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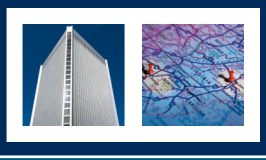
5th District
Footprint

JULY 2012



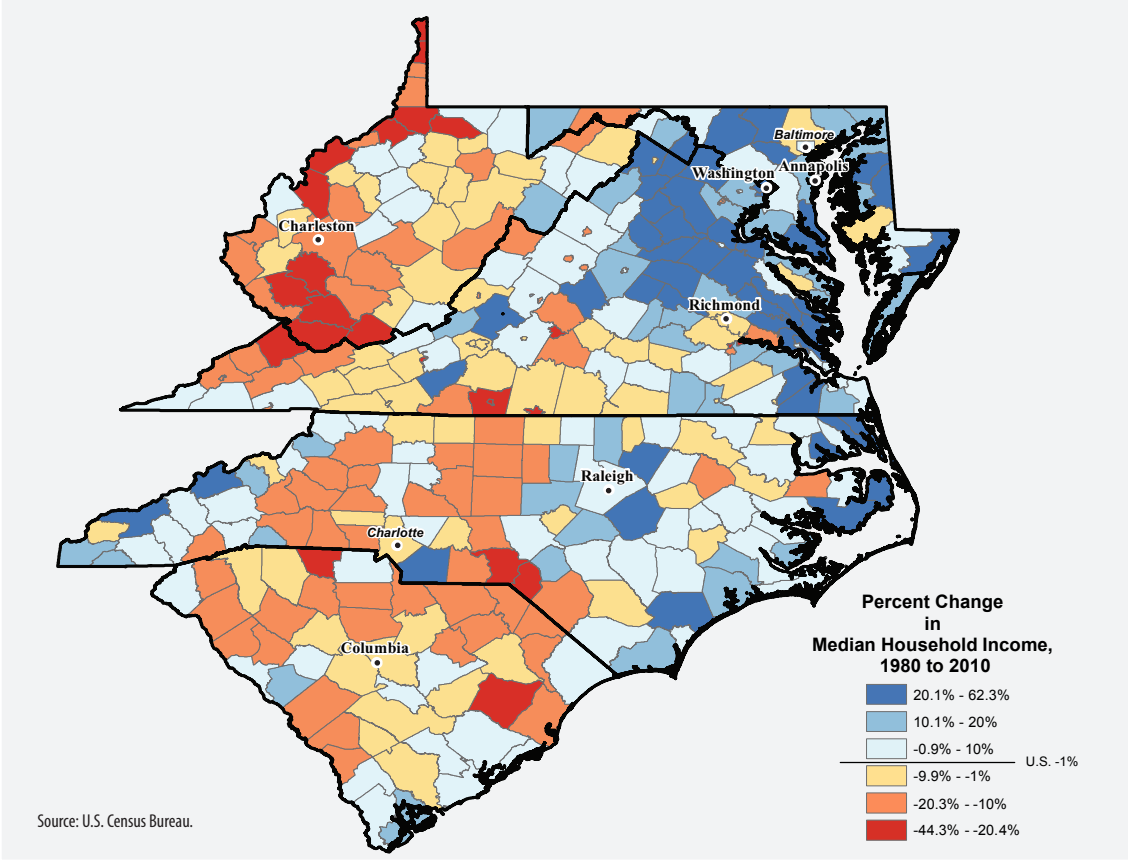
Change in Median Household Income 1980 to 2010

Income growth is one indicator of a community's economic health. In this issue of *5th District Footprint,* we look at the change in median household income within counties in the Fifth District between 1980 and 2010.[1]

Real median household income grew in 178 counties, nearly half of all counties in the Fifth District. This growth ranged from less than 1 percent in New Hanover County, N.C., to roughly 62 percent in Loudoun County, Va. In counties where income fell, the decline ranged from less than 1 percent in Page County, Va., to 44 percent in Marion County, W.V. By comparison, real median household income in the U.S. as a whole declined by 1 percent over the same period.

While a majority of counties in Maryland, North Carolina and Virginia, along with Washington, D.C., experienced positive income growth, the opposite was true for South Carolina and West Virginia.

In most cases, the counties that experienced a decline in income started with low income levels in 1980. Specifically, over 90 percent of the counties with declining median household income had income levels that were below the U.S. median in 1980 and 2010. For example, Marion County, W.V., had median incomes of $43,305 and $24,133 in 1980 and 2010, respectively. The gap between the median household income of Marion County and that of the U.S. grew from 14 percent in 1980 to 52 percent in 2010.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

The highest income growth counties in Maryland, North Carolina and South Carolina are all coastal counties: Queen Anne's County, Md. (51 percent), Currituck County, N.C. (40 percent), and Beaufort County, S.C. (19 percent). These counties also experienced other changes consistent with income growth. Educational attainment levels rose in all three counties during the same period.[2] Between 1980 and 2010, the population of the three counties also grew at an average annual rate of 3 percent, which is greater than the U.S. average rate of 1 percent over the same period.[3]

Counties that experienced income growth also tended to have relatively low unemployment rates. Over 40 percent of the counties with positive income growth had unemployment rates below the U.S. average in both 1980 and 2010.[4]

The majority of counties with negative income growth are located in nonmetropolitan areas. Also, over 43 percent of the counties with negative income growth had unemployment rates that exceeded the U.S. average in both 1980 and 2010. Thirteen percent of these counties are classified as places of "persistent poverty."[5] In more than a third of the counties, 25 percent or more of their residents lacked a high school education or GED.[6]

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1. *The U.S. Census Bureau's 1980 Census used the 1979 median household as its income measure. The 2010 median household income is from the U.S. Census Bureau's Small Area Poverty Estimates. All values are in 2010 dollars.*
2. *U.S. Census Bureau's 1980 and 2000 Censuses; 2006–2010 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.*
3. *U.S. Census Bureau's Population Estimates Program.*
4. *Bureau of Labor Statistics/Haver Analytics.*
5. *A county is defined as having "persistent poverty" if 20 percent or more of its population lived in poverty for the 1970, 1980, 1990 and 2000 Censuses.*
6. *Data is for residents 25 years or older and is from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, County Typology Codes.*