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## Working Toward Equality, Updated, Race, Employment, and Public Transportation in Erie County

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Aaron Krolikowski

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## Working Toward Equality, Updated, Race, Employment, and Public Transportation in Erie County

### Abstract

"As documented in the 2016 PPG report, "Working Toward Equality," there are severe racial disparities in employment and earnings in Erie County. In this report, we update the data from the 2016 report and add new research and analysis about one important barrier: the lack of adequate transportation connecting people of color to jobs. In Erie County, people of color are disproportionately concentrated in high-poverty urban neighborhoods, but jobs, especially quality jobs, are increasingly scattered outside the city, inaccessible or poorly served by public transit. Better-funded public transportation, along with more transit-oriented development and smart growth policies, will produce more racial equity while also reducing poverty and protecting the environment."

### Keywords

Buffalo, Equality, Civil Rights, Environment, PDF



# Working Toward Equality, Updated:

Race, Employment, and  
Public Transportation  
in Erie County



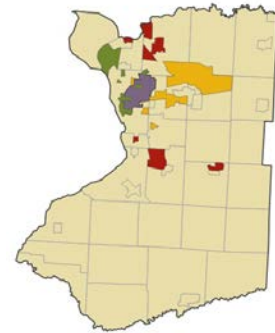
PARTNERSHIP  
FOR THE  
PUBLIC GOOD

JULY 2017



THIS STUDY WAS COMMISSIONED BY THE FOLLOWING ORGANIZATIONS:

NEW YORK STATE AFL-CIO ● WNY AREA LABOR FEDERATION, AFL-CIO ● BUFFALO URBAN LEAGUE  
CONCERNED CLERGY OF WESTERN NEW YORK ● BAPTIST MINISTERS CONFERENCE OF BUFFALO AND VICINITY  
NAACP BUFFALO BRANCH ● COALITION OF BLACK TRADE UNIONS (BUFFALO CHAPTER) ● LABOR COUNCIL  
FOR LATIN AMERICAN ADVANCEMENT (WNY CHAPTER)



# Working Toward Equality, Updated:

Race, Employment, and Public Transportation in Erie County

By Aaron Krolikowski and Sam Magavern

## Summary

As documented in the 2016 PPG report, “Working Toward Equality,” there are severe racial disparities in employment and earnings in Erie County. In this report, we update the data from the 2016 report and add new research and analysis about one important barrier: the lack of adequate transportation connecting people of color to jobs. In Erie County, people of color are disproportionately concentrated in high-poverty urban neighborhoods, but jobs, especially quality jobs, are increasingly scattered outside the city, inaccessible or poorly served by public transit. Better-funded public transportation, along with more transit-oriented development and smart growth policies, will produce more racial equity while also reducing poverty and protecting the environment.

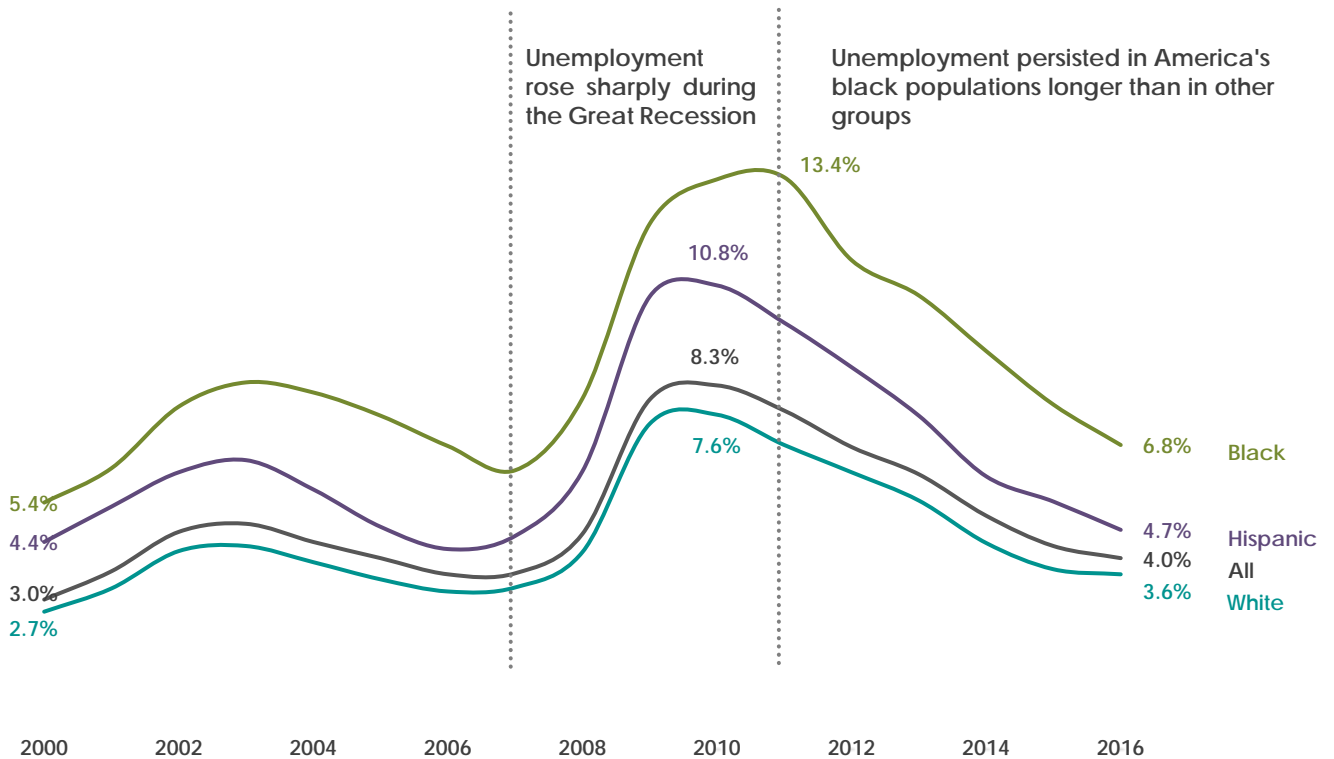
## Employment, Earnings, and Equity

For decades in the United States, unemployment rates have fluctuated widely, but the racial disparities in unemployment rates have stayed remarkably similar, with the unemployment rate for African Americans roughly twice that of whites, and the rate for Hispanic populations roughly one and one half times that of whites. (Figure 1).

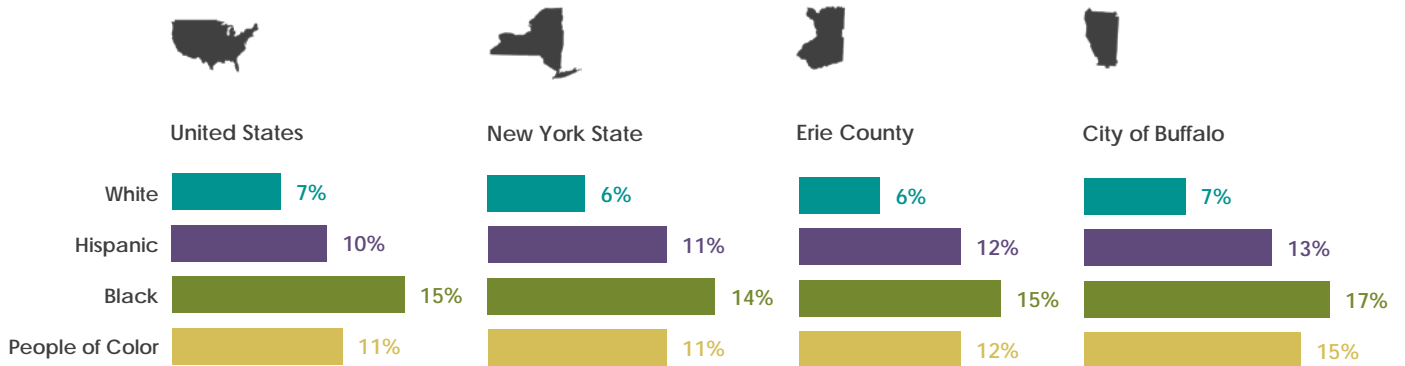
Erie County's disparities are somewhat worse. The 2015 unemployment rate for people of color in the county (12%) was higher than rates for New York state (11%) and the United States (11%). Erie County's unemployment rate for Hispanic workers (12%) was also worse than that of New York state (11%) or the United States (10%).

