

Not Dead Yet: The Infill of Cleveland's Urban Core

Richey Piiparinen

A version of this report appeared on the Urban Institute's Metrotrends Spotlight.

Summary: Between 2000 and 2010 the City of Cleveland lost over 80,000 people. Observers declared Cleveland was dead. But lost in the overall population numbers is a silver lining that could be the canary in the coal mine in reverse: Downtown's population increased by 96%, with the majority of those immigrating aged 22 to 34. As well, the brain gain has spilled over into the adjacent neighborhoods of Tremont and Ohio City, with each area showing significant gains in the 25- to 34-year old cohorts between 2000 and 2010.

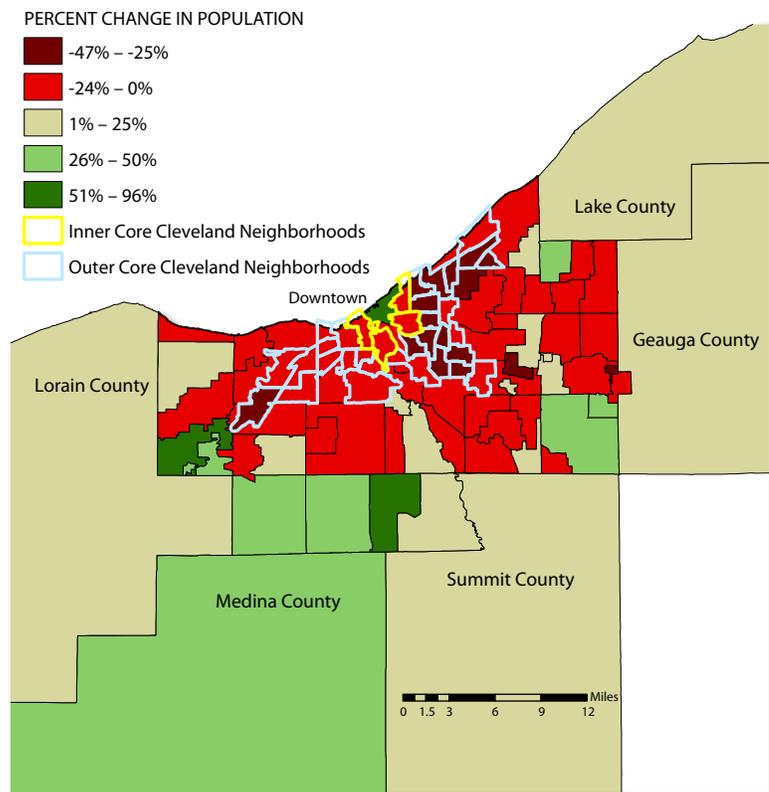
Mark Twain once said the "report of my death was an exaggeration." Perhaps the same thing can be said about the City of Cleveland.

While Cleveland's struggles are real, there are signs of a revival, particularly in Cleveland's downtown district. Moreover, select neighborhoods on the periphery of downtown are also showing signs of vitality. And while time will tell if the city is filling in its donut hole so to speak, the fact remains: there is a pulse.

Take the latest population figures in the 5 county metropolitan area. From 1990 to 2010, the City of Cleveland shrank, as did many of the suburban areas of Cuyahoga County. The growth mostly occurred in the increasingly exurban fringes of the metro, as well as on the edges of Cuyahoga County.

Except there is one outlier: downtown Cleveland. Over the last two decades, the neighborhood's population grew 96%, with residential totals increasing from 4,651 to 9,098. It was the single largest spike of any neighborhood, suburb, or county measured for the two decades under study. Downtown residential occupancy rates now stand over 95% and developers are eagerly looking to meet residential demand.

