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Philadelphia a city of extremes: High incomes, high poverty, report shows

by Alfred Lubrano, Updated: December 19, 2019-12:01 AM



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Philadelphia is becoming more and more a city of extremes, with prosperity growing in some neighborhc and poverty deepening in many others.

That's the takeaway from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) Five-Year Estim for 2014 through 2018, released on Thursday morning.

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The survey looks at poverty and median household income by neighborhood over five-year periods, and i considered to be the most granular and thorough federal report of socio-economic factors within communities.

Compared to the first Five-Year ACS, which covered 2005 through 2009 (including the recession years), i new report shows that incomes rose in 15 Philadelphia neighborhoods and fell in 39, including every sect the Northeast except Bridesburg.

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At the same time, poverty decreased in 17 neighborhoods and jumped in 38 others.

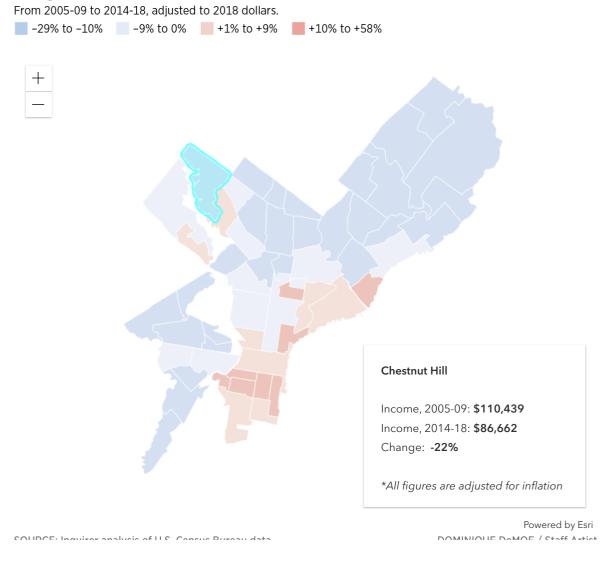
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More Neighborhoods Going Down Than Up

More than half of Philadelphia's neighborhoods have had declines in median household income of at least 10% over the last nine years, including every neighborhood in Northeast Philadelphia except for Bridesburg (an increase of 19%) and Tacony/Wissinoming (a decrease of 6%).

Roll over the map for more information.

Change in median household income



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While improvements brighten Philadelphia every day, with new houses going up around Temple Univers Point Breeze, and in Kensington, there remains a dense mass of poverty that seems to exert a gravitation on a city otherwise poised to soar.

"Philadelphia embodies the problem of the gap between the haves and have-nots," said Mark Zandi, chief economist at Moody's Analytics. "If you took a snapshot right now, it feels like trends are moving in the r direction, with places in the city coming alive with development.

"But broadly speaking, the city is struggling with poverty, and it's not gotten better in the last decade."

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'Terrible news'

To be sure, there are incremental advancements to note with some optimism: The city's poverty rate dec from 25.7% in 2016 to 24.5% in 2018, federal figures show. And overall median household income (adjust inflation) increased from \$43,372 to \$46,116.

But the Five-Year ACS is "a terrible bit of news," said sociologist Maria Kefalas, a poverty expert at St. Jos University. "We can have a lovely lunch in a nice neighborhood like the Graduate Hospital area while the of the city goes into catastrophic free fall."

As neighborhoods such as Point Breeze gentrify, disenfranchised residents who can no longer afford the are forced to relocate. Experts say it's possible that gentrification accounts for 5,326 people in poverty m into Lawncrest since the first survey — the largest single increase of low-income people in the city.

Gentrification piles "even more people in poverty into a handful of areas already weakened and under pressure," Kefalas said. "You then have concentrated, concentrated poverty."

Illustrative of the city at its apex, the Graduate Hospital area (also called Schuylkill/Southwest Center C registered a 58% increase in income between the first Five-Year ACS and the new report: from \$64,565 tc \$101,834, the highest median household income in the city.

Philadelphia a city of extremes: High incomes, high poverty, report shows



MONICA HERNDON / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER Mary Addison stands on Pine Street in Graduate Hospital. A U.S. Census Bureau survey says the neighborhood has the highest median household income in the city.

"This is a sophisticated place, with more established people," said resident Mary Addison, 26, a graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania who enjoys the neighborhood of in-vogue shops and sumptuou homes. "Most people are a little older and dress well. The cars are nice, also."

On the other end of the scale, the largest income decreases occurred in Hunting Park (down 29% to \$23,8 Tioga/Nicetown (down 28% to \$21,269), and Southwest Philadelphia (down 27% to \$27,433).

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The lowest median household income in the city, \$18,722, was recorded in Fairhill, which also has the hig poverty rate at 55%.

That's down from 63% in the 2005-09 Five-Year ACA, but it's "hardly a victory" to say that 45% of a neighborhood *isn't* poor, said Emily Dowdall, policy director of the Reinvestment Fund in Philadelphia, *ε* financial institution that helps low-income residents.

"How do people ignore how bad this place is?" asked Siria Rivera, 34, the newly installed executive direct Fairhill's Providence Center, which offers education programs for children and adults in the ravaged neighborhood of meager chances. Rivera was born in Fairhill, but grew up in Camden and Pennsauken. "¹ are servicing families with PTSD just from living in a community like this — no space, no heat, no food, n quiet time.

"How isn't this a focal point in political campaigns? How could it not be more in the news? We have resor to help people, but without cars or bus passes, how do they get to us? I see signs of distress in children he don't even have funding to address."

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Enormous inequality exists between places such as Graduate Hospital and Fairhill, said Judith Levine, director of the public policy lab at Temple. "Fairhill's poverty is astronomical and is a real crisis," she said Levine said a child's life chances depend on where he or she grows up. What chances, Levine asked, does Fairhill child have?

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Income Levels for Philadelphia Neighborhoods

Estimates of median household income for the 2014-18 five-year period.

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Kingsessing	\$29,656
West Philadelphia/Parks	\$27,703
East Germantown	\$27,690
Southwest Philadelphia	\$27,433
Allegheny West	\$27,000
Hunting Park	\$23.842

Armada of lifeboats

Low-income gentrification refugees are flocking to still-affordable neighborhoods such as West Oak Lan driving poverty levels there up from 13% during the first Five-Year ACS to 23% during the current one, ex say.

Like fearful passengers vying for space on a shrinking armada of lifeboats, a diaspora of formerly housed residents are washing up in other neighborhoods, doubling with friends and family, Dowdall said.

"It can put so much pressure on a place like West Oak Lane," she added.

Tour the city by bicycle to get a better understanding of how much communities change within short distances, said Glenn Bergman, executive director of Philabundance, the region's leading hunger-relief a You come away with a big question: "How can there be so much poverty so close to such development?"

The Five-Year survey lays bare that paradox.

"One neighborhood and another can be like two different countries," said economist Neeta Fogg, researc professor at the Center for Labor Markets and Policy at Drexel University.

"We see the city improving, but it's sad that no matter how well the economy is doing, there is a segment population that is not being helped — the persistent poor mired in a stubborn poverty that always seems make up about one-quarter of the population."

Even though, as Dowdall points out, the number of Philadelphians in the labor force is up 10% since 200£ there is a persistently disconnected group that is not working and may never find a job.

"It's a problem often among young people here," Fogg said. "Many dropped out of high school and never g work. If you start off detached from the labor market, you will never get in it.

"They say a rising tide lifts all boats. But if you're not even in the water, your boat does not rise."

Mostly low wages

It should be pointed out that even though more people are working, they are laboring for small salaries in service jobs that offer little future, said Kathy Fisher, policy director at the Greater Philadelphia Coalitio Against Hunger.

"Much of the job growth in Philadelphia is concentrated in low-wage positions, and many seniors are livi a fixed income," she said. "People need help just to afford the basics."

City officials say they understand the problems.

"We celebrate this period of growth in Philadelphia," said Maari Porter, deputy chief of staff policy and strategic initiatives in the mayor's office. "But we need to move faster to get people out of poverty."

Porter said that initiatives such as free pre-K classes, down payment assistance for first-time home buye more affordable housing options for people who are homeless, increased funding for the eviction-preven program, and greater investments in schools are making a difference. The city also works hard to make s people sign up for government-aid programs for which they qualify, Porter said.

"We are focused on economic growth in the neighborhoods without displacement," she added.

An important goal, said Ashley Putnam, director of the economic growth and mobility project of the Feder Reserve Bank of Philadelphia, "is to increase income and access to the jobs that provide economic securi





How to get there is hard to say.

"People face so many barriers," Fogg said. "How to get them working and moving forward, well, that is a N Prize-winning question."

Posted: December 19, 2019 - 12:01 AM



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