The city of Buffalo has particularly high unemployment rates and racial disparities (Figure 2). At 17%, black workers in Buffalo have a much higher unemployment rate than Erie County, New York state, or the United States as a whole. Hispanic unemployment (13%) is also higher. In general, people of color in Buffalo are unemployed at a rate of 15%, more than double the rate for whites (7%). Labor force participation rates tell a similar story (Figure 3). In Erie County, 44% of working-age people of color are not in the labor force, compared to 35% of whites.

**Figure 1. National unemployment rate by race and ethnicity; 2000-2016 annual average of quarterly rates for workers 25 years and older.**  
Data Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey.

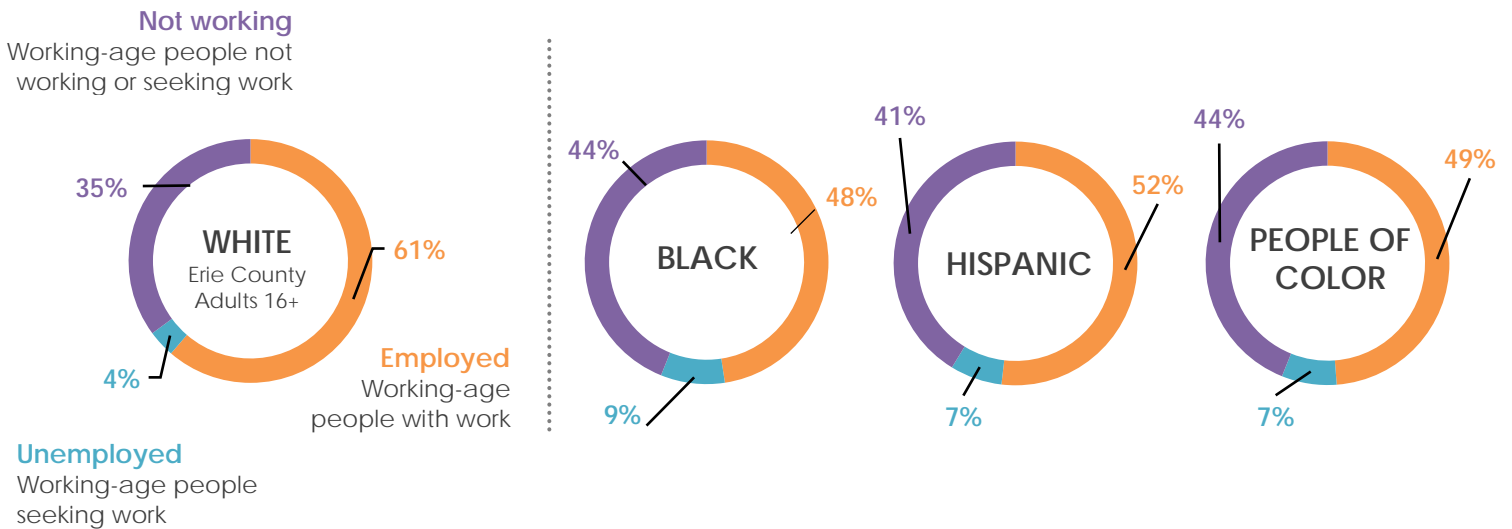


**Figure 2. Unemployment rates by race and ethnicity for selected geographies**  
 Data Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2015 5-yr estimates.



Looking at American Community Survey Census data over time (Appendix, Tables A1 and A2), one sees very consistent racial disparities in unemployment and labor force participation, which are generally worse in Buffalo and Erie County than in the state and the nation. For example, from 2010 to 2015, the black labor participation rate in New York State fluctuated between 61.4% and 61.8%, and the Hispanic rate between 64.4% and 64.7%, but in Erie County the black rate fluctuated between 55.8% and 56.5%, while the Hispanic rate ranged between 57.3% and 61.4%. By contrast, the white population in Erie County posted consistently higher labor participation rates than the white population of the state as a whole.

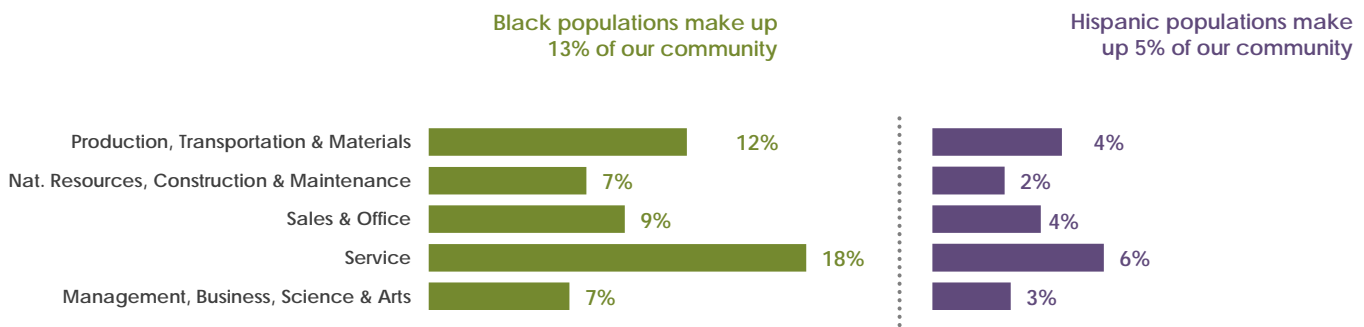
**Figure 3. Workforce Participation in Erie County**  
 Data Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2015 5-yr estimates.



In Erie County, black and Hispanic populations are underrepresented in almost all occupational categories except service jobs (Figure 4). The industries in which black workers represent a greater share of the workforce include Accommodation and Food Services; Administration and Support, Waste Management, and Remediation Services; Health Care and Social Assistance, and Transportation and Warehousing (Figure 5). Hispanics represent a greater share of the workforce in Accommodation and Food Services; Administration and Support, Waste Management, and Remediation Services; Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting; Real Estate; Retail Trade; and Transportation and Warehousing.

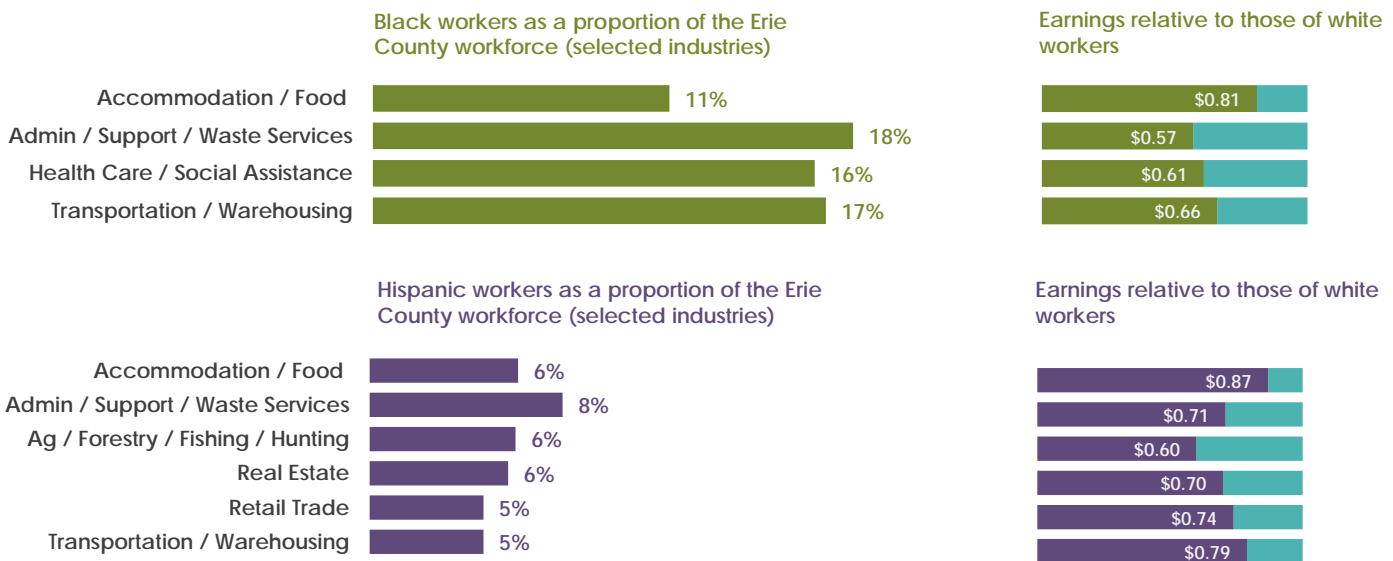
**Figure 4. Proportion of the workforce by selected occupations**

Data Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2015 5-yr estimates.



**Figure 5. Proportion of the workforce by selected industries, race, and ethnicity. The figure also shows earnings in each industry relative to white workers.**

Data Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015 4th quarter estimates of employment, LEHD QWI.





Unemployment is only part of the picture. Equally important are the wage gaps faced by workers of color, both nationally and locally. Nationally, black workers in the bottom fifth of wages worked an average of 1,524 hours in 2015, up 22% from 1979 and higher than the number of hours worked by white workers in the bottom fifth of wages (1,445 hours, up 17% from 1979). And yet even as black workers put in more hours, the wage gap between black and white workers increased. For workers in the bottom ten percent of earners, it rose from 3.6% in 1979 to 11.8% in 2015.<sup>1</sup>

Wage gaps remain large in Erie County as in the nation, with black workers earning only 74 cents, and Hispanic workers earning only 73 cents, for every dollar earned by white workers (Bureau of Labor Statistics, fourth quarter, 2015). Even in industries with a larger share of black and Hispanic workers, there are large gaps in earnings between different racial and ethnic groups (Figure 5). For every dollar earned by white workers in Accommodation and Food Services, black workers earn \$0.81 and Hispanic workers earn \$0.87. In Administration and Support, Waste Management, and Remediation Services, black workers are earning \$0.57 for every dollar earned by white workers. For Hispanic workers, the greatest gap in earnings can be found in Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, and Hunting; where they earn \$0.60 for every dollar earned by white workers.

## Erie County: Sprawl, Segregation, and Public Transit

Erie County is home to over 920,000 residents, with more than 260,000 people living in Buffalo, the state's second-largest city. In addition to Buffalo, the county has two other cities (Lackawanna, Tonawanda), 25 towns, and 16 villages. Erie County is also home to portions of two reservations belonging to the Seneca Nation (Cattaraugus, Tonawanda). The county is becoming more racially diverse, largely because, since the mid-2000s, it has become a major refugee resettlement destination.<sup>2</sup>

In the first Working Toward Equality report in 2016, we discussed some of the major reasons for the racial disparities in employment and earnings: discrimination, segregation, the legacies of past racial inequality, the growth of economic inequality, and the impacts of the Great Recession and the austerity policies that accompanied it. We identified many solutions, including:

- Local and targeted hire policies
- Voluntary actions by employers
- Laws about hiring (including use of credit and criminal histories)
- Anti-discrimination law enforcement
- Direct job creation in targeted communities
- Raising wages and supporting work
- Correcting the spatial mismatch between people of color and quality jobs.

In this report, we offer additional data and analysis relevant to this last solution: connecting people with jobs.

## Sprawl and Segregation

Buffalo’s development pattern is best described as “sprawl without growth.” Between 1950 and 2000, the region gained only 80,881 people, but the urbanized area nearly tripled, going from 123 square miles to 367 square miles.<sup>3</sup> The city of Buffalo’s population declined by 287,484, while the rest of Erie County grew by 338,511.<sup>4</sup> Even as the region’s population started to fall, the rapid sprawl continued. From 1980 until 2006, when the region’s population was declining by 5.8%, the urbanized area grew 38%.<sup>5</sup>

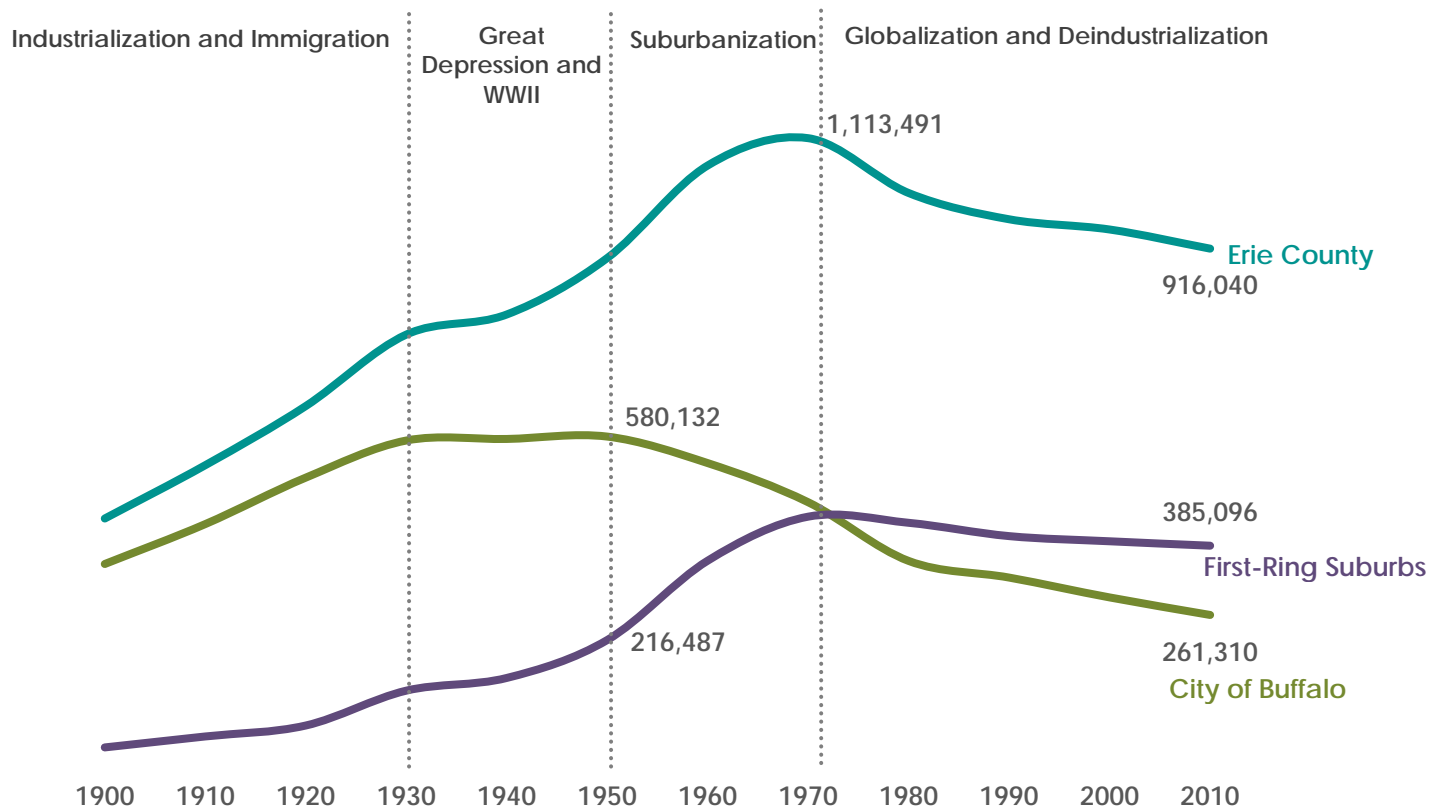
As Buffalo sprawled, it remained highly segregated by race and became increasingly segregated by income, as well. Buffalo-Niagara is the sixth most racially segregated metropolitan region in the nation. In the region, 64% of people of color live in concentrated poverty, compared to 14% of whites.<sup>6</sup> The Buffalo-Niagara metro area ranked in the top ten for increase in income segregation in the last decade,<sup>7</sup> and in 2014 was ranked seventh most segregated by income.<sup>8</sup> Even within city limits, segregation by race and income remains strong, with roughly 85% of African-Americans living east of Main Street.<sup>9</sup>

These patterns of sprawl and segregation mean that while jobs, capital, and the region’s white population are increasingly dispersed throughout the region, people of color are heavily concentrated in urban, high-poverty neighborhoods that lack employment opportunities.

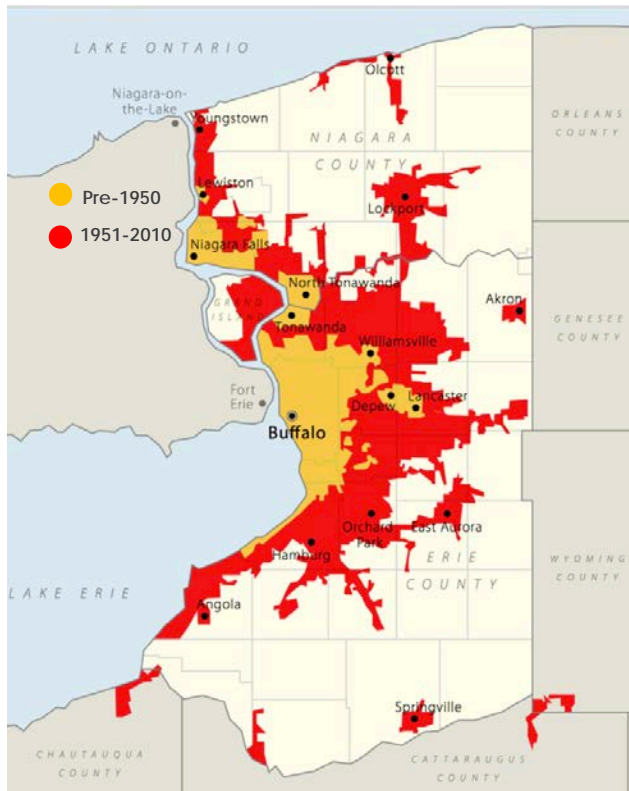
**Figure 6. Populations of Erie County, City of Buffalo, and First-Ring Suburbs\* 1900-2010**

Data Source: US Census Bureau, Decennial Census.

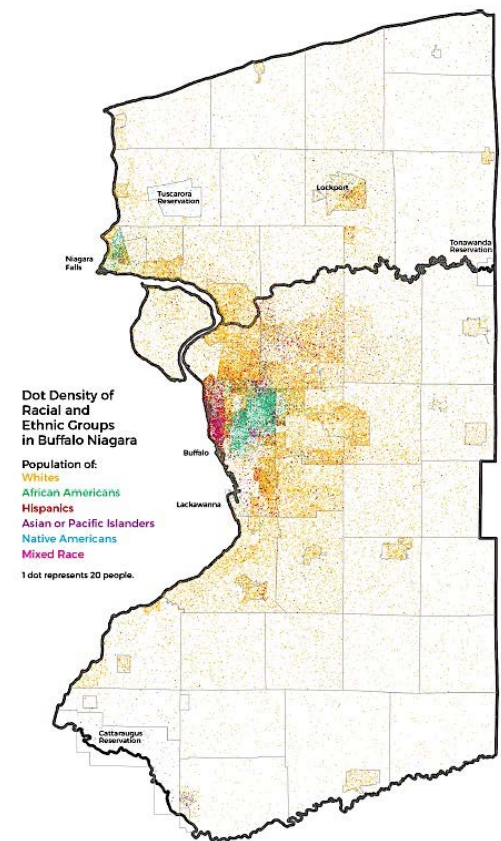
\*Amherst, Cheektowaga, Tonawanda (Town), Tonawanda (City), Kenmore, Lackawanna, Sloan, West Seneca



**Figure 7.** Expansion of urbanized area in Erie and Niagara Counties since 1950  
Map Source: Chuck Banas, 2017



**Figure 8.** Location of people of different races and ethnicities in WNY  
Map Source: UB Regional Institute



## Public Transportation and Access to Employment

Before the second half of the 20th century, Buffalo and Erie County had an extensive streetcar and rail network operated by the International Railway Company. The city's first buses were in operation in 1923, and in 1950 the Niagara Frontier Transit System (later the NFTA) was incorporated.<sup>10</sup> Although the NFTA has added service to Niagara County and areas outside the city of Buffalo, many routes still operate with nearly the same alignment as the former streetcar and rail network.

As public transportation has failed to keep up with the geographic spread of development, residents without reliable cars often struggle to find and keep jobs. Over 56,700 households in the Buffalo-Niagara metropolitan area do not own a vehicle.<sup>11</sup> Approximately 67% of these households are low-income. More than 2,000 of these carless households have no access to public transportation.<sup>12</sup> Crucially, almost 58% of jobs in the region are beyond the reach of transit networks.<sup>13</sup>

Even where the jobs can be reached by transit, barriers remain. Transit commuters often have long journeys to work and in some cases, workers have to take taxis to arrive at work on time, particularly on weekends. Distant employment options also make it

difficult to coordinate other aspects of daily life, including child care drop offs and pick-ups.<sup>14</sup> The combination of increased travel time and wait times required at stops or during a route transfer can further exacerbate inequalities by reducing the time available for other work- and life-related activities.<sup>15</sup>

In most census tracts on the east and west sides of Buffalo, more than 33% of households lack a vehicle.<sup>16</sup> In a number of tracts, more than 43% of households lack a vehicle.<sup>17</sup> Of city of Buffalo workers, for those earning between \$15,000 and \$24,999 per year, 11% take public transit to work and 7% walk. For those earning between \$10,000 and \$14,999, 14% take public transit and 9% walk. And for those earning less than \$10,000, 16% take public transit and 13% walk.<sup>18</sup>

Rates of public transit usage vary dramatically by race as well as income. Among workers earning between \$35,000 and \$64,999, 21% of black workers use public transit to get to work, compared to 3% of whites. For workers earning between \$15,000 and \$34,999, 18% of black workers and 11% of Hispanic workers take transit, compared to 7% of whites. And for workers earning less than \$15,000, 30% of black and 21% of Hispanic workers use transit, compared to 8% of whites. Overall, in the city of Buffalo, 21% of black, 15% of Hispanic, and 26% of Asian and Pacific Islander workers commute by transit, compared to only 5% of whites.<sup>19</sup>

Workers of color have to waste much more of their valuable time commuting than white workers – what is known as the “travel time penalty.” The average black worker who rides the bus spends 59 more hours in transit per year than the average white bus rider and 174 more hours than the average white car driver. The average Hispanic worker spends 80 more hours than the average white bus rider and 195 more hours than the average white car driver.<sup>20</sup>

A closer look at the current levels of service throughout the county finds that the NFTA's most frequent lines are largely confined to the city of Buffalo, with routes of moderate frequency connecting to the first-ring suburbs. In the rest of the county, the routes are often infrequent, do not offer service on the weekends, and provide insufficient flexibility for people trying to access employers with widely varying shifts and schedules.



Figure 9. Maps of high- and moderate-frequency public transit routes in Erie County

Data Source: NFTA Public Datasets

High and moderate frequency lines serve the City of Buffalo and most first-ring suburbs, but provide limited or no access to Lackawanna and Amherst.

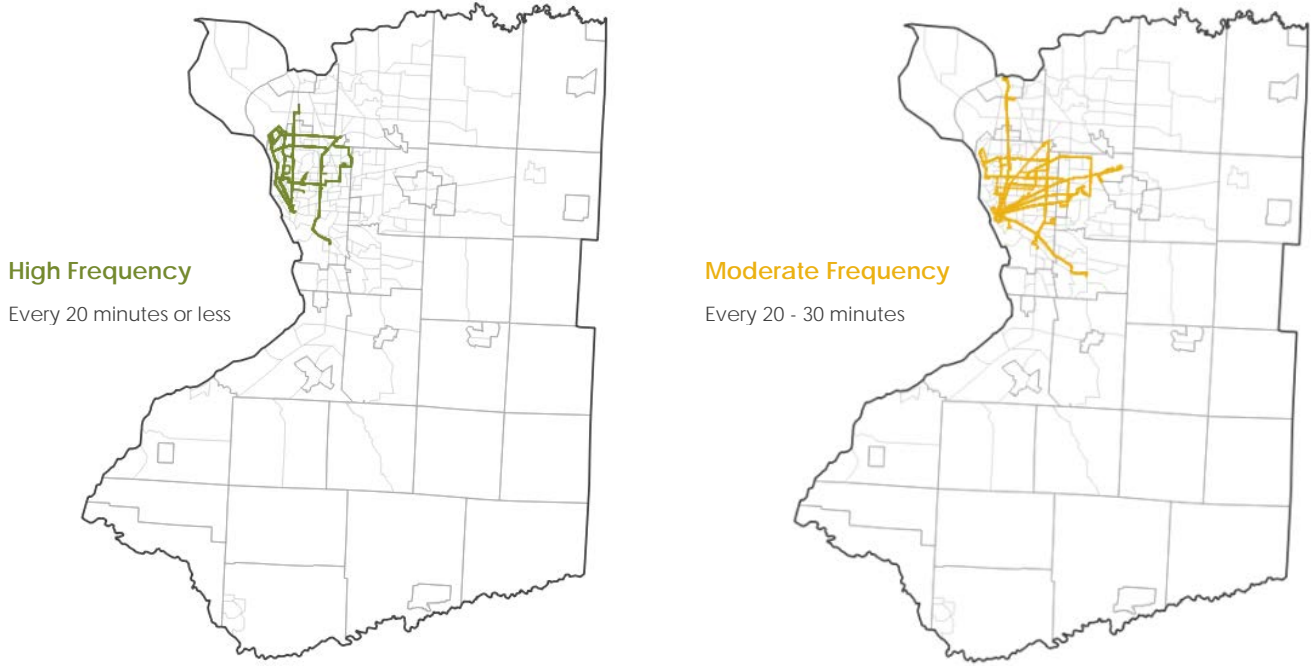
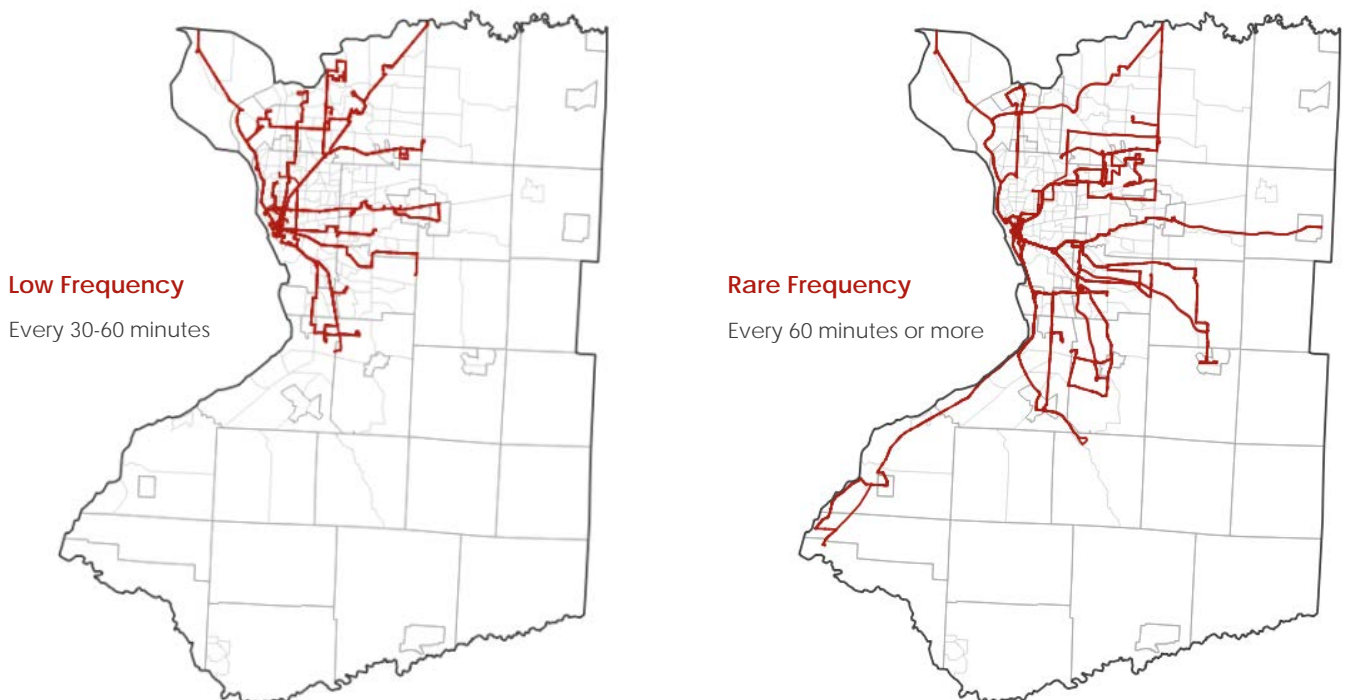


Figure 10. Maps of low- and rare-frequency public transit routes in Erie County

Data Source: NFTA Public Datasets

Low and rare frequency lines reach the first- and second-ring suburbs, but may not run often enough for adequate workforce support.



## Employment Centers

According to data from the US Census Bureau's Longitudinal Origin-Destination Employment Statistics (LODES), Erie County has an estimated 483,495 jobs. Using a method first proposed by Marlay and Gardner,<sup>21</sup> we use LODES data to identify employment centers in the county. Two variables are central to this analytical approach - the jobs ratio and the job density of each census tract. The jobs ratio refers to the relative numbers of jobs and residents in an area; employment centers must have a jobs ratio greater than 1.0, which can also be understood as having "more jobs than bedrooms."<sup>22</sup> In this study, census tracts that have both a jobs ratio greater than 1.0 and a job density above 500 jobs per square mile are classified as employment centers.

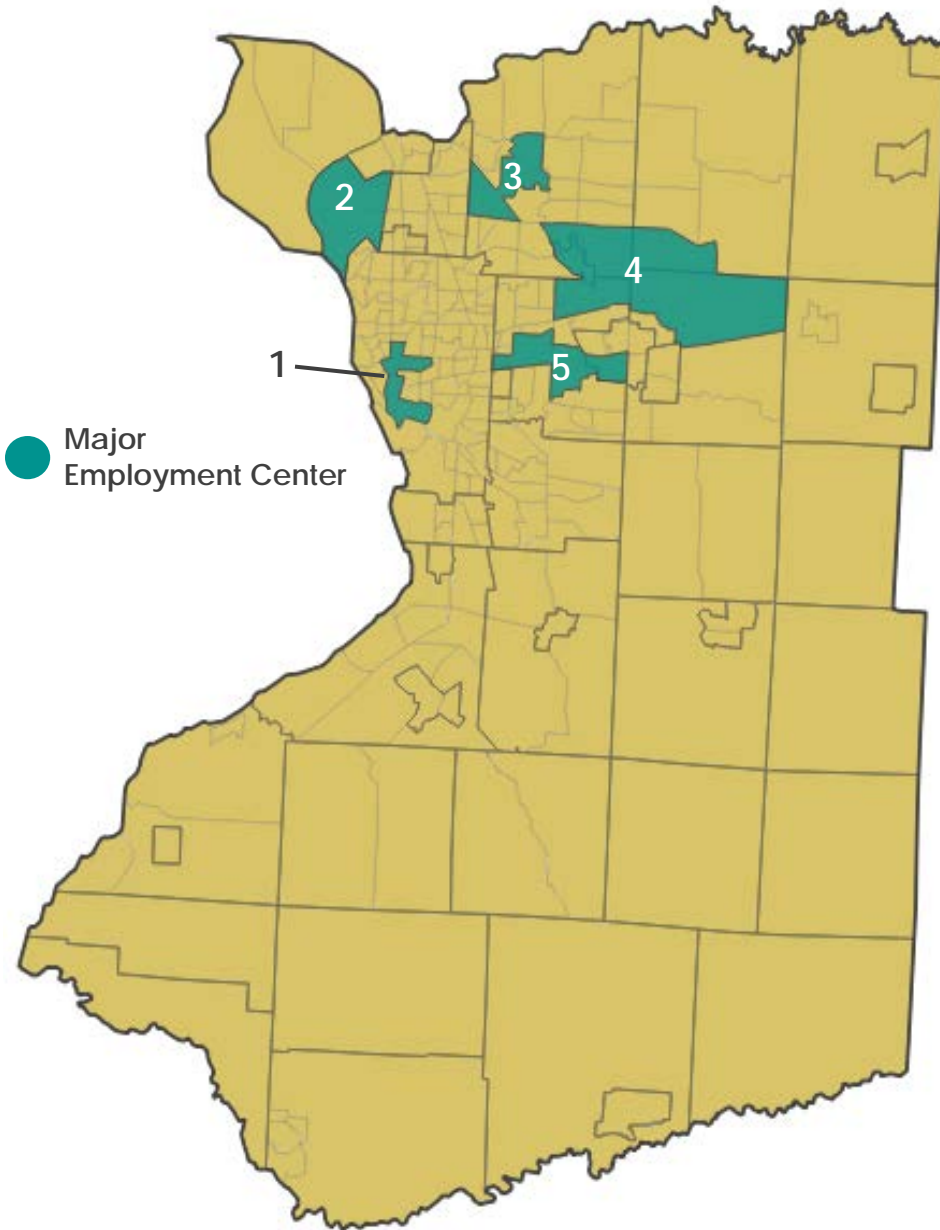
There are five major employment centers in Erie County: Downtown Buffalo; River Road in Tonawanda; the area around Sweet Home Road in Amherst; a substantial area in the northeastern suburbs that includes the Airport, Wehrle Drive, Main Street, and Transit Road; and Walden Avenue in Cheektowaga.

Workers in major employment centers are in a variety of industries. For example, over 47% of employees in the River Road employment center work in manufacturing, while 31% of workers near Sweet Home Road are in education. The proportion of jobs paying more than \$3,333 per month ranges from a low of 34% in the area around Walden Avenue to a high of 61% in the area around River Road. Interestingly, the River Road employment center also has the highest proportion of workers without any college education (36%).

Four out of five of these major employment centers are located outside the city of Buffalo. Downtown Buffalo's major employment center has the highest proportion of non-white workers (17.5%), whereas the Airport-Main-Wehrle-Transit employment center has the lowest proportion of non-white workers - just 10.6% of the workforce.

Figure 11. Major employment centers in Erie County

Data Source: US Census Bureau, 2014 Worker Area Characteristics, LODS



- 1) Downtown Buffalo**  
*58,373 workers*

Prominent employers include the State of New York, the federal government, Buffalo City School District, M&T Bank, Kaleida Health, Catholic Health System, Roswell Park Cancer Institute, HSBC Bank, Erie County, and Seneca Gaming.
- 2) River Road - Tonawanda**  
*14,826 workers*

Prominent employers include General Motors, Sumitomo Rubber Industries, Dupont, FedEx, UPS, NOCO, Aramark, LaFarge North America, Unifrax, and 3M.
- 3) Sweet Home Road - Amherst**  
*32,390 workers*

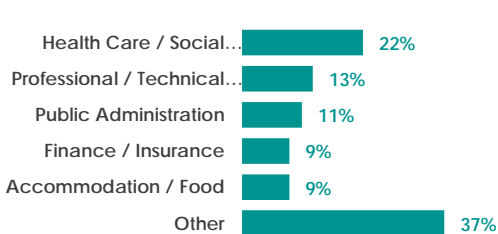
Prominent employers include the University at Buffalo, GEICO, Fidelis Care, Citigroup, as well as retail shops at the Boulevard Mall and along Niagara Falls Boulevard.
- 4) Airport - Main - Wehrle - Transit**  
*46,225 workers*

Prominent employers include the Buffalo Niagara Falls International Airport, TOPS Friendly Markets, Buffalo Crushed Stone Quarry, Erie Community College, US Postal Service, and Ingram Micro.
- 5) Walden Ave - Cheektowaga**  
*21,946 workers*

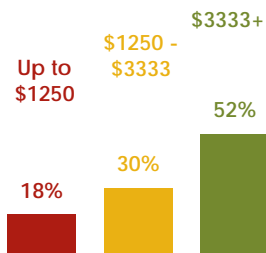
Prominent employers include API Heat Transfer and Niagara Transformer, as well as retail shops at the Galleria Mall and along Walden, Union, and Transit.

## EMPLOYMENT CENTER

### 1) Downtown Buffalo

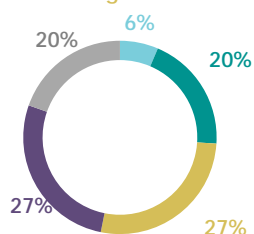


## MONTHLY WAGES



## EDUCATION

● Less than HS    ● Bachelors +  
● HS/Equiv.    ● No Data  
● Some College

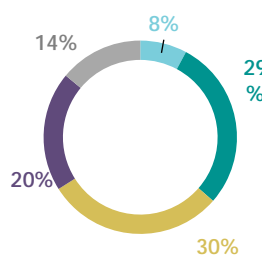
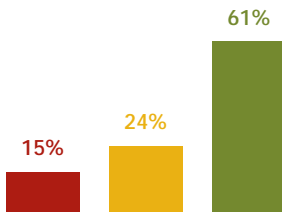
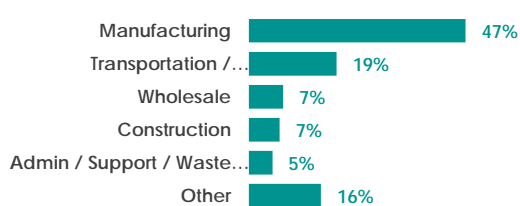


## RACE & ETHNICITY

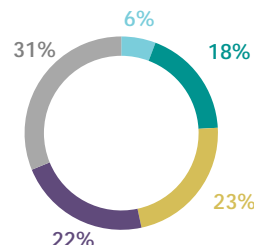
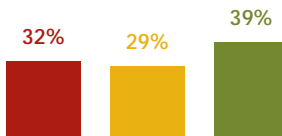
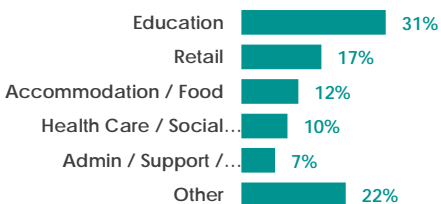
● White    ● Black    ● Other Groups



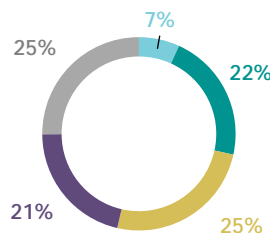
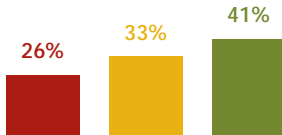
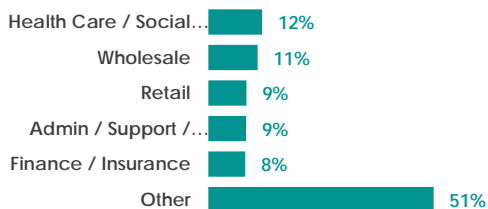
### 2) River Road - Tonawanda



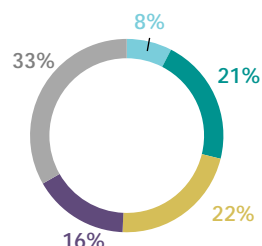
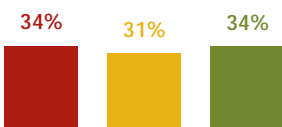
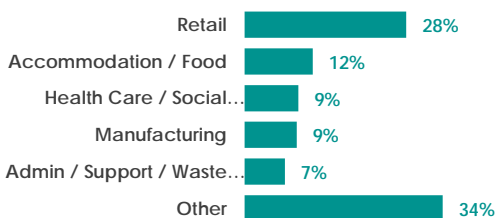
### 3) Sweet Home Road - Amherst



### 4) Airport - Main - Wehrle - Transit



### 5) Walden Avenue - Cheektowaga





## Minor Employment Centers

Beyond major employment centers, this study also identifies stand-alone census tracts with a high jobs ratio and job density as minor employment centers. There are 12 such areas in Erie County, hosting over 22,000 jobs. Six of these minor employment centers are located in the city of Buffalo and are home to Buffalo State College, Sisters of Charity Hospital, the Erie County Medical Center, University of Buffalo, Tri-Main Development, the Veterans Administration Hospital, an area in North Buffalo of concentrated retail activity, and the area around the Niagara Frontier Food Terminal.

There are another six minor employment areas in the suburbs, hosting more than 36,000 jobs. These areas include prominent employers like Ingersoll Rand, Columbus McKinnon, Fisher Price, Multisorb Technologies, and a variety of engineering firms in Orchard Park.

Minor employment centers located in the city of Buffalo have the highest proportions of non-white workers, ranging from 16% around the Niagara Frontier Food Terminal to almost 24% at the Erie County Medical Center. The suburban minor employment centers, by contrast, are highly white. In East Aurora, where Fisher-Price is located (12), only 3.5% of the workforce is people of color. And only 6% of the workforce in the two minor employment centers focused on engineering (6,11) is non-white. The retail center surrounding the northern stretch of Niagara Falls Boulevard has the highest proportion of workers of color (10.8%), but also has the lowest earnings and the least-educated workforce.

**Table 1. Employment at minor employment centers by race/ethnicity**

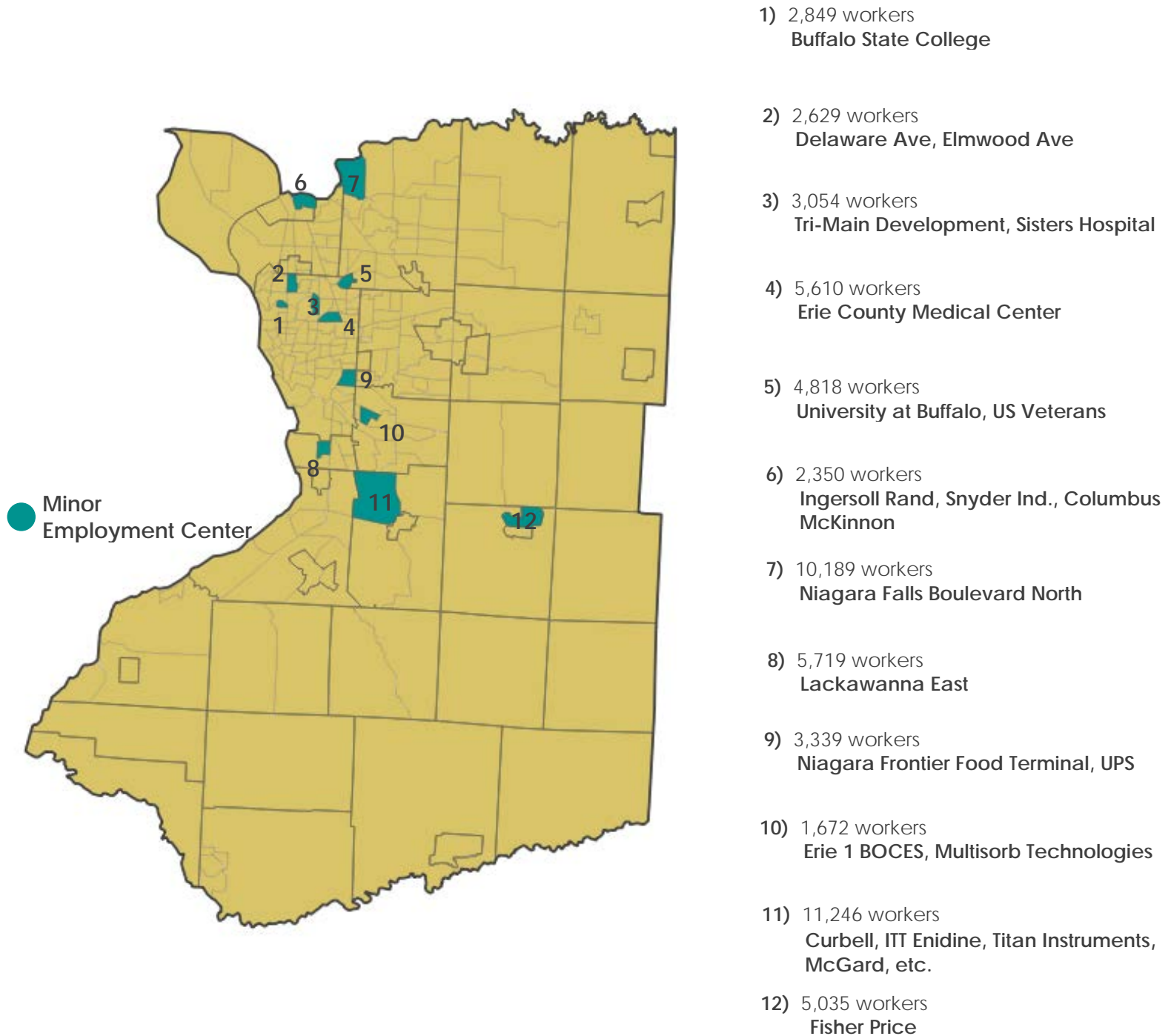
Data Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

MINOR EMPLOYMENT CENTER #	TOTAL JOBS	WHITE	BLACK	OTHER	HISPANIC*
1	2,849	83%	11%	6%	3%
2	2,629	82%	14%	4%	6%
3	3,054	84%	14%	3%	3%
4	5,610	76%	20%	4%	3%
5	4,818	79%	10%	11%	4%
6	2,350	94%	4%	2%	3%
7	10,189	91%	6%	3%	3%
8	5,719	89%	9%	2%	3%
9	3,339	84%	14%	2%	4%
10	1,672	92%	6%	2%	3%
11	11,246	94%	4%	2%	2%
12	5,035	96%	2%	2%	2%

\*People who identify as Hispanic may be of any race.

Figure 12. Minor employment centers in Erie County

Data Source: US Census Bureau, 2014 Worker Area Characteristics, LODES



## Communities of Color in Erie County

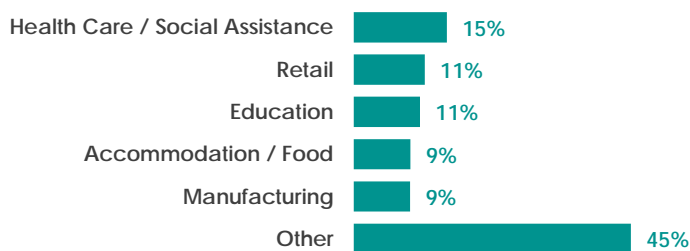
Data from the American Community Survey (2015, 5-yr estimates) show that Erie County is home to over 215,000 people of color, accounting for approximately 23.4% of the population. The map in Figure 13 illustrates how people of color in Erie County are highly concentrated in Buffalo and Lackawanna.

There are six communities of color in Erie County – i.e., sets of contiguous census tracts where more than 50% of the population is people of color. Buffalo’s West Side is one such community made up of 14 census tracts. In this area, over 29% of residents identify as Latino or Hispanic, and 57% of the population is non-white. Only 70% of workers in this area use a car to get to work, with 17% reliant on public transit and another 12% that walk or bike. 44% of residents over the age of 25 have some level of college education.

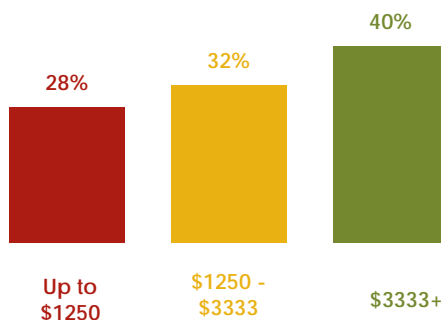
**Figure 13. Key characteristics of Erie County workforce including top industries, monthly earnings, and race & ethnicity.**

Data Source: US Census Bureau, 2014 Worker Area Characteristics, LODES

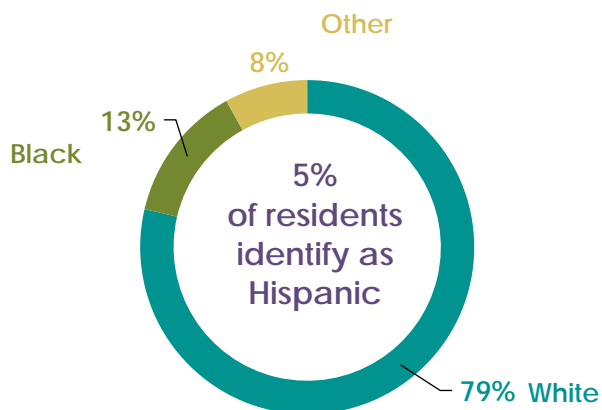
### Top Industries / All Erie County Workers



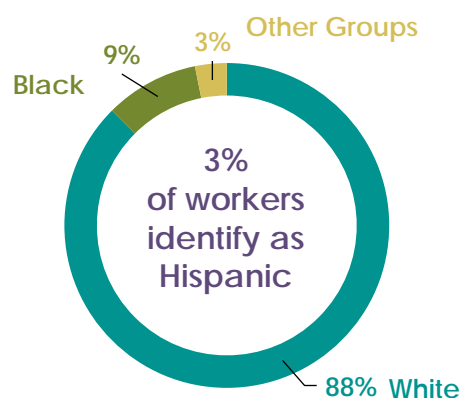
### Monthly Earnings / All Erie County Workers



### Race & Ethnicity / All Residents



### Race & Ethnicity / All Erie County Workers

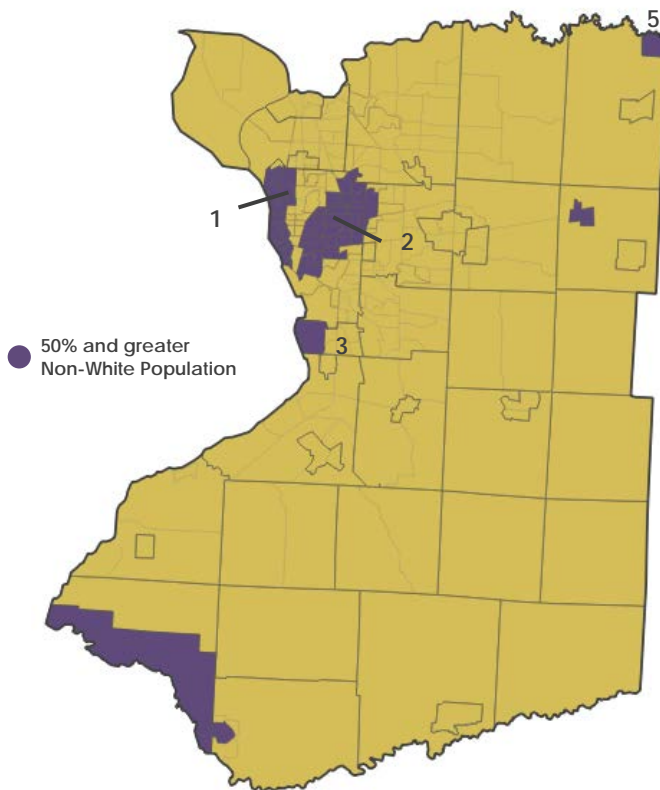


Buffalo’s East Side is the county’s largest community of color with over 96,000 residents in 32 contiguous census tracts. 77% of residents in this area are black, and there is an overall non-white population of 86%. In this community, 17% of workers use public transit and 9% walk or bike.

Smaller communities of color in the county include the area of Western Lackawanna adjacent to the former Bethlehem Steel Plant, the portion of the Tonawanda Reservation in northeastern Erie County, and the portion of the Cattaraugus Reservation in southwestern Erie County.

While full-time, year-round employment for the Erie County workforce stands at 61.3%, this figure is much lower in communities of color; for example, it is 49% for workers living on Buffalo’s East Side. The following page provides profiles of each of these communities of color, except for the Erie County portion of the Tonawanda Reservation, which has a population that is too small for analysis. Commuting method, educational attainment, race and ethnicity, and the size of each community are provided where data are available.

**Figure 14. Map of census tracts with majority non-white populations (communities of color).**  
Data Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2015 5-yr estimates



**1) Buffalo - West Side**

With 14 census tracts along the Niagara River, this area includes large Hispanic and refugee populations

**2) Buffalo - East Side**

Comprised of 32 census tracts mostly east of Main Street in Buffalo, this community stretches into Western Cheektowaga

**3) Western Lackawanna**

Located adjacent to the former Bethlehem Steel Plant, this community has large Hispanic, black, and Yemeni populations

**4) Cattaraugus Reservation**

This Seneca Nation reservation has a relatively large population in Southern Erie County

**5) Tonawanda Reservation**

This Seneca Nation reservation has a small number of people in Erie County.



COMMUNITY

COMMUTING METHOD

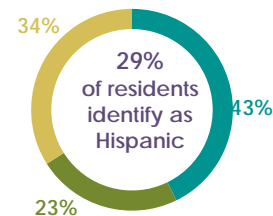
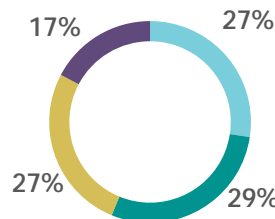
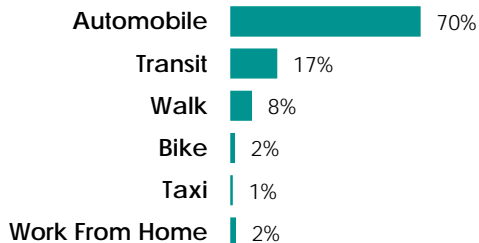
EDUCATION

RACE & ETHNICITY

● Less than HS  
● HS/Equiv.     
 ● Some College  
● Bachelors +     
 ● White     
 ● Black     
 ● Other Groups

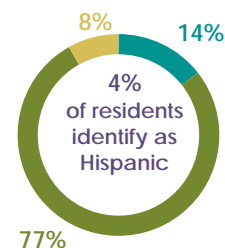
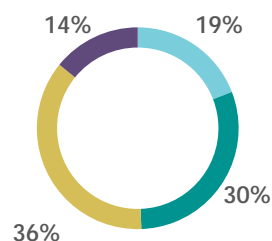
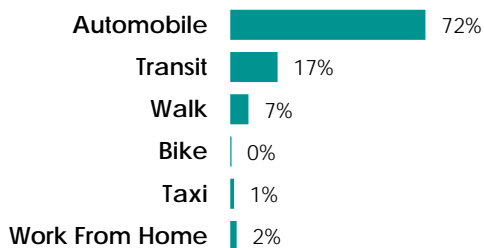
1) West Side - Buffalo

50,406 residents  
66% of the population is non-White



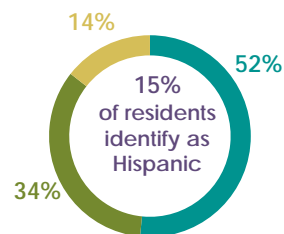
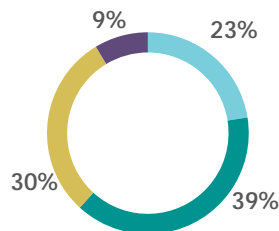
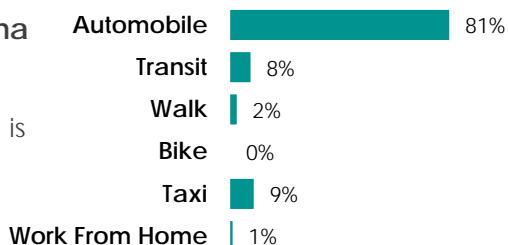
2) East Side - Buffalo

96,192 residents  
87% of the population is non-White



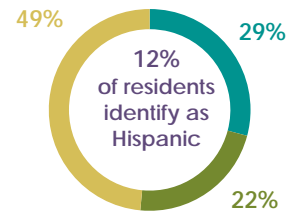
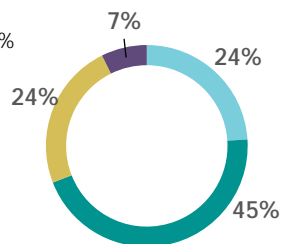
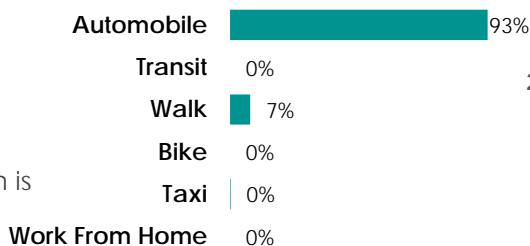
3) Western Lackawanna

4,220 residents  
51% of the population is non-White



4) Cattaraugus Reservation

4,421 residents  
72% of the population is non-White



## Connections and Levels of Service

After identifying employment centers in Erie County, the next step of the analysis focuses on the transit connectivity between them and communities of color.

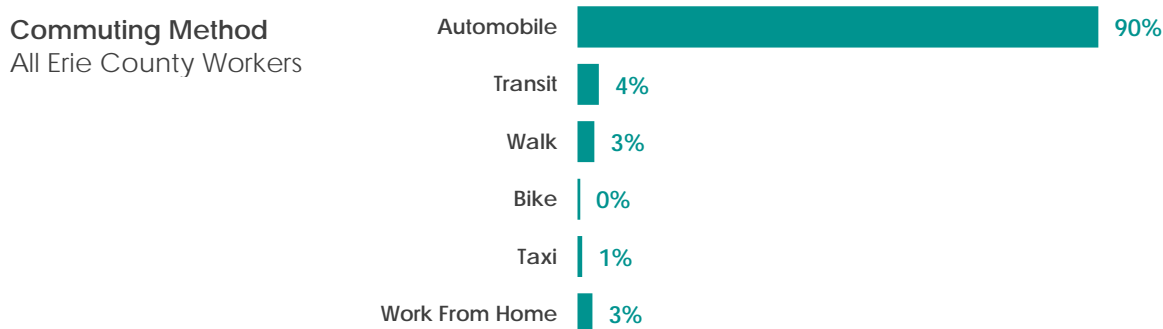
The West Side of Buffalo connects to all five major employment centers and eight out of 12 minor employment centers via public transportation. On Buffalo's East Side, residents can also access all five major employment centers and 11 out of 12 minor employment centers via NFTA transit routes.

Beyond the City of Buffalo, however, connectivity between communities of color and employment centers is weak. Residents of Western Lackawanna can access only the Downtown Buffalo major employment center and the Lackawanna East minor employment center via public transportation. It is striking that 9% of workers in Western Lackawanna report using a taxi for their commute, compared to only 8% using transit.

The Cattaraugus Reservation connects only with Downtown Buffalo, and the Tonawanda Reