10.9 percent, while neighborhood 5 was the only other neighborhood in the University Community with a rate below the county-wide average of 7.0 percent.

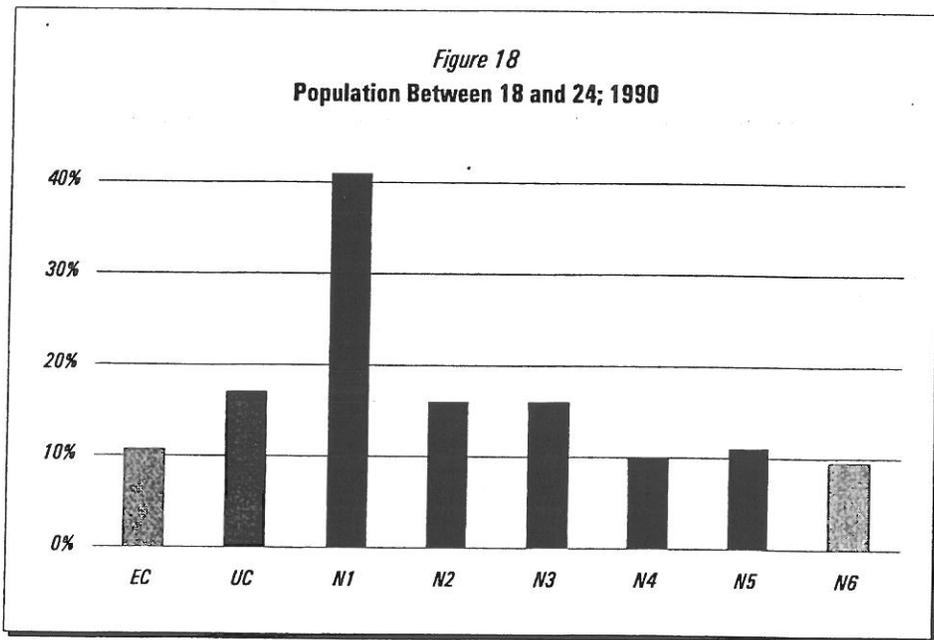
Median household incomes in 1989 were similarly arranged, with neighborhoods 5 and 6 the only ones to have medians above the county-wide figure of \$28,000 (Figure 20). Neighborhoods 1, 2, and 3 all had medians between 84 to 92 percent of Erie County, and were well above the city-wide average of 70 percent of the county's median. Even neighborhood 4, with the lowest median household income in the University Community at \$18,500, matched the city-wide figure for median incomes in 1989.

Poverty rates, which rose so dramatically in the University Community between 1970 and 1990, were also very unevenly distributed within individual neighborhoods. Consistent with median

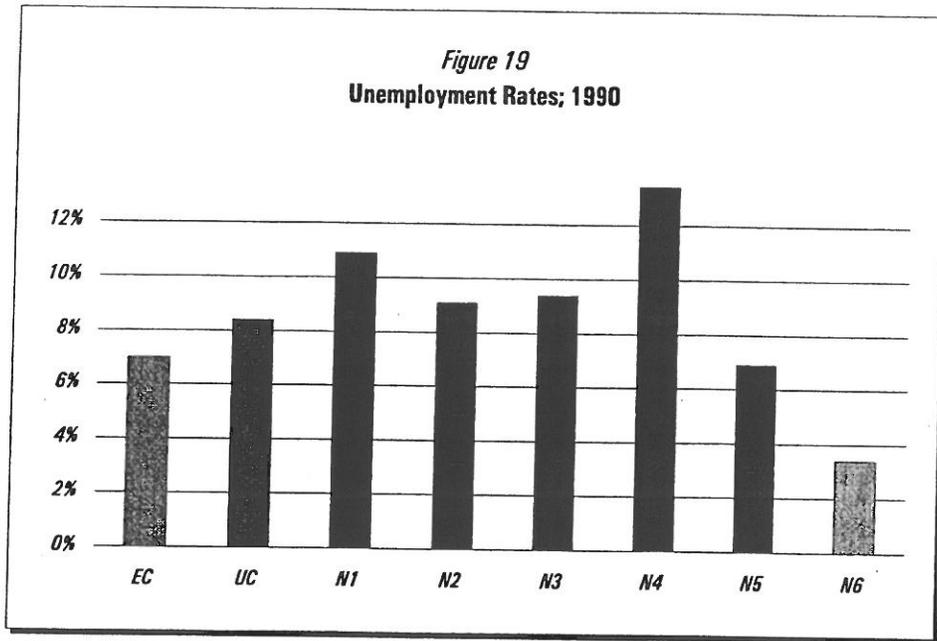
*Figure 17*  
**Non-White Population; 1990**



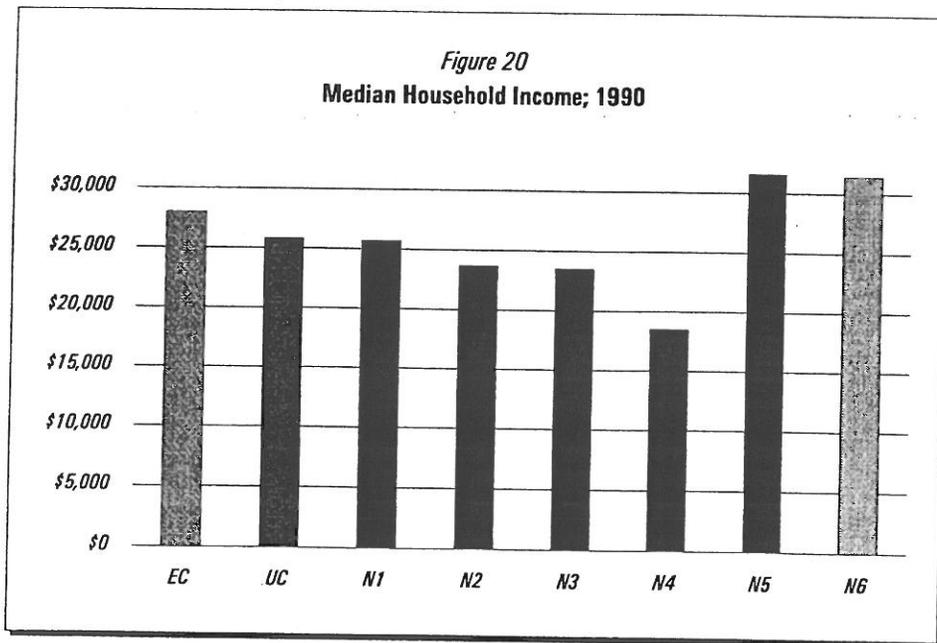
*Figure 18*  
**Population Between 18 and 24; 1990**



*Figure 19*  
**Unemployment Rates; 1990**



*Figure 20*  
**Median Household Income; 1990**



incomes and unemployment rates, 5 and 6 were the only neighborhoods to have poverty rates below the county-wide figure of 12 percent (Figure 21). The other four neighborhoods had rates ranging from 16 to 30 percent. Within the University Community, the overall poverty rate in 1990 was 12 percent for whites, 25 percent for blacks, and 45 percent for Asians – which is most likely a reflection of the large student population among Asians.

### ***Household structure***

Household size across the University Community showed little variation from the overall figure of 2.5 persons per household. The high of 2.7 persons per household was in neighborhood 3, while the low of 2.4 was shared by neighborhoods 2 and 4. The growth of non-family households between 1970 and 1990, which is behind the decrease in household size, was reflected across all neighborhoods of the University Community (Figure 22). Only suburban neighborhood 6 had a lower percentage of non-family households than the county-wide average of 32 percent. Neighborhood 1, adjacent to the university, had the highest rate of non-family households at 53 percent, followed by neighborhood 2 at 44 percent.

### ***Housing characteristics***

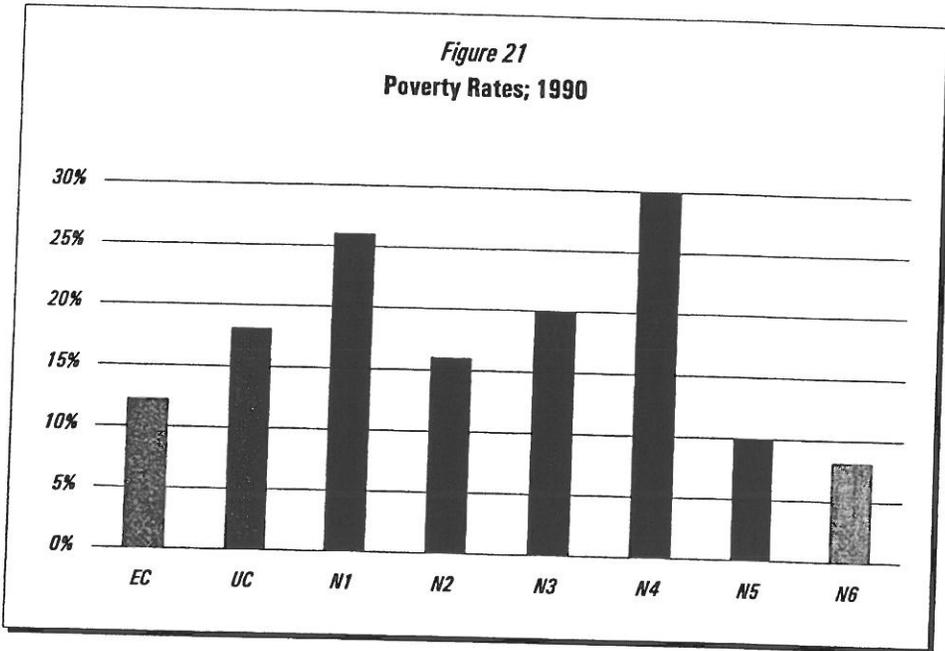
The age of housing in the University Community showed little variation among neighborhoods within either the city or suburban sections. The main differences were between housing located in the city and suburban sections of the community (Figure 23). In the city neighborhoods, between half and two-thirds of the housing was built before 1940; while in the suburban neighborhoods, less than a quarter was of that vintage.

Homeownership rates ranged from 44 percent in neighborhood 4 to 74 percent in neighborhood 6, bracketing the overall University Community figure of 59 percent (Figure 24). Black homeownership shows a wider variation, ranging from a high of 69 percent in neighborhood 3, to a low of 24 percent in neighborhood 6.

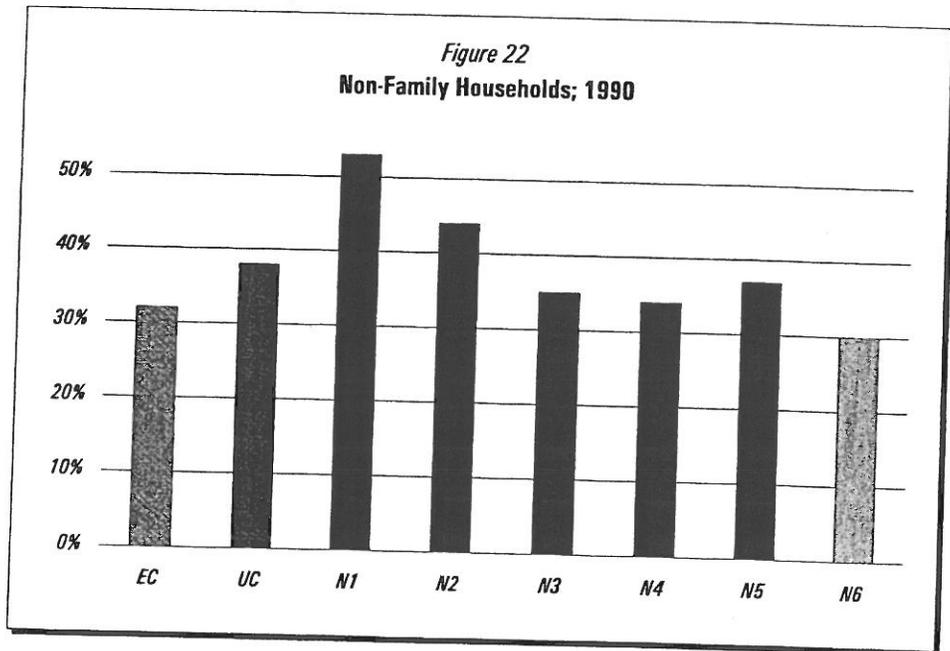
The value of owner-occupied housing in the University Community was above the county-wide median of \$74,000 only in neighborhood 5 (Figure 25). The median value of \$91,200 in 1990 reflects both the stability of the North Buffalo area that forms the majority of the neighborhood, as well as the peak in housing values that occurred at the time of the last census. Neighborhoods 2, 3, and 4 all have median values below the community-wide average, in the low to mid \$40,000 range.

The situation with respect to monthly contract rents is dramatically different, however. Five of the six neighborhoods reported median monthly rents in excess of the county-wide figure of \$290 in 1990 (Figure 26). Only neighborhood 4, which includes a large public housing development where rents are subsidized, had a median rent below Erie County's average. The highest rents were found in neighborhood 1, adjacent to the university, and neighborhood 5, in North Buffalo. The high rent levels throughout the community are an indication of the strong demand for this type of housing at this location.

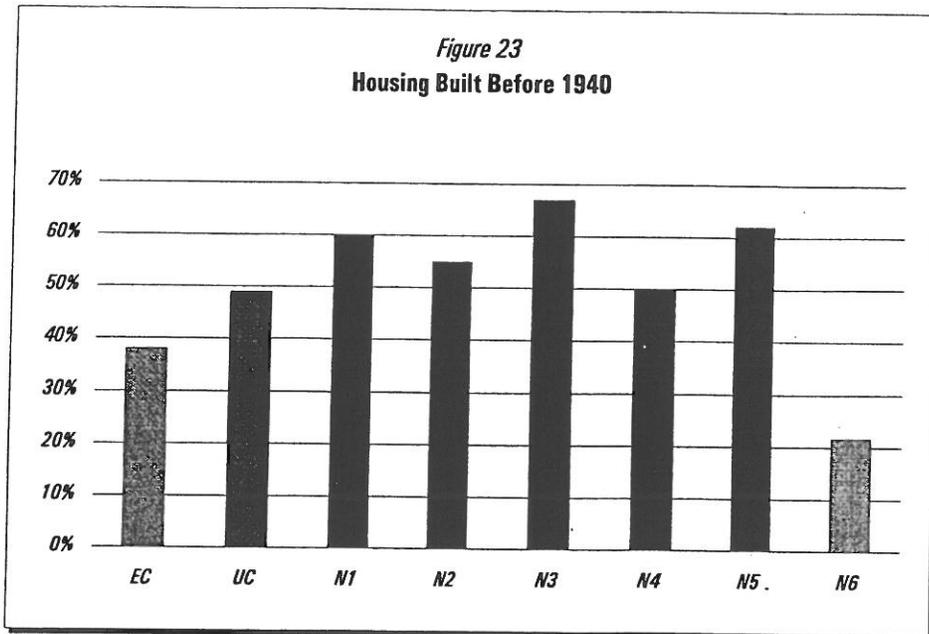
*Figure 21*  
**Poverty Rates; 1990**



*Figure 22*  
**Non-Family Households; 1990**



*Figure 23*  
**Housing Built Before 1940**



*Figure 24*  
**Homeownership Rates; 1990**

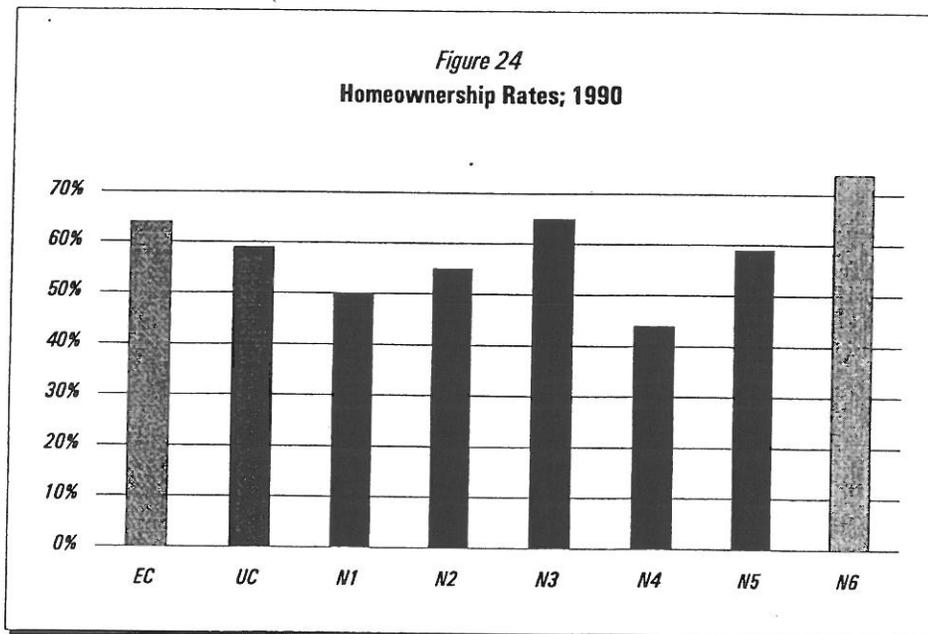


Figure 25  
Median Housing Values; 1990

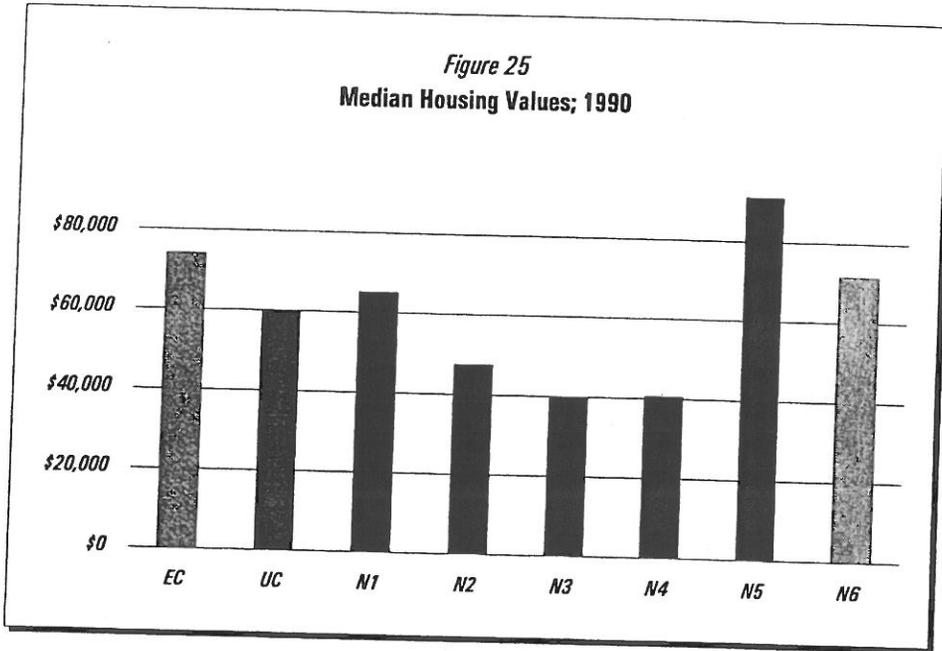
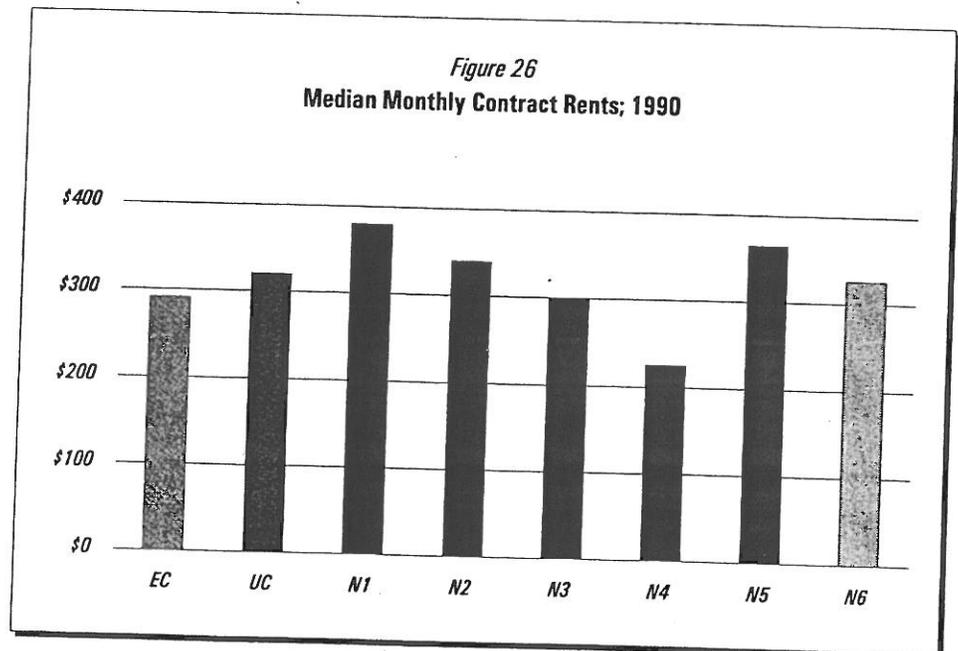


Figure 26  
Median Monthly Contract Rents; 1990



## **Summary**

The demographic profile of the University Community indicates a number of strengths that should be built upon, as well as some weaknesses that need to be addressed. These trends should inform efforts to stabilize and revitalize the neighborhoods of the University Community.

### **Strengths**

- Although the population of the University Community has declined, it has done so at a slower rate than the city as a whole. This may be due to the growing attractiveness of the community to minority households, whose numbers have increased substantially over the past two decades.
- The community – particularly those neighborhoods surrounding the University at Buffalo – is attracting large numbers of young adults between the ages of 18 and 24. Although this is a relatively mobile age group, it may be possible to retain a greater share of its members as they age and their economic situations improve.
- Household incomes in the community held steady with respect to the county-wide median between 1970 and 1990. This indicates that the area remains attractive to a stable base of middle-income households.
- Black homeownership is relatively high in the community, and on the rise. Many of the neighborhoods in the city section are attracting middle-income black households, and this can provide a source of stability in a city rapidly losing its middle-class.
- Housing values remain higher than those for the city as a whole. In addition, values in the University Community were maintained at a higher level between 1970 and 1990 than for rest of the city.
- Rents continue to outpace those of Erie County. Only one neighborhood in the University Community had a median rent lower than the county-wide figure in 1990. The demand for rental housing, particularly among the student population, serves to maintain these levels.

### **Weaknesses**

- The racial balance found in the University Community as a whole is not being replicated within individual neighborhoods. It remains to be seen whether this balance is transitional, as neighborhoods move from white majority to black majority, or if truly integrated neighborhoods can be maintained.
- Unemployment and poverty rates increased dramatically between 1970 and 1990, in contrast to the median income, which remained relatively stable. This may indicate a fracturing of the community between a stable middle-class and a growing number of households living in poverty.

- The number of non-family and female-headed households, the households types with the lowest incomes, are rising. While this mirrors trends occurring throughout Erie County, the increases in the University Community are at a much faster rate than in the county as a whole.
- The housing stock in the community is aging, and there has been very little new housing built in both the city and suburban sections over the past 20 years. As new housing is built further from both the central city and inner suburbs, the migration of middle-class households from the older neighborhoods of the region will likely continue.
- Although median housing values and rents in the University Community remain higher than for the city as a whole, both are declining relative to county-wide figures. As the housing stock ages, its value will continue to fall if appropriate levels of maintenance are deferred.