**Figure 1: Downtown Cleveland:
Growing while surrounding areas shrink**



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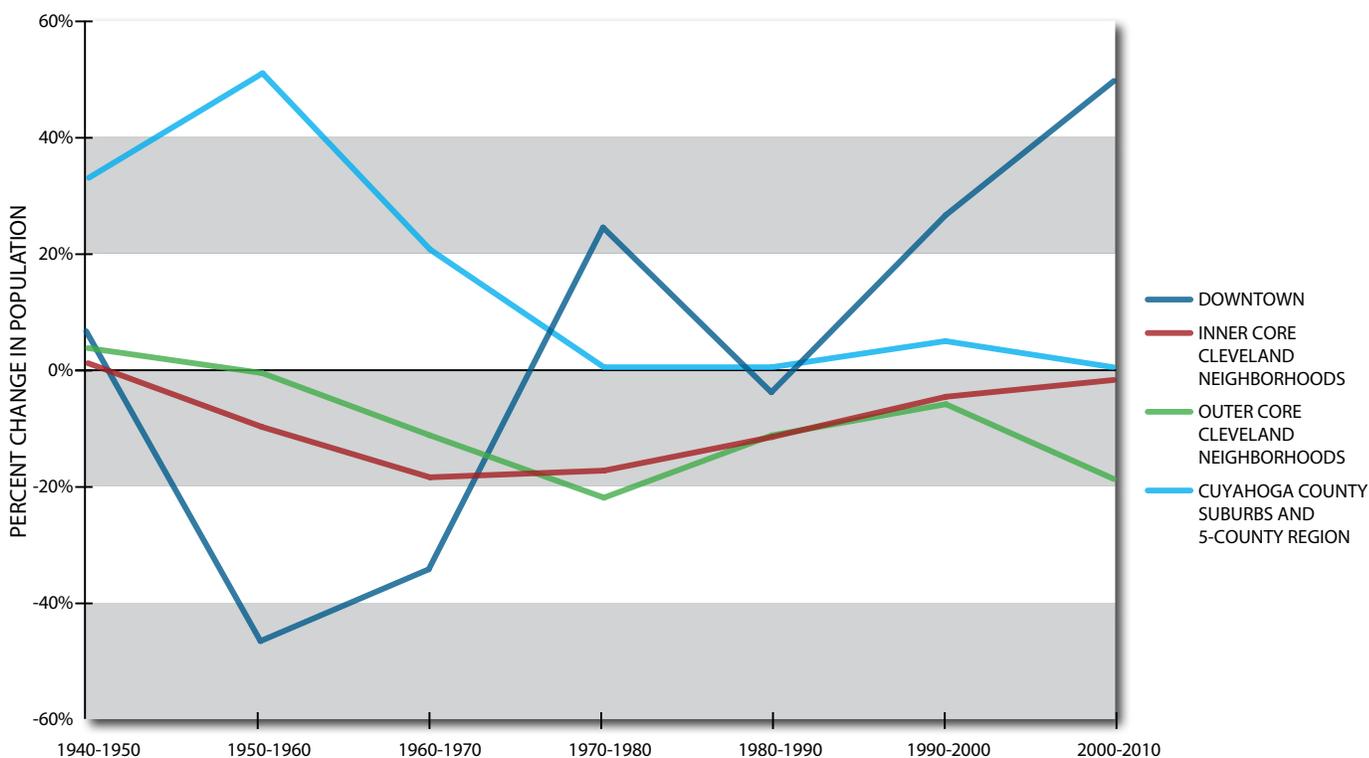
Source: U.S. Decennial Census, 1990-2010
Prepared by: the Center on Urban Poverty and Community Development
Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences, Case Western Reserve University
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Historical analysis reveals that these trends have long been underway (see below). Before 1970, flight from the city accompanied growth in the suburbs and surrounding counties. By 1990, however, rapid growth began to materialize in downtown Cleveland. Moreover, population declines in Cleveland's inner core neighborhoods (see map for reference) bordering downtown began to slow. Between 1990 and 2000, these inner core neighborhoods broke with trends found in both outer core neighborhoods—where population loss hastens—as well in the suburban/exurban areas where population growth slows or begins to decline.

But questions remain. Are fewer people leaving the neighborhoods bordering downtown or are folks moving in? If it is the latter, are the inner core neighborhoods being “pulled up” by demographic shifts mirroring downtown’s growth? Put simply: is a reverse in the donut hole in the making?

The answer is a (tentative) yes. An observed/expected analysis, performed by comparing the size of 10-year age cohort in 2000 (e.g., the number of 5- to 14-year olds) to its size in 2010 (e.g., the number of 15- to 24-year olds), reveals that Cleveland's downtown re-densification may be spilling over into the adjacent inner core neighborhoods.

Figure 2: Trending Upward: Cleveland's Core Claws its Way Back



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 Prepared by: Center on Urban Poverty and Community Development at Case Western Reserve University
 Source: U.S. Decennial Census, 1940-2010

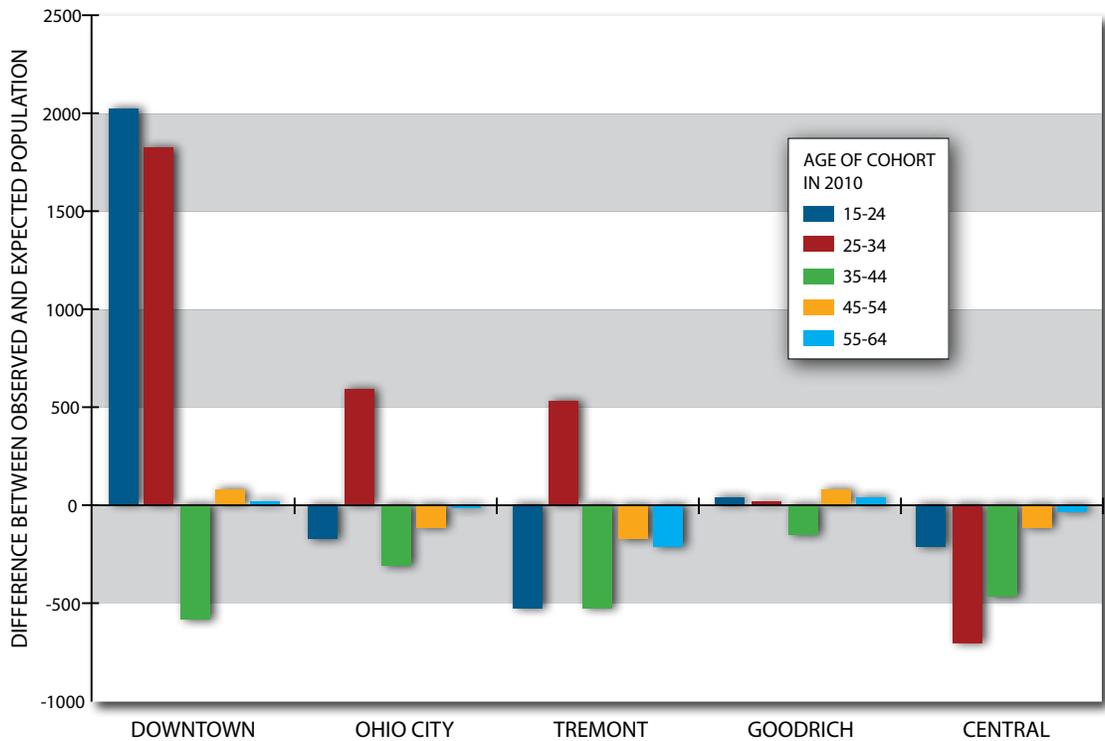
Between 2000 and 2010 over 2,000 15- to 24-year olds moved into Downtown, with 51% of those being 22- to 24-year olds. During that same time period, nearly 2,000 25- to 34-year olds became new residents of Downtown. This influx of youth spilled over into Tremont and Ohio City as housing options tightened.

