



**University at Buffalo**  
*State University of New York*

University Community Initiative (UCI)  
Office of Vice President for Public Service and Urban Affairs

## The Bailey Avenue Project



*Prepared by*  
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Spring 1997



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*State University of New York*

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## The Bailey Avenue Project



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## **Introduction**

The health and vitality of a community is strongly influenced by perception. When residents perceive their neighborhoods and commercial districts to be safe, they invest more time and resources in their community. Similarly, areas that suffer blight are often viewed to be unstable, reinforcing negative stereotypes and perpetuating the out migration of middle class residents.

In the spring 1997 studio class members and graduate assistants at the University at Buffalo's Center for Urban Studies (Center) undertook the Bailey Avenue Project at the request of University District Council member Kevin Helfer. The project objective was to analyze the portions of Bailey Avenue which fell within the University Community boundaries and to identify the realities and perceptions of the Bailey Avenue business community.

The study encompassed compiling a database of the existing businesses on Bailey Avenue through fieldwork and telephone interviews; employing available government information such as the federal government's Standard Industrial Code (SIC), city assessment data and census tract information; hosting a Vision Session at the Edward Saunders Community Center to determine resident concerns; conducting a resident survey in the Bailey Avenue area; and interviewing business owners and managers on a sample of Bailey Avenue to determine merchants' perceptions of Bailey Avenue.

This report is divided into to six portions. The first section provides a profile of Bailey Avenue within the context of the University Community. This will be followed by an outline of the Bailey Avenue Project's purpose and a description of the methodology used. The limitations of the study will also be addressed in this section. The main body of the Bailey Avenue Report discusses residential and merchant perceptions of Bailey Avenue after briefly describing the existing business mix on Bailey Avenue. This is ensued by an outline of the study's major findings. Section five contains recommendations and implications for future studies. The final section presents some concluding remarks.

### **Profile of Bailey Avenue and the University Community Initiative**

Bailey Avenue is a busy street in the heart of the University Community and is a thoroughfare to many other communities in Erie County. Located in the northeast corner of the City of Buffalo, there are many small businesses located on the street as well as several social and cultural institutions, including Kensington-Bailey Community Center, Horizon Human Services, the Salvation Army, and portions of the University at Buffalo's Main Street (South) Campus.

The University Community Initiative (UCI) is a multi-faceted project involving the City of Buffalo, Town of Amherst, Cheektowaga, Tonawanda, and University at Buffalo to stabilize, revitalize and reinvent the neighborhoods surrounding the university's Main Street campus, collectively known as the University Community (figure 1). This partnership with the community is designed to ensure that these neighborhoods remain inviting places to live, work, and play well into the future.

Bailey Avenue has been affected by significant changes in the University Community since the 1970s. Census tracts from 1970 to 1990 have shown that the population of the University Community has fallen seventeen percent, from 66,500 to 54,800. This decline can largely be attributed to smaller household sizes in the University Community. In 1950, the average household size in the University Community was 3.4 persons. By 1990, the average household size in the University Community had fallen to 2.5 persons, with single persons composing almost 30 percent of all households. Erie County recorded 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).

The University Community has also seen a decline in its median household income. Census tracts show that in 1970, the median household income in the University Community was \$8,200, which was 94 percent of Erie County's median of \$8,800. By 1990, the median household income in the community had increased to \$25,800, which was now 92 percent of the County's median of \$28,000. The city of Buffalo fared much worse during this period, with a drop from 75 to 70 percent of the county-wide median.

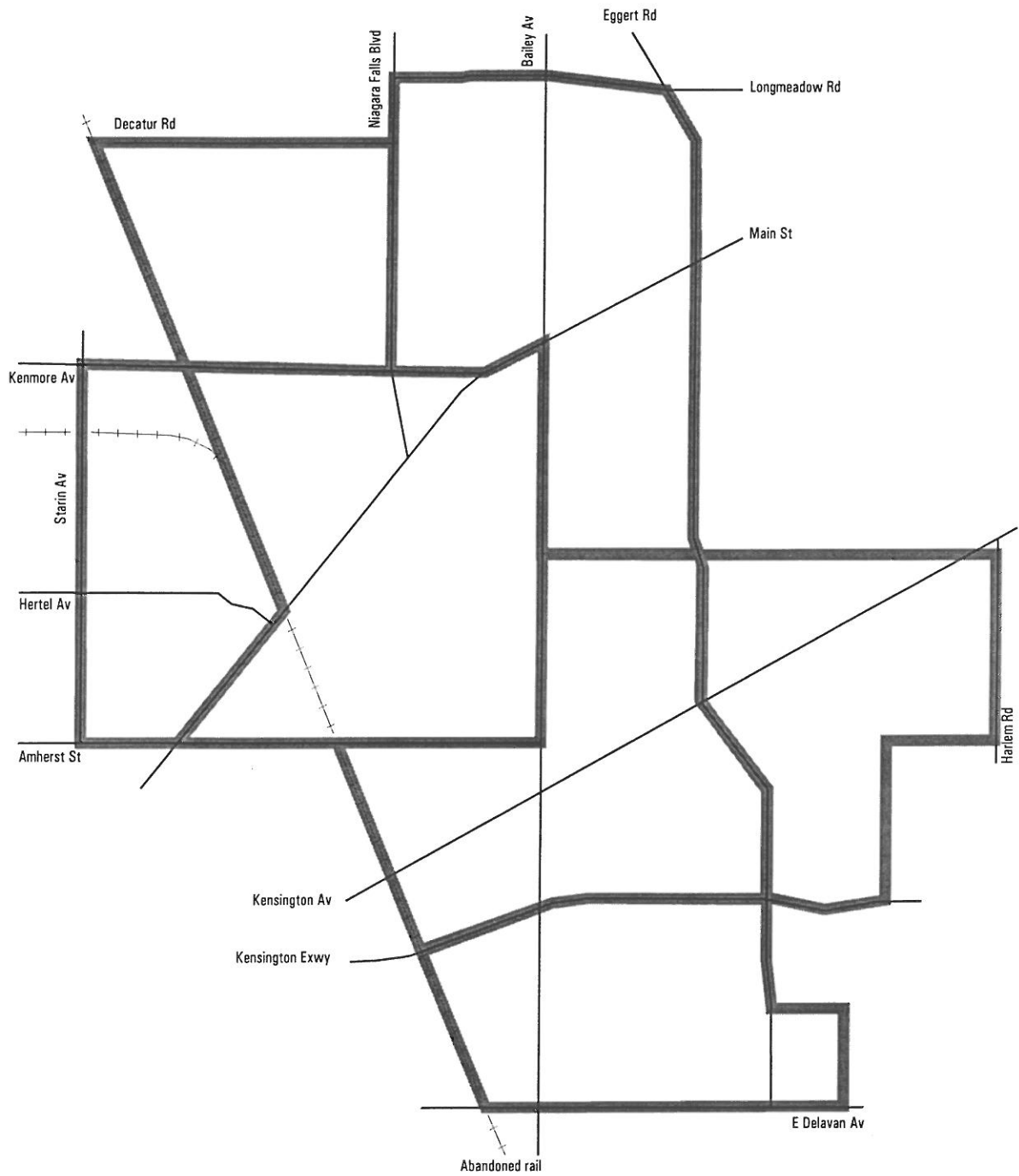
In addition to this, poverty rate statistics indicate that University Community has become much poorer. From 1970 to 1990, the University Community's poverty rate doubled, increasing from 9 to 18 percent, with the number of persons living below the poverty line reaching 60 percent. This increase was chiefly limited to the Buffalo portions of the University Community, which had an increase from 15 to 26 percent. The poverty rate in suburban Erie County remained relatively stable during this period, with poverty rate increases of slightly more than 5 percent.

Changes in the racial composition of the University Community were also prevalent during this period. From 1970 to 1990, the black population of the University Community increased by 32 percent of the total population while there was a decrease of almost 30,000 residents. Of the total black population in the University Community, 96 percent reside in Buffalo, compared to an even greater proportion than the 92 percent of blacks county-wide who live in the city.



Map 1

University Community Neighborhoods



## Study Purpose and Methodology

The Bailey Avenue Project objective was to analyze the portions of Bailey Avenue which fell within the University Community boundaries to ascertain the realities and perceptions of the Bailey Avenue business community. We were especially interested in investigating the physical attributes of Bailey Avenue; the attitudes and concerns of the residents in the Bailey Avenue area; as well as the attitudes and concerns of the business owners and managers on Bailey Avenue.

From January to May of 1997 studio class members and graduate assistants at the CENTER worked to verify existing CENTER databases of Bailey Avenue businesses. The information in this database was then merged with lists of businesses and contact people obtained from University District Council member Helfer's office and Kensington-Bailey Neighborhood Housing Services (KBNHS). This enabled us to update our information base and facilitated further study.

A phone survey was conducted asking owners and staff members of businesses to confirm the existence of their establishment, the business' address, and the name of the contact person for the business. Establishments that were previously confirmed through recent fieldwork were not called.

We were successful in reaching about half of the businesses on our list by phone. The other businesses were confirmed through the assistance of University at Buffalo interns working for KBNHS and through field work. Almost every businesses on our list was confirmed.

The federal government's Standard Industrial Code (SIC) was employed to categorize each business listed in the database. The SIC is produced by the US Department of Labor's Office of Occupational Safety and Health Administration and provides a list of numerical codes which corresponds to specific businesses. By categorizing the businesses by specific type, we were then able to ascertain which businesses were most prevalent on Bailey Avenue and which businesses were under represented.

City assessment data enabled us to analyze the existing physical business mix on Bailey Avenue even further. From previous and current assessment rolls we were able to obtain the name of the property owner, the assessed value of the property, the land value of the property, the land code, the property dimensions and descriptions, and the zoning codes listed for all businesses.

A resident survey was conducted to ascertain resident attitudes and visitation patterns on Bailey Avenue. In some of these questions, residents were asked to rate aspects of Bailey Avenue from poor to excellent. Other questions were "open-ended" which afforded residents the opportunity to briefly answer questions in their own words. Demographic questions were included in the survey which allowed us to procure

resident profiles from the sample. Surveys were left at community institutions in the Bailey Avenue area such as libraries, community centers, churches, health clinics, and shops.