In downtown, there has been a remarkable jump in the number of residents falling between the ages of 15 to 24 in 2010. The majority of the 2,000 plus young adults moving in are comprised of 22- to 24-year olds (51%), whereas 15 to 17-year olds make up only 4%. This 22- to 24-year old influx bumps up against the substantial increase of approximately 2,000 persons found in the 25- to 34-year old cohort. In all, this could foretell a turning point for Cleveland, since it is those areas attracting the “young and

the restless” (as this cohort has been dubbed) that will be best positioned in an evolving knowledge-based economy.

Trends in other inner core neighborhoods are not as clear cut, but nonetheless offer promise. In Ohio City and Tremont—two of Cleveland’s gentrifying neighborhoods—the net in-migration of 25- to 34-year olds mirrors the pattern downtown. Given that the Cleveland metro is losing its 25 to 34-year old cohort overall, evidence points to a core resurgence as opposed to a regional trend.

Figure 3: Downtown Cleveland leads the inner core’s “Brain Gain” Movement



Source: U.S. Decennial Census, 2000-2010
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But not all inner core neighborhoods are experiencing the same pattern. Goodrich/Kirtland Park, a near east side neighborhood, has not seen much in-migration and Central—Cleveland’s poorest neighborhood with a poverty rate of over 70%—is losing population across the board. In other words, the reverse of the donut hole is tilted towards the west side of the map, which speaks to the legacy of segregation in Cleveland that still casts its shadow on the city.

Another point of interest deals with the decline of the 35- to 44-year old cohort. The exodus of the child-rearing age group may neutralize the gains made with the young. Be it because of school quality or safety concerns, this group’s unwillingness to stay in either downtown or inner-tier neighborhoods gives pause to policymakers and politicians alike.

So what does it all mean for Cleveland? Well, in terms of policy, there are generally two schools of thought. The first focuses on retaining middle-aged people leaving the region by encouraging the growing 25- to 34-year cohort to “age in place” so as to catalyze

school and community improvements that will make the inner core more family friendly.

The second school of thought involves letting the older cohort “go” in order to make space for the younger “brain gain” group. For proponents of the so-called “churn model”, such as Jim Russell, an expert on migration and economic development, the issue is not so much the inability to retain so long as there is a constant influx of fresh ideas and talent taking place.

Said Russell, when presented with the Cleveland migration data: “the suburban/exurban migration of the older cohort will speed up revitalization and make the young adults more dominant in Downtown, Ohio City, and Tremont. The urban core is a net importer of young adults and a net exporter of old adults. That’s the antithesis of a dying city.”

Cleveland—the antithesis of a dying city? Quite possibly. And its path of renewal is the return of the young along the footprints of previous generations’ escape.

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The Center on Urban Poverty and Community Development seeks to address the problems of persistent and concentrated urban poverty and is dedicated to understanding how social and economic changes affect low-income communities and their residents. Based in Cleveland at Case Western Reserve University's Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences, the Center views the city as both a laboratory for building communities and producing change locally, and as a representative urban center from which nationally relevant research and policy implications can be drawn.

A community resource for expertise and data analysis for over 20 years, the Center on Urban Poverty and Community Development created the groundbreaking community data system NEO CANDO (Northeast Ohio Community and Neighborhood Data for Organizing), a web-based tool that centralizes a broad array of indicators, making it easier to overlay and analyze disparate data. Community development corporations, foundation program officers, local governments, neighborhood activists and residents, students at the Mandel School and other institutions, the media, community reinvestment professionals and academic researchers are among those who have found NEO CANDO invaluable in their work. The Center conducts extensive training and maintains a listserv so NEO CANDO users can get the most out of its vast data collection. You can visit the NEO CANDO webpage at <http://neocando.case.edu>.



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