Additional fieldwork was conducted in the Fall of 1997 by CENTER staff to ascertain the attitudes of business owners and managers on a sample of Bailey Avenue in an informal manner. We were particularly interested in ascertaining whether merchants were happy with their location on Bailey Avenue and how merchants perceived Bailey Avenue in terms of safety and profitability.

### **Limitations**

The data from the Bailey Avenue study was compiled using several sources. While every attempt was made to ensure accuracy, the dynamic conditions of small businesses constantly change. Businesses everywhere, not just on Bailey Avenue, are subject to market conditions and experience highs and lows. It is quite possible that in the short time since our study was conducted, new businesses have opened and closed on Bailey Avenue.

## **The Results of the Bailey Avenue Study**

### **The Bailey Avenue University Community Trade Area.**

*The mix of businesses on Bailey Avenue.* Our fieldwork and data analysis yielded a great deal of information regarding the existing physical mix of businesses on Bailey Avenue, from Winspear to Delavan. We were able to confirm the operation of at least one hundred and sixty-one businesses, including restaurants, clothing stores, banks, beauty parlors, furniture stores, automotive shops, shoe stores, insurance agents, flower shops, small convenience stores (there are not any large supermarkets), and rental centers. In addition to this, there are a variety of churches and community institutions located on Bailey Avenue, such as McAlpine Presbyterian, Bethany Lutheran Church, the Bailey Avenue AME Zion Church, Horizon Human Services, and the Salvation Army.

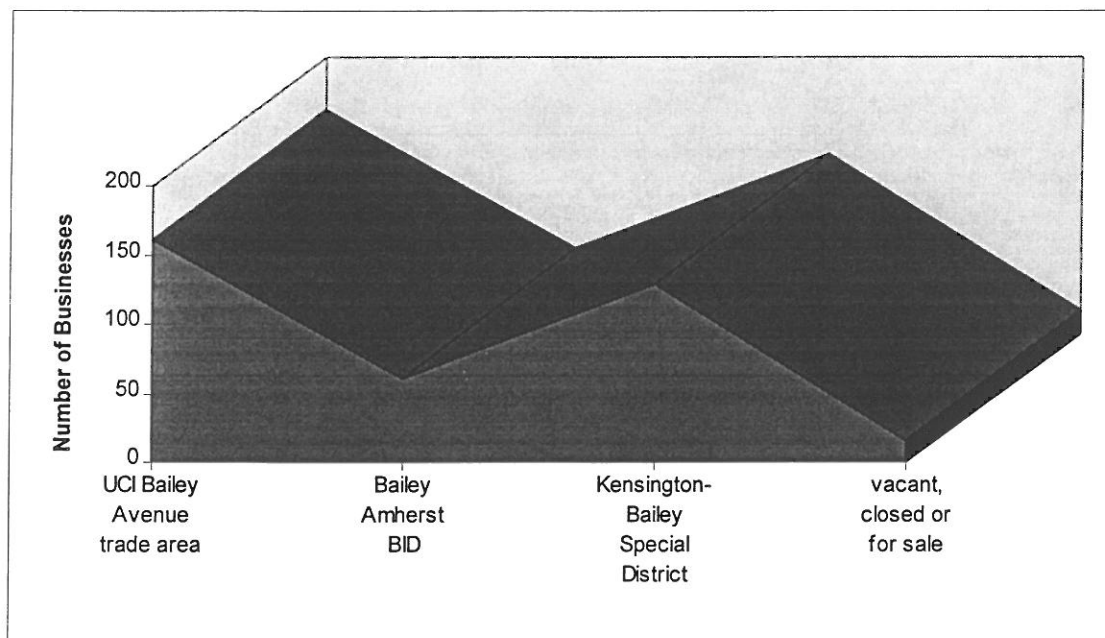
*Bailey-Amherst Business Improvement District.* Sixty-one of the Bailey Avenue businesses confirmed in our database are located in the Bailey-Amherst Business Improvement District (Bailey-Amherst BID) which is managed by the Bailey Amherst District Management Association (BADMA). The district was approved by the Buffalo City Council after winning support from a referendum of the residents in the area and is in its tenth year of operation.

The Bailey Amherst BID's activities are paid for by a special surcharge added to the property tax bill of property owners within the district's boundaries between Bailey from Hewitt to Phyllis and 1083 to 1142 Kensington Ave. Funded activities include winter snow plowing, sidewalk sweeping, planting flower beds, and landscaping.

*Kensington-Bailey Business District.* Approximately one hundred and thirty businesses on Bailey Avenue also fall within the specially zoned Kensington-Bailey Business District. The area encompasses Bailey Avenue from Winspear to the Kensington Expressway, and Kensington Avenue from Parkridge and Northumberland to Eggert. The City of Buffalo created this special district to protect the area from the over-development and expansion of bars, taverns, restaurants, fast food take-out shops and commercial enterprises which jeopardize the unique and continuing viability of the area.

*Vacant, closed or for sale parcels.* Current records provided by Kensington Bailey Neighborhood Housing Services show that approximately sixteen businesses on Bailey Avenue are closed, for sale or vacant. Compared to the relative size of the Bailey Avenue University Community trade area as a whole, the vacancy rate is approximately ten percent (figure 2).

Figure 2



## Resident Perception of Bailey Avenue

The results from the Bailey Avenue Vision Session and the Resident Survey yielded a great deal of information and are discussed below. Whenever possible, the data has been presented collectively. The questions that were asked to determine resident perceptions of Bailey Avenue can be grouped into several categories: what residents liked about Bailey Avenue; the appearance and cleanliness of Bailey Avenue; what residents want changed on Bailey Avenue; safety perceptions; and residents' need assessments for new businesses on Bailey Avenue.

*What residents liked about Bailey Avenue.* When residents were asked what they liked most about Bailey Avenue, almost thirty percent of survey respondents wrote that they did not like anything about Bailey Avenue. A number of these residents also mentioned that they used to like Bailey Avenue but indicated that the street had deteriorated over time. Some of the responses to the question "what do you like most about Bailey Avenue" from these dissatisfied residents included:

"Not much! It was once a beautiful street. Now there's graffiti and dirt. And it's dangerous."

"Nothing-one big eye sore"

"Nothing-used to enjoy walking up there but not anymore."

"Bailey Avenue has gone downhill over the past several years. I no longer feel safe shopping or walking in the area. Graffiti, boarded businesses make it unsightly."

"Nothing! Almost ashamed to state where we live..."

Of the positive aspects residents noted, the convenience of Bailey Avenue was also cited slightly more than thirty percent of the time. Respondents liked the fact that Bailey Avenue was accessible to bus lines and other destinations in the County. Typical answers to the question "what do you like most about Bailey Avenue" from these residents included:

"It's convenience and it's accessibility to city residents."

"It's accessible to many bus lines."

"It's a main thoroughfare to many places, I feel safe except for some pocket areas."

"Close to Amherst."

"Convenient-I only live one block away. Variety of types of stores. Ethnicity of area."

Slightly over thirty percent of the residents also noted that they liked the variety of businesses on Bailey Avenue. Some respondents named specific stores and businesses they frequented. Others discussed Bailey Avenue in more general terms as a business center:

"I like the stores and restaurants."

"It has everything, everything but a grocery store."

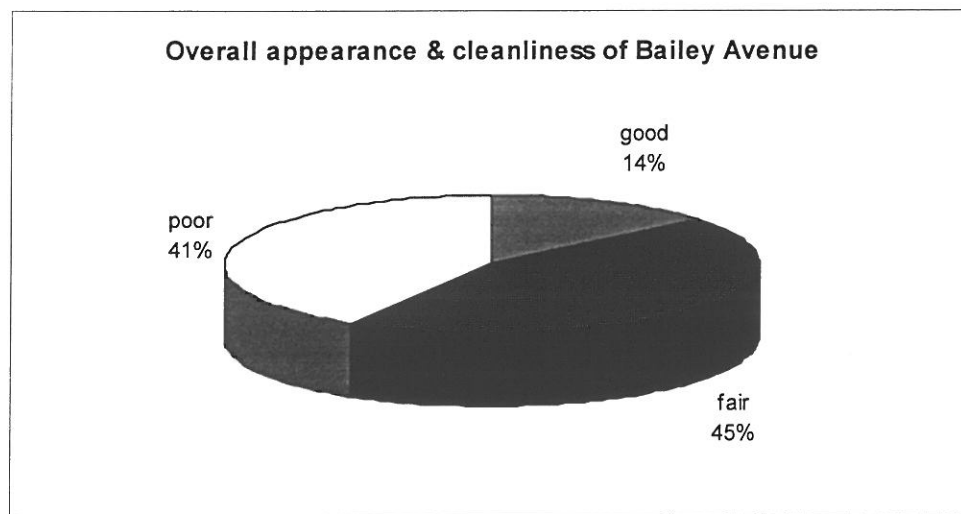
"My business is on Bailey and I like the way they continue to add on to the area to bring people in the neighborhood. Everybody knows to come here for certain services no matter what."

"I like the business-like atmosphere."

"I like the banking facilities."

*The appearance and cleanliness of Bailey Avenue.* In spite of the resident's positive comments about the presence of businesses on Bailey Avenue, when residents were asked to rate the overall appearance of the businesses on Bailey Avenue in a separate question on the resident survey, 41 percent of the respondents rated their overall appearance poor, and 45 percent fair (figure 3). Similarly, low evaluations were also given to the question of the physical appearance of Bailey Avenue which included sidewalk and street conditions. Less than thirteen percent of the residents rated the physical appearance as good, with twenty-nine percent rating it poor and almost fifty-eight percent evaluating it as fair.

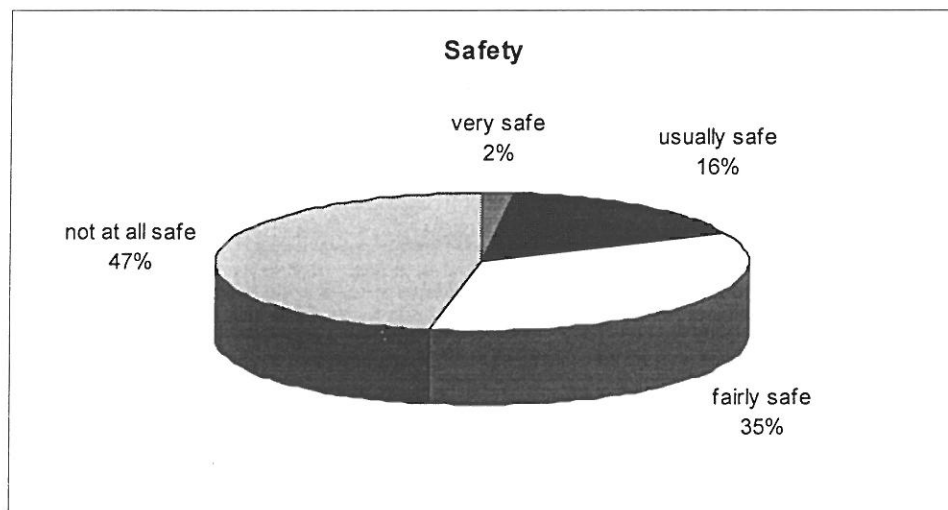
Figure 3



*What residents want changed on Bailey Avenue.* When residents were asked at the Vision Session what they would change about Bailey Avenue, over half of the participants indicated that they would change the aesthetic qualities of Bailey Avenue. A number of these residents also indicated that change needed to include the addition of new businesses, as well as better parking arrangements and public works improvements for the Bailey Avenue area.

*Safety.* The results from the survey clearly indicate that the perception of safety on Bailey Avenue is a problem for residents. When asked to rate “how safe do you feel on Bailey Avenue?” forty-seven percent of respondents indicated that they did not feel at all safe, thirty-five percent answered that they felt fairly safe, sixteen percent responded that usually felt safe, and only two percent responded that they perceived Bailey Avenue as very safe (figure 4).

Figure 4



Residents were asked what else they thought the police could do to make Bailey Avenue safer. Almost a third of the survey respondents answered that they thought the police should prohibit teens from loitering on Bailey Avenue, while almost a fifth of the respondents indicated that they would like to see more visibility from the police. Some respondents also acknowledged that it takes more than just the police to improve the Bailey area. Typical responses to the question “what else do you think the police could do to make Bailey Avenue safer?” included:

“[It] takes more than just the police. [It] must be a joint effort by the police, residents, and business owners.”

“[The police could] get out of their cars and out on foot like they use to.”

“Get rid of [the] teens gathering on corners...”

“To be seen would help a lot.”

“Ask the kids who hang out on corners to move.”

“I don’t know- people have to change from inside. Lawlessness reigns and there is little or no respect for authority. So many just don’t care!”

*Resident assessment of Bailey Avenue needs.* Residents in the Bailey Avenue area were asked several questions to ascertain the attitudes residents had towards Bailey Avenue businesses. Residents were asked the following questions: the frequency in which they visited Bailey Avenue; how they spent their money on Bailey Avenue; if they did not shop on Bailey Avenue, why not; where else Bailey Avenue area residents shopped; and what new businesses residents would like to see on Bailey Avenue.

In spite of residents’ low safety perceptions of Bailey Avenue, forty-one percent of respondents indicated that they frequently visited Bailey Avenue, and eighteen percent replied that they sometimes visit Bailey Avenue. The most commonly identified businesses frequented were eating establishments, clothing stores, automotive-related businesses, and novelty shops (figure 5).

Figure 5

Type of business	Percentage of residents frequenting establishments
eating establishments	41 %
clothing stores	26 %
automotive businesses	18 %
novelty shops	16 %
barber shops	14 %
beauty shops	14 %
office clinics/doctor’s offices	12 %
other	26 %

To the survey question “If you do not visit Bailey Avenue, why not?” residents indicated that they did not visit Bailey Avenue for a variety of reasons. The most often cited reasons were: the area was unsafe (47%); merchants did not carry what they need (28%); there were access problems (16%); and that services needed were unavailable. At the Vision Session, residents articulated similar concerns, although residents asserted that there was a lack of quality of merchandise over a third of the time.



The data from both the resident survey and the Vision Session clearly indicated that the majority of residents in the Bailey Avenue area shop at the University Plaza, located nearby on Main Street. In particular, many residents specifically mentioned the Tops grocery store located in the Plaza. This is especially interesting given that when residents were asked to identify what new businesses they would like to see on Bailey Avenue in the resident survey, almost a quarter of the residents indicated that they needed a new grocery store. Residents also indicated that they would like to see new clothing stores, restaurants, shoe stores, bakeries, and movie theaters.

### **Merchant Perception of Bailey Avenue**

On September 15, 1997, and October 16, 1997 the First Annual Bailey Avenue Walk was held by the Bailey Amherst District Management Association (BADMA) and University District Council member Helfer. The team also included representatives from the University Community Initiative (UCI), Kensington Bailey Neighborhood Housing Services (KBNHS), and the Buffalo Police Department. The purpose of the walk was to acquaint business owners with community resources in the Bailey Avenue area and to identify businesses' immediate concerns.

*Overall attitude.* All of the owners and managers who were interviewed claimed that they were satisfied with the location of their businesses on Bailey Avenue. While several merchants identified problems and potential problems to our team such as teenagers hanging-out around the backs of stores, slow police response to shoplifting problems, and "smash and grabs" in the area, most of them said that the conditions in the area had improved substantially. The merchants also told us that the crime rate on Bailey Avenue had decreased markedly over the last few years. Some of the responses to the question "are you experiencing any problems on Bailey Avenue or do you have any concerns" from these merchants included:

"We really don't have many problems here. We have great customers for the most part. [They include] professionals and many people who live close-by. Some of our customers our little old ladies who walk here to buy their milk and bread. They depend on us and it would be terrible if we weren't here for them."

"We have had some problems with kids on bikes-we think they are around twelve years old-smashing car windows in our parking lot and stealing things from the cars."

"We've having a big problem with the police response time! A couple of times we've caught shoplifters and when we dial 911 it takes the police two hours to get here... we had the security guard handcuff them but we ended-up having to let them go because the police took so long."

"[There are] no problems here. Business is good for us at this location."

"I have to work in the store alone sometimes and for the most part I feel safe. The area is better than it was three or four years ago".

The representative from the District E Police Station was able to address the merchants' complaints of slow police response to shoplifting calls immediately by clarifying how the 911 systems works. He explained that all 911 calls are received by the County, not the Buffalo Police Department. The County's 911 service rates the priority of calls determining the order in which the police answer the calls. Merchants must make it very clear to the 911 operators, the representative stressed, when shoplifters are still in the store so that their call will receive higher priority. The merchants were then advised to call the District E Police Station Directly if the police do not arrive within ten minutes after they call 911.

Later, the owner of a busy market in a plaza whom we interviewed made it clear to us that he had learned to call the police station directly for quick response some time ago. He said that although he rarely had problems in his store, when he did have the occasional shoplifter, he called Station E directly and the police were there within minutes.

*Current public perception.* Several managers and owners addressed Bailey Avenue's negative image, calling this perception bad for business. Some of them discussed the various efforts by BADMA and individual Bailey Avenue merchants to make Bailey Avenue more attractive and inviting to consumers. Others discussed the media's role in perpetuating negative images. Some of the comments and concerns from these merchants were:

"We keep our portion [of Bailey Avenue] nice. The sidewalk sweeper does a good job too."

"Part of the problem is that the media perpetuates the myth that the Highgate Heights-Bailey Avenue area is dangerous. Rapes and bank robberies have occurred recently in some of the "safer" neighboring business districts, and not on Bailey Avenue, yet you don't hear anyone saying that these areas are unsafe."

"We try to take care of our store and make it look nice. That's important for business-people notice these things."

"I received a call from a lady who wanted to come to my store but she wanted to know how safe the area was first. I told her that I walk down the street all of the time and nothing ever happens to me."

*The appearance and cleanliness of Bailey Avenue.* The overall conditions of the area we visited were good. During both walks we observed planters with flowers in them outside of shops and someone from BADMA sweeping sidewalks. In one instance dangerous infrastructure was observed where a metal grate near the sidewalk had risen

making it hazardous for pedestrians. This was noted by Council member Helfer and BADMA for correction. We also saw some graffiti on the side of a building. The BADMA group indicated that they intended to send a letter to the building's owner asking them to paint over the graffiti.

*Merchant assessment of Bailey Avenue needs.* It was indicated by some merchants during our walk that cooperation among business owners was important for success. The manager of a clothing store said that he would like to meet with other managers and owners to discuss the possibility of having a sidewalk sale to draw consumers into the area. Other merchants discussed the importance of having good relationships with neighboring businesses:

"I know many of the owners of other businesses near my store and we look out for each other."

"I'm friendly with many of the other managers and owners around here... we talk about different things and if there are problems we let each other know."

### **Summary of Major Findings**

The following is a list of the major findings from the Bailey Avenue Study:

*Bailey Avenue businesses:*

- The Bailey Avenue University Community trade area has at least one hundred and sixty-one businesses in operation.
- There are many different types of businesses including restaurants, clothing stores, banks, beauty parlors, furniture stores, auto motive shops, shoe stores, insurance agents, flower shops and rental centers.
- While there are a variety of small convenience stores, Bailey Avenue does not have any large supermarkets.
- There are a variety of churches and community institutions also located on Bailey Avenue.

*Bailey-Amherst Business Improvement District.*

- The Bailey-Amherst Business Improvement District's (Bailey-Amherst BID) boundaries are between Bailey from Hewitt to Phyllis and 1083 to 1142 Kensington Avenue.
- Sixty-one of the Bailey Avenue businesses confirmed in the CENTER databases are located in the Bailey-Amherst BID.
- The Bailey-Amherst BID is managed by Bailey Amherst District Management Association (BADMA).

- The division was approved by the Buffalo City Council after winning support from a referendum of the residents in the area.
- The Bailey Amherst BID is in its tenth year of operation.
- The district's activities are paid for by a special surcharge added to the property tax bill of residents that fall within the district's boundaries.
- Funded activities include winter snow plowing, sidewalk sweeping, flower beds, and landscaping.

*Kensington-Bailey Business District.*

- Approximately one hundred and thirty businesses on Bailey Avenue fall within the specially zoned Kensington-Bailey Business District.
- The boundaries for this district encompasses Bailey Avenue from Winspear to the Kensington Expressway, and Kensington Avenue from Parkridge and Northumberland to Eggert Road.
- This special district was created by the City of Buffalo to protect the area from the over-development and expansion of bars, taverns, restaurants, fast food take-out shops and commercial enterprises.

*Vacant, closed or for sale parcels.*

- Approximately sixteen businesses on Bailey Avenue are closed, for sale or vacant.
- Compared to the relative size of the Bailey Avenue University Community trade area as a whole, the vacancy rate is approximately ten percent

*Residents' perception of Bailey Avenue.*

- Almost thirty percent of survey respondents wrote that they did not like anything about Bailey Avenue.
- Of the positive aspects residents noted, the convenience of Bailey Avenue was cited slightly more than thirty percent of the time.
- Respondents liked the fact that Bailey Avenue was accessible to bus lines and other destinations in the County.
- Slightly more than thirty percent of the residents also noted that they liked the variety of businesses on Bailey Avenue.

*What residents want changed on Bailey Avenue.*

- Over half of the survey respondents indicated that they would like to change the aesthetic qualities of Bailey Avenue.
- Other changes sought included the addition of new businesses, as well as better parking arrangements and public works improvements for the Bailey Avenue area.

*The appearance and cleanliness of Bailey Avenue.*

- Forty-one percent of the survey respondents rated the overall appearance of Bailey Avenue poor, and forty-five percent fair.
- Low evaluations were also given to the question of the physical appearance of Bailey Avenue which included sidewalk and street conditions.
- Less than thirteen percent of the residents rated the physical appearance as good, with twenty-nine percent rating it poor and almost fifty-eight percent evaluating it as fair.

*Residents' safety concerns.*

- The perception of safety on Bailey Avenue is a problem for residents.
- Only two percent of the survey respondents indicated that they perceived Bailey Avenue as very safe.
- Almost a third of the survey respondents thought the police should prohibit teens from loitering on Bailey Avenue
- Close to a fifth of the respondents indicated that they would like to see more visibility from the police.
- In spite of residents' low safety perceptions of Bailey Avenue, forty-one percent of respondents indicated that they frequently visited Bailey Avenue, and eighteen percent replied that they sometimes visit Bailey Avenue.
- The most commonly identified businesses frequented were eating establishments and clothing stores.

*Residents' assessment of Bailey Avenue needs.*

- Residents indicated that they did not visit Bailey Avenue for a variety of reasons.
- The most frequently cited reasons for not visiting Bailey Avenue were centered around safety issues and the unavailability of desired goods.
- The majority of residents in the Bailey Avenue area shop at the University Plaza, located nearby on Main Street.
- In particular, many residents shop at the Tops grocery store located in the Plaza.
- When residents were asked to identify what new businesses they would like to see on Bailey Avenue in the resident survey, almost a quarter of the residents indicated they would like to see a new grocery store.
- Other businesses which residents indicated that they would like to see included clothing stores, restaurants, shoe stores, bakeries, and movie theaters.

*Merchants' perception of Bailey Avenue.*

- All of the owners and managers who were interviewed claimed that they were satisfied with the location of their businesses on Bailey Avenue.
- Most of the merchants said that the conditions in the area had improved substantially over the last few years.

- Several merchants identified problems and potential problems such as teenagers hanging-out around the backs of stores, slow police response to shoplifting problems, and “smash and grabs” in the area.
- Some merchants have learned to deal with security problems by calling the police station directly for quicker response.

#### *Current public perception.*

- The negative image of Bailey Avenue is bad for business.
- BADMA and individual Bailey Avenue merchants have made efforts to make Bailey Avenue more attractive and inviting to consumers.
- The media plays a role in perpetuating negative images.

#### *Merchants’ assessment of Bailey Avenue needs.*

- Cooperation among business owners was important for success.
- Cooperation fosters good relationships with neighboring businesses and generates economic growth.

## **Recommendations and Implications for Future Studies**

This report attempted to identify the discrepancies between the realities and perceptions of Bailey Avenue. While the merchants on Bailey Avenue paint the picture of Bailey Avenue as a fairly safe street with minor problems with crime, residents perceive it to be much worse than it actually is. The business community needs to consider how it can improve its negative image to keep University Community residents in the area and to draw new consumers.

Future areas of consideration for Bailey Avenue could include an analysis of whether there is a correlation between the location and distribution of specific types of businesses and the association of criminal activities. For example, if residents believe that the presence of bars and pawn shops perpetuate crime, they may view areas with these particular types of businesses as unsafe.

## **Conclusion**

The most salient concerns identified by residents and merchants were centered around safety issues. The negative perception of Bailey Avenue inhibits consumers from frequenting Bailey Avenue, hurting the entire University Community.

Many University Community residents perceive Bailey Avenue as unsafe, and often go to other areas to shop. Their comments depicting Bailey Avenue as an area that has declined over the past several years and as an area that is no longer safe to stroll is symptomatic of Bailey Avenue's negative image problem. Some of the residents' perception of Bailey Avenue is so poor that they indicated in the survey that they no longer wish to live in the University Community.

While property crime occurs everywhere and not just on Bailey Avenue, the occurrences of vandalism and petty larceny has concerned merchants. They are not afraid for their personal safety, but worry about the protection of their property. The slow police response to shoplifting complaints for 911 calls has also frustrated merchants. Some merchants have hired private security guards for additional security to help solve this problem. Other merchants have solved this problem by calling the neighborhood police station directly for prompt police response. Despite these problems, most merchants indicated that that they had few problems on Bailey Avenue and that Bailey Avenue was a good location for them to operate their business.

Many owners and managers realize that they need to cooperate with other businesses to promote the health and vitality of Bailey Avenue. If the image of Bailey Avenue can be changed to reflect the merchants perception of Bailey Avenue as an area that is fairly safe, the entire University Community will be strengthened.

# A Demographic Profile of the University Community



Keith Lucas  
*Principal Investigator*

**Center for Urban Studies**  
Henry Louis Taylor Jr., Ph.D.  
*Director*



## Introduction

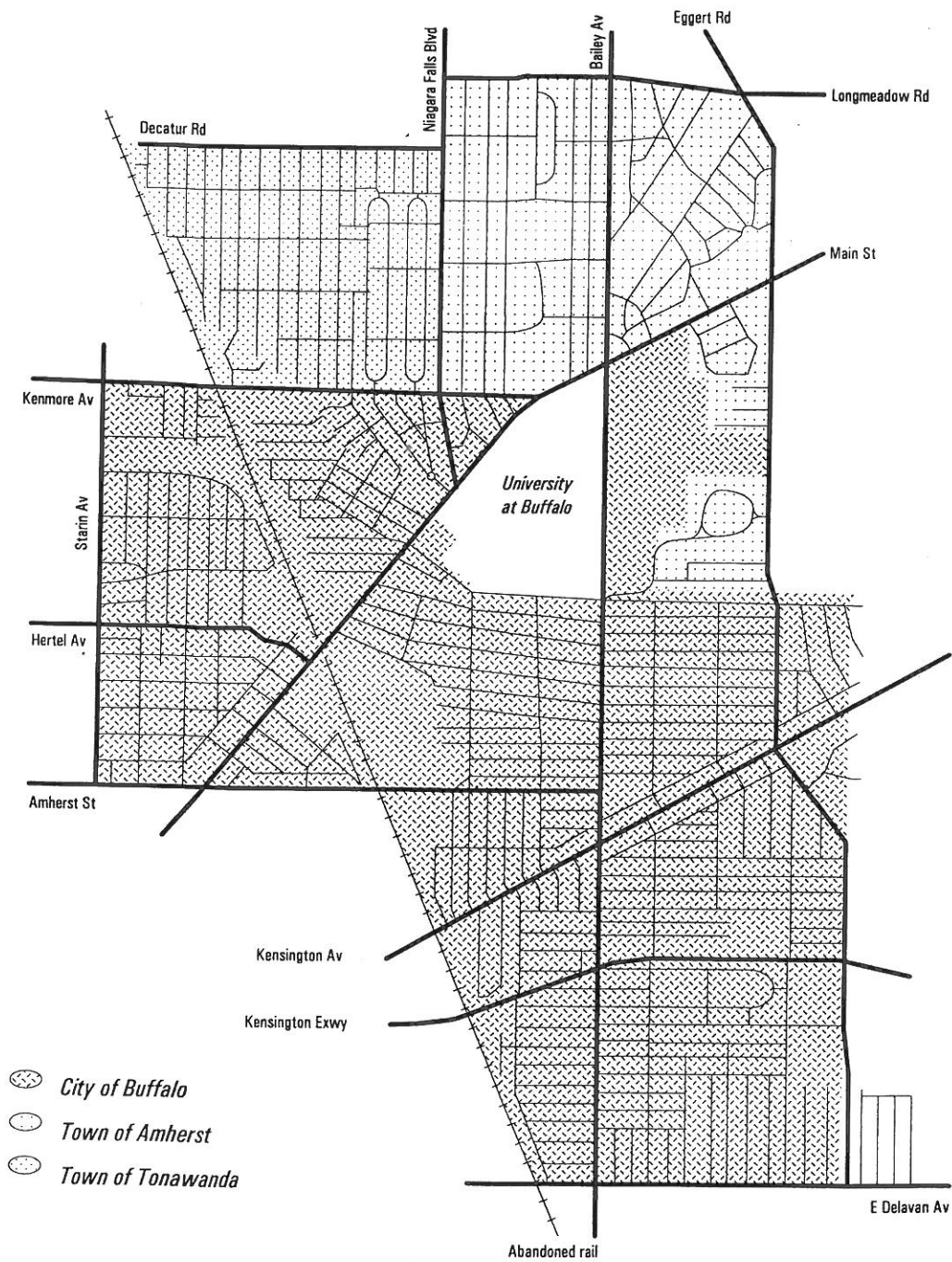
This working paper provides a demographic profile of the University Community (Map 1) by using census data for the years 1950 to 1990. The census, which is administered every decade, asks a fairly standard set of questions about persons and households, and reports the responses geographically using a system of census tracts and block groups that has remained consistent. This allows for comparisons to be made both over time and across place, and to identify and analyze trends that are occurring.

Census geographies are generally coterminous with the boundaries of the University Community, with the exception of the town of Amherst, where the block groups are somewhat larger and are bisected by the community's boundaries in certain areas (Map 2). For purposes of this report, all census data for block groups 93.01:5, 93.02:2, and 94.01:4 was included in the University Community; while data from block group 95.01:6 was not included in the study area.

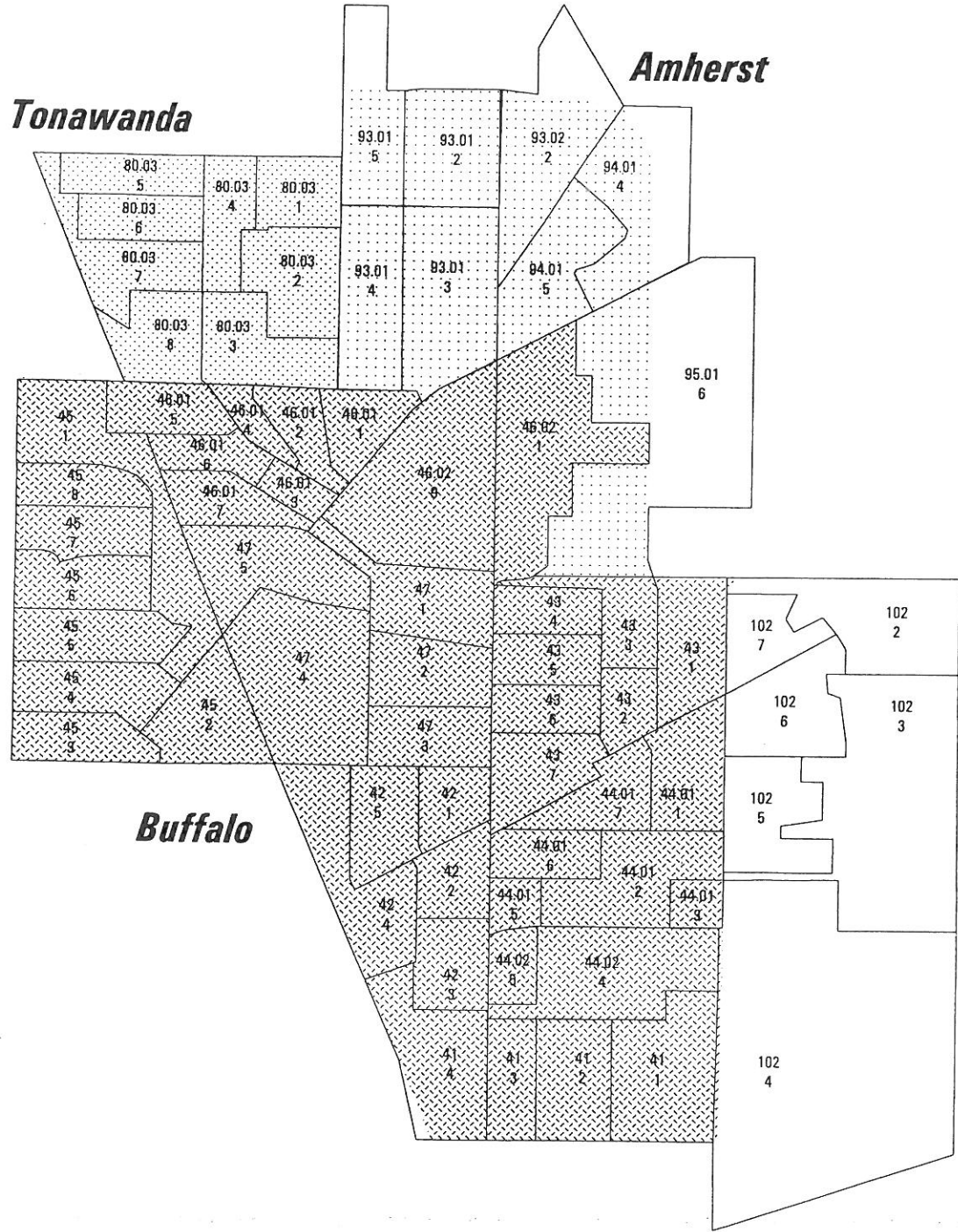
A greater number of geographic inconsistencies were evident at the neighborhood level (Map 3). Again, the same mismatches existed in the town of Amherst (part of neighborhood 6), as well as between neighborhoods 1 and 3, neighborhoods 1 and 5, and neighborhoods 3 and 4. None of these differences were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

In comparing the University Community over time, the study area was broken down into city and suburban sections, since not enough data was available prior to 1990 at a level that would allow comparisons among neighborhoods to be made. The comparisons among the six neighborhoods was based on 1990 census data, to provide the most recent perspective on the differences within the University Community.

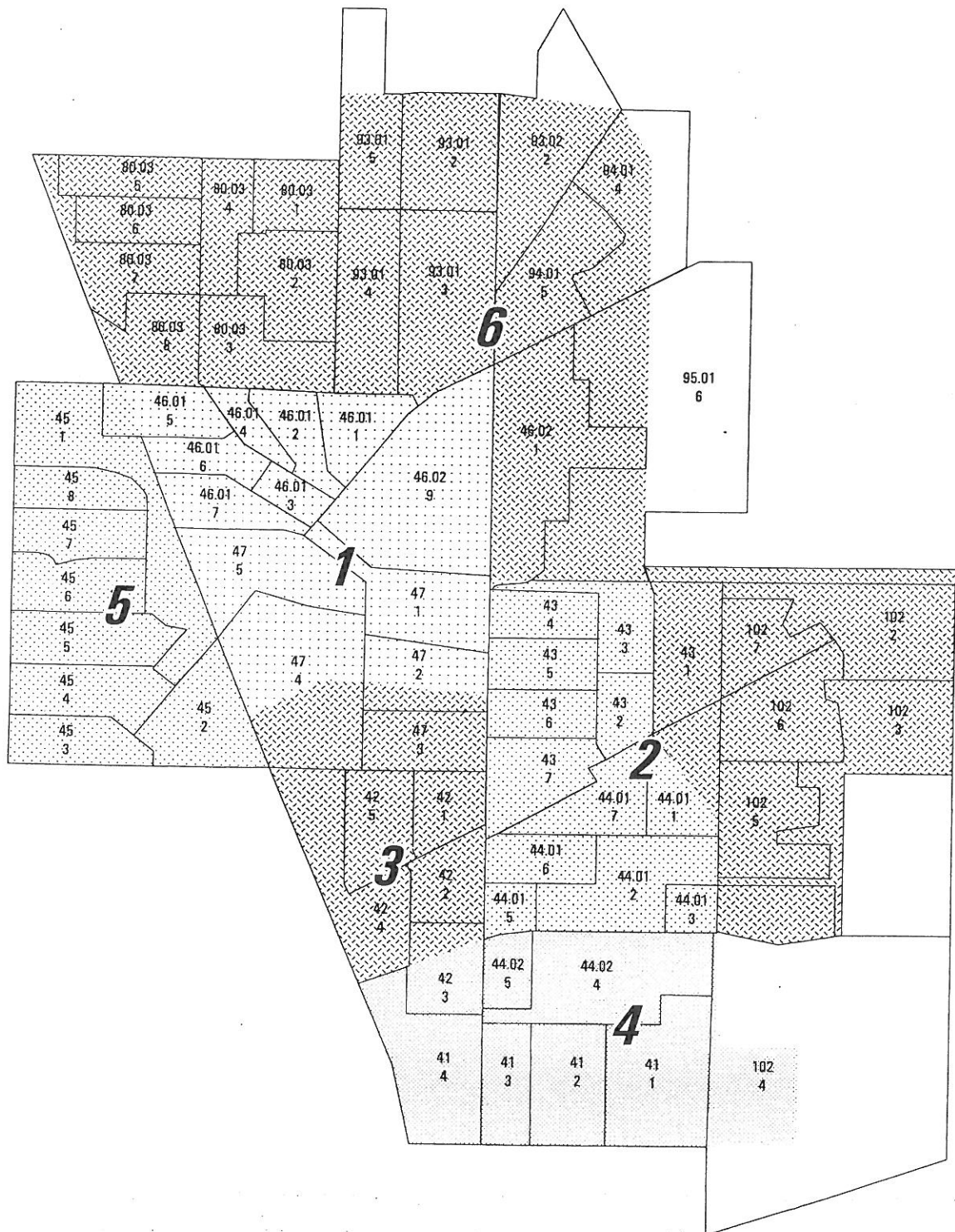
Map 1  
University Community Boundaries



Map 2  
Block Groups by Municipality



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.

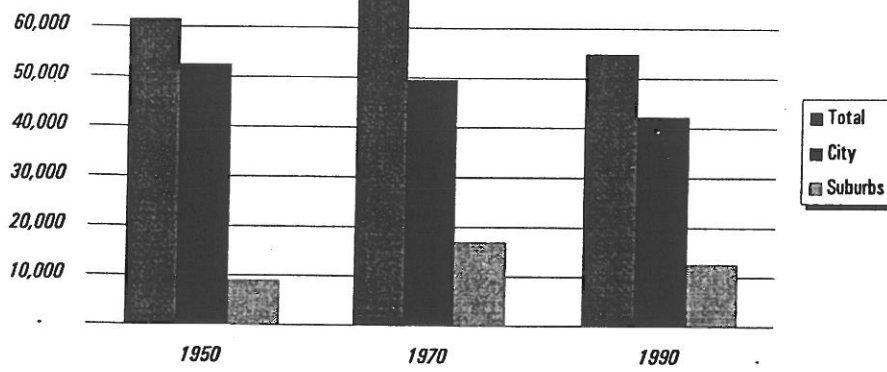
Between 1970 and 1990, the black population of the University Community increased dramatically, climbing to 17,770 residents, or 32 percent of the total population (Figure 3). This was accompanied by a decrease in the white population of almost 30,000 residents, leaving the share of white residents in 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.

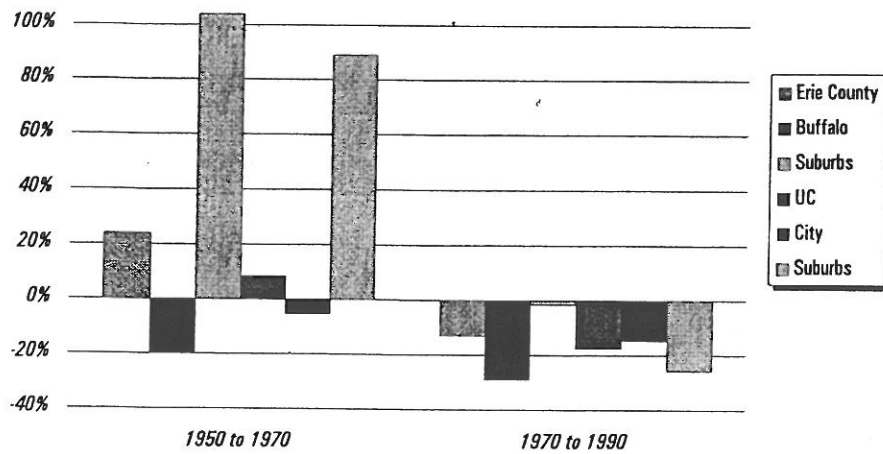
### ***Economic characteristics***

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

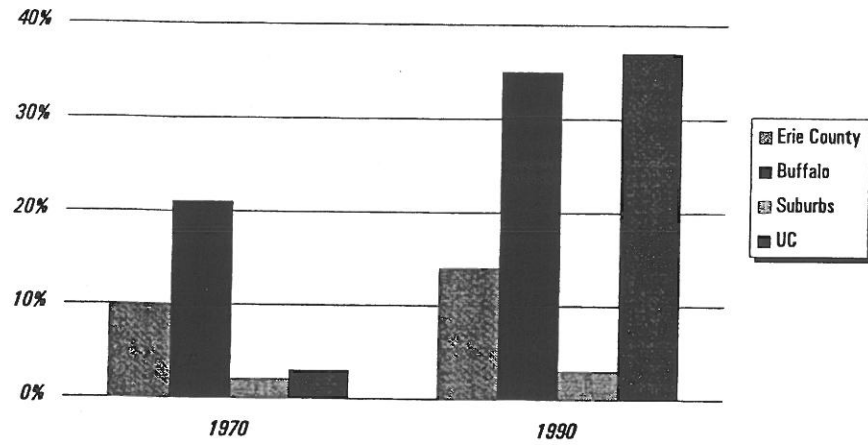
**Figure 1**  
**University Community Population**



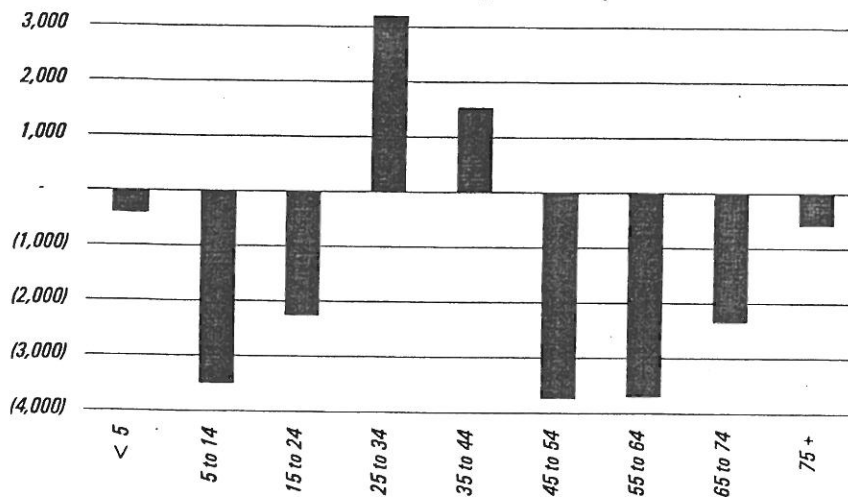
**Figure 2**  
**Rate of Population Change**



**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***

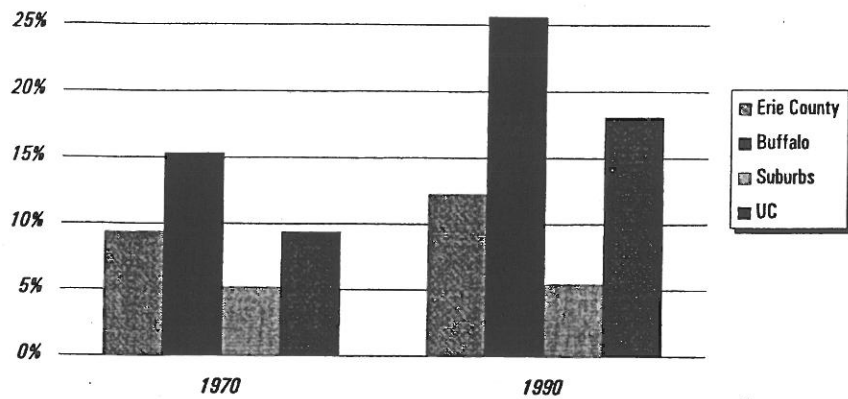
Although the population of the University Community has fallen sharply since 1970, the number of households has declined far less rapidly. Households fell from 22,330 in 1970 to 21,430 in 1990, a loss of just four percent. Within the city section, the number of households declined by just under four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

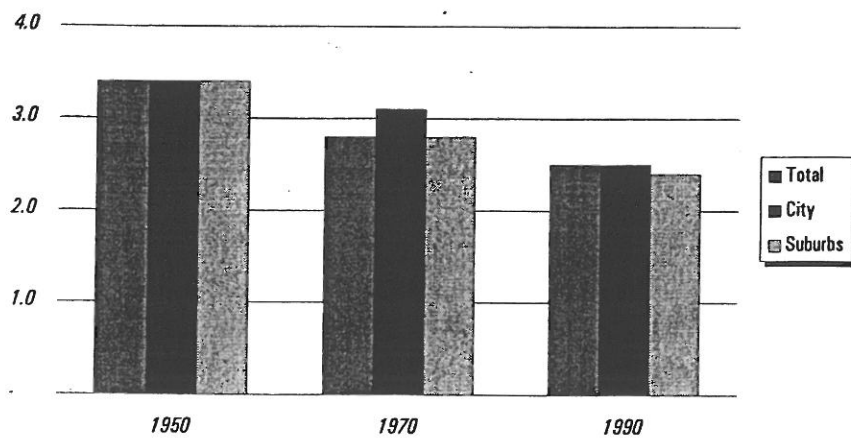
Changes in household type have contributed to the decline in household size, with non-family households in the University Community increasing from 25 to 38 percent of all households between 1970 and 1990 (Figure 9). Female headed households with children under 18 also increased from four to 12 percent, 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



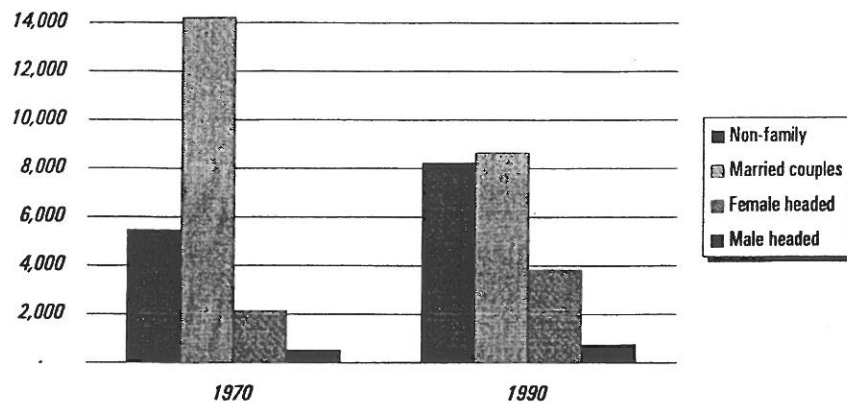
*Figure 7*  
**Poverty Rates**



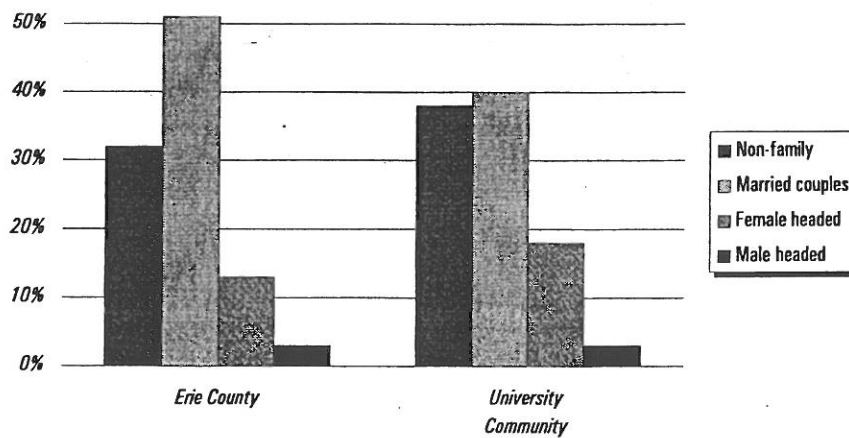
*Figure 8*  
**Change in Household Size: University Community**



**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.

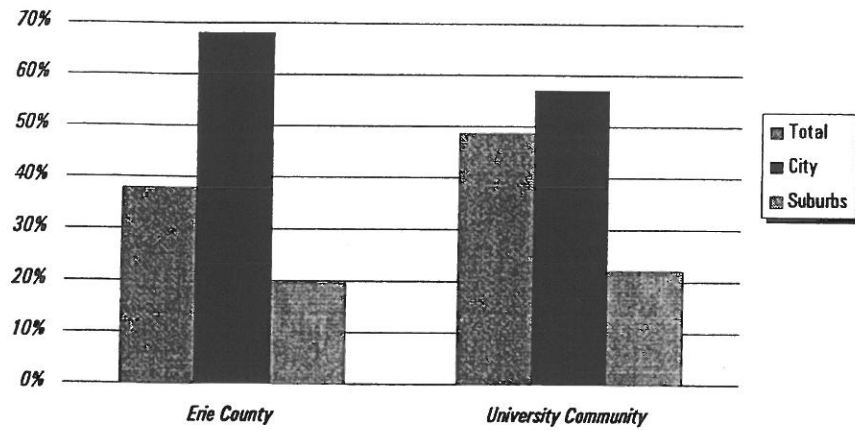
Much of the growth in the housing stock of the University Community took place between 1950 and 1970, with increases of nine percent in the city and 102 percent in the suburbs (Figure 12). Owner occupancy rates, which had held steady at 62 percent between 1950 and 1970, declined slightly between 1970 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.

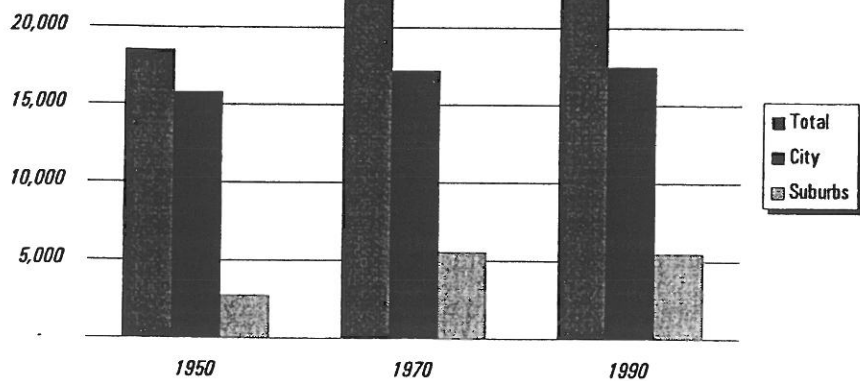
The relative value of owner-occupied units in the University Community slipped slightly between 1970 and 1990, which may have been a contributing factor to the rise in black homeownership. In 1970, the median value of an owner-occupied home in the community was \$16,450, or 89 percent of the county-wide 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

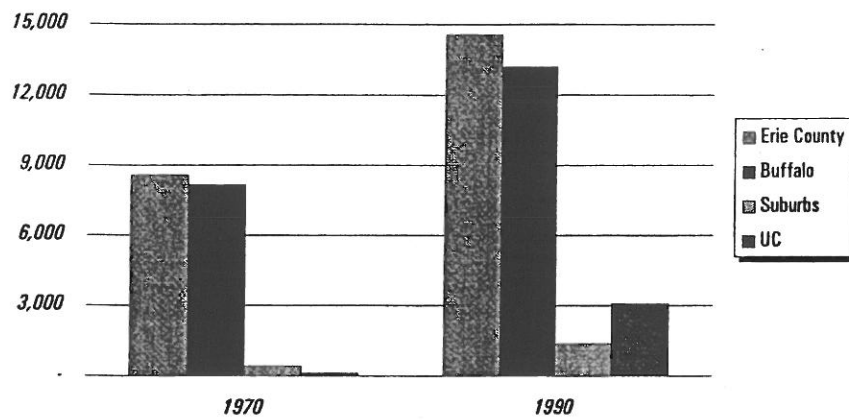
**Figure 11**  
**Housing Built Before 1940**



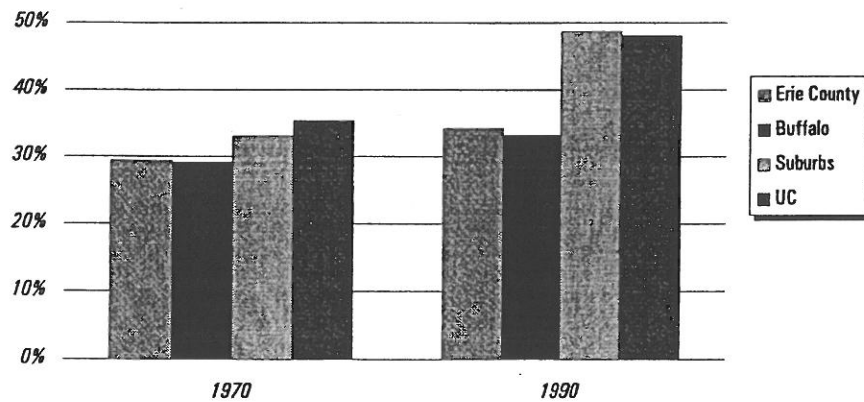
**Figure 12**  
**Change in Numbers of Housing Units: University Community**



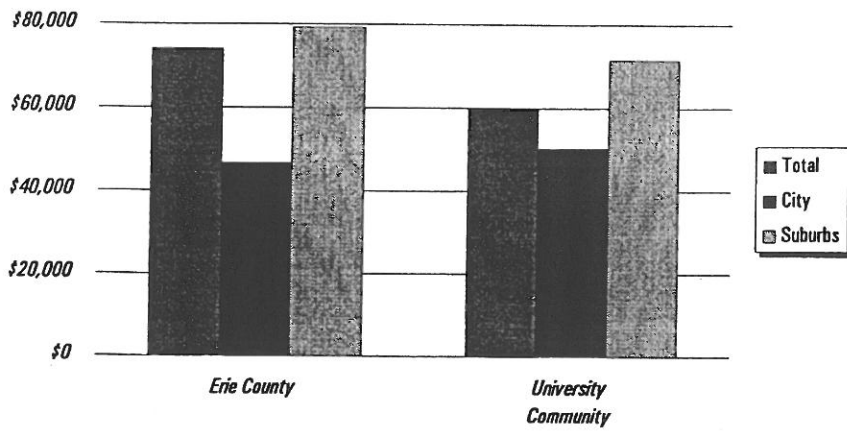
**Figure 13**  
**Changes in Black Homeownership**



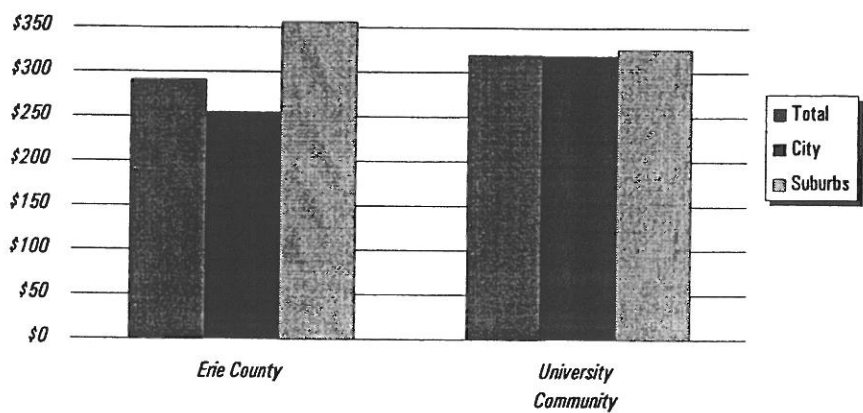
**Figure 14**  
**Black Homeownership Rates**



**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***

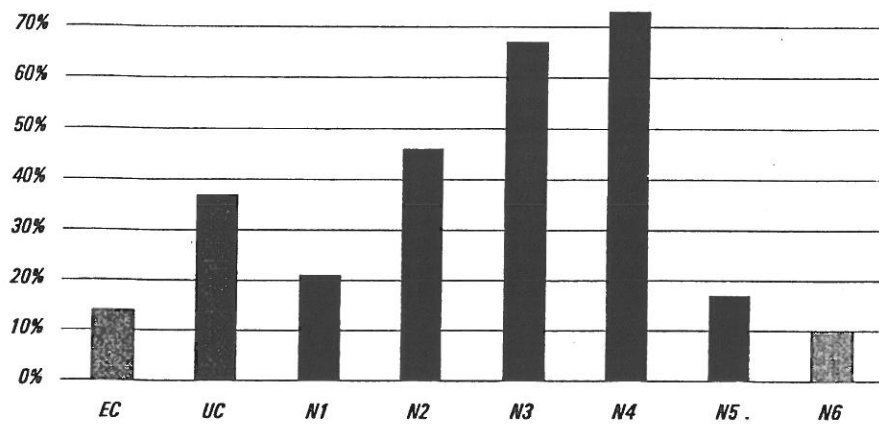
Economic indicators for the six neighborhoods of the University Community varied widely in 1990. Neighborhoods 5 and 6 were typically in better shape than the county as a whole, while neighborhood 4 was consistently in the poorest condition. Unemployment rates in 1990 ranged from a low of 3.4 percent 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.

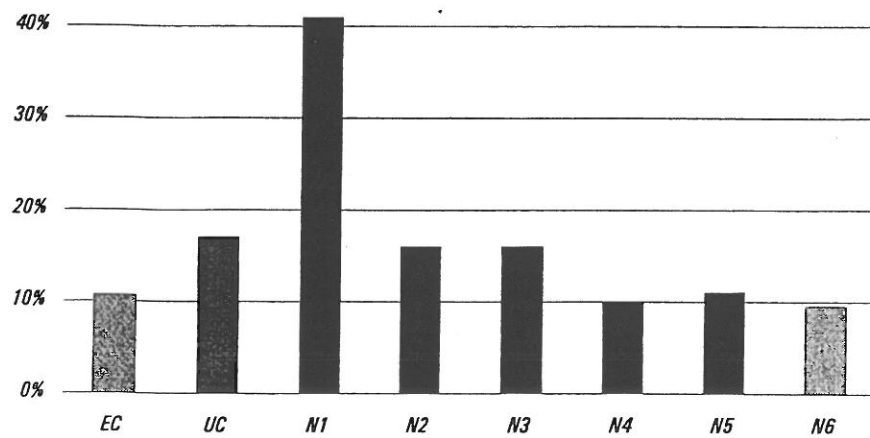
Poverty rates, which rose so dramatically in the University Community between 1970 and 1990, were also very unevenly distributed within individual neighborhoods. Consistent with median



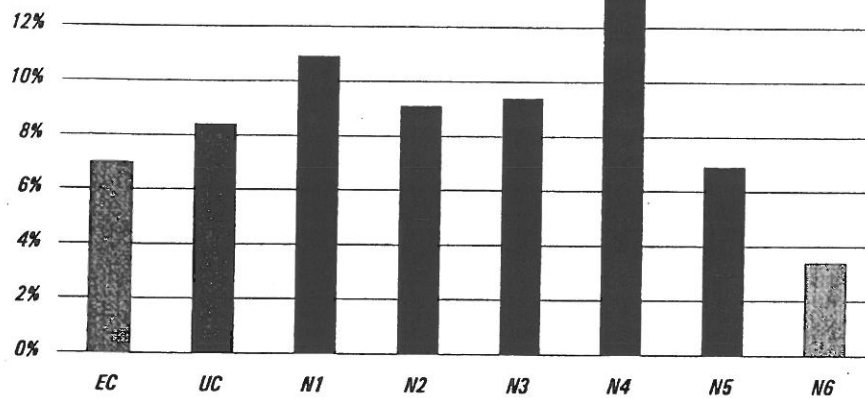
**Figure 17**  
**Non-White Population; 1990**



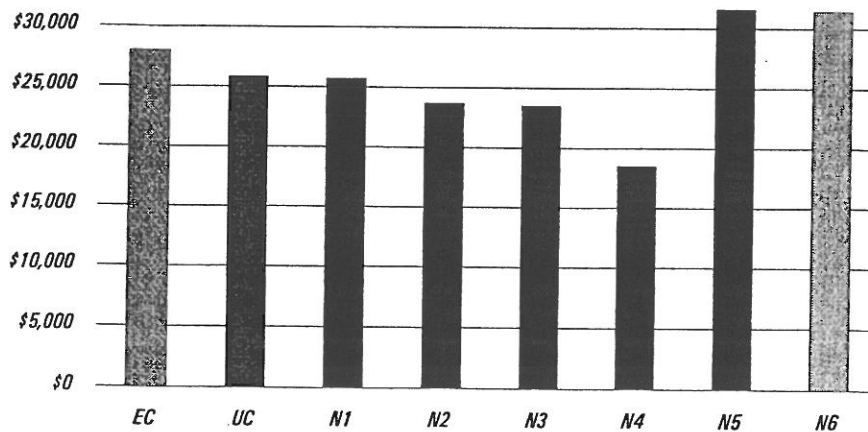
**Figure 18**  
**Population Between 18 and 24; 1990**



**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***

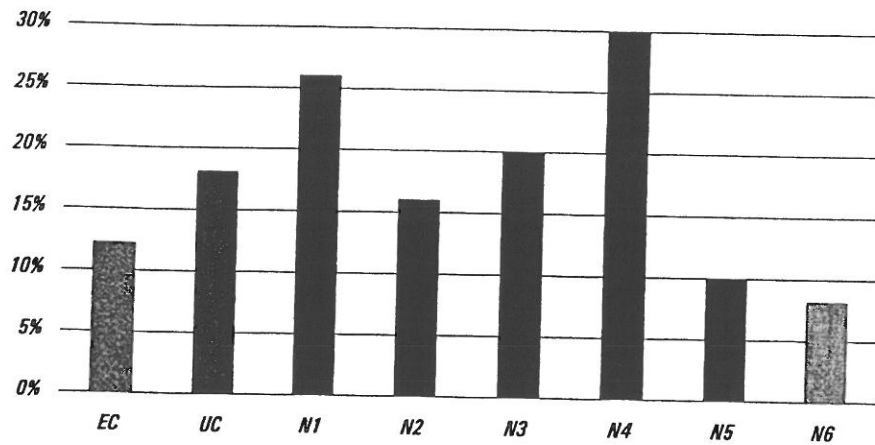
The age of housing in the University Community showed little variation among neighborhoods within either the city or suburban sections. The main differences were between housing located in the city and suburban sections of the community (Figure 23). In the city neighborhoods, between half and two-thirds 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.

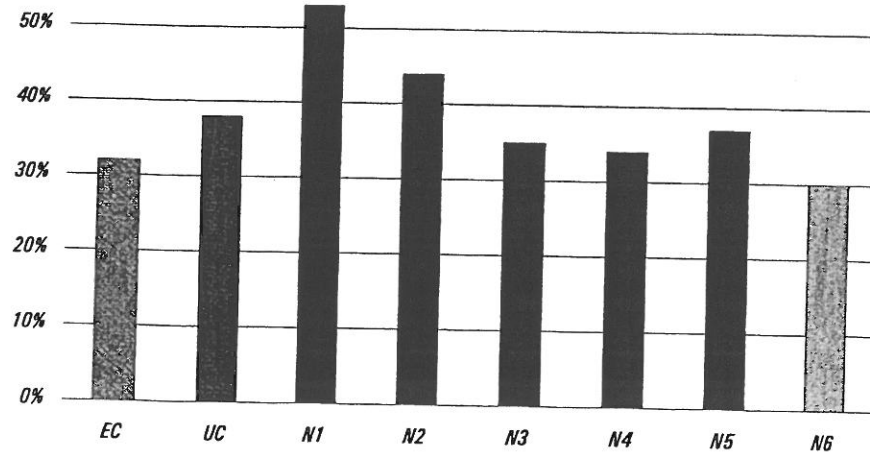
The value of owner-occupied housing in the University Community was above the county-wide median of \$74,000 only in neighborhood 5 (Figure 25). The median value of \$91,200 in 1990 reflects both the stability of the North Buffalo area that forms the majority of the neighborhood, as well as the peak 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.

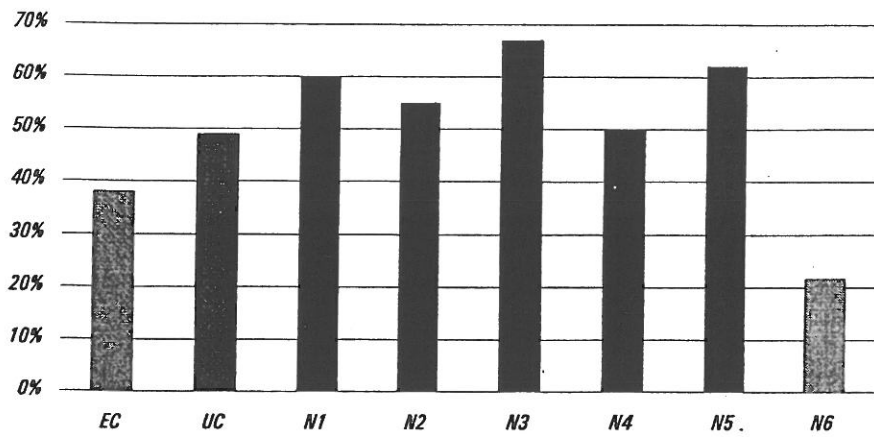
**Figure 21**  
**Poverty Rates; 1990**



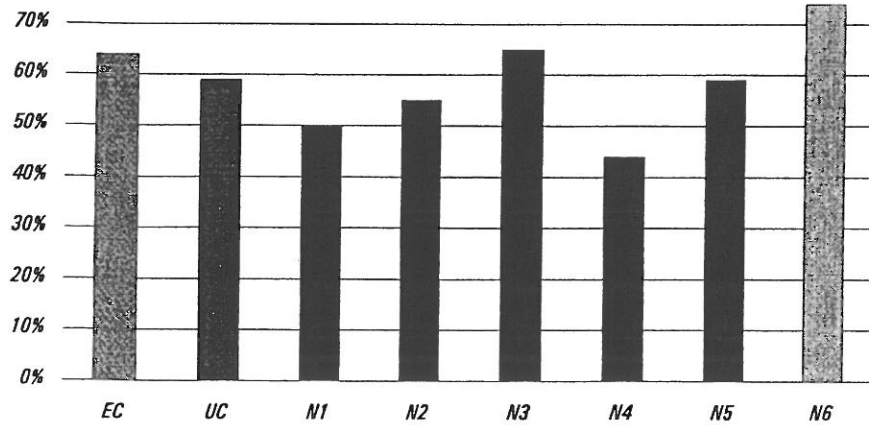
**Figure 22**  
**Non-Family Households; 1990**



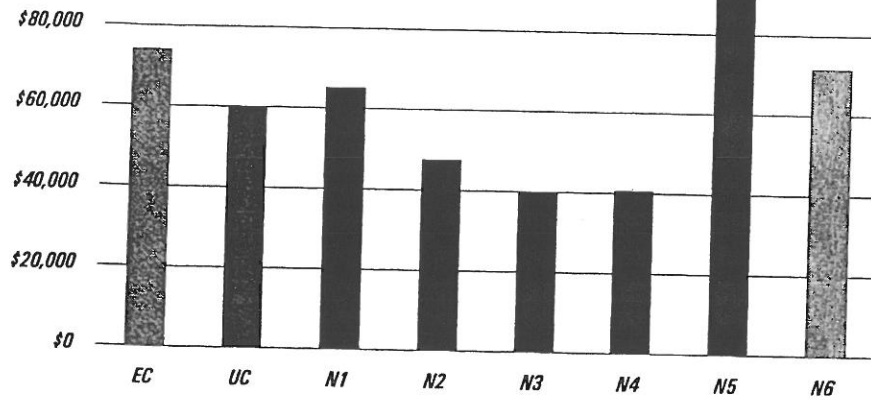
**Figure 23**  
**Housing Built Before 1940**



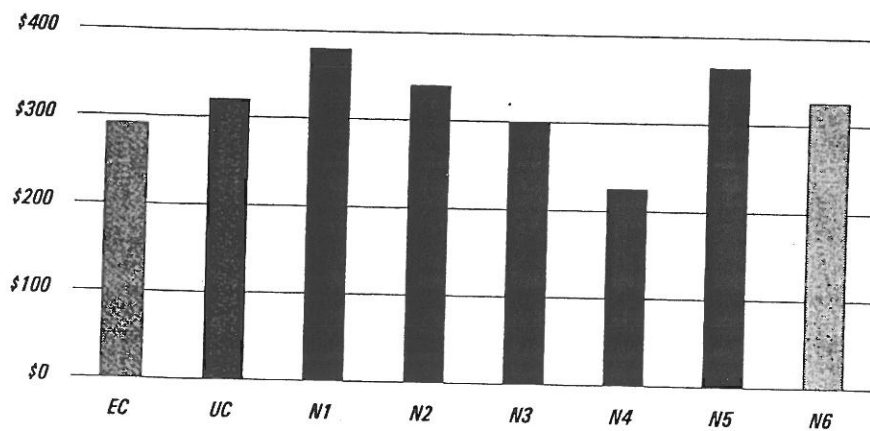
**Figure 24**  
**Homeownership Rates; 1990**



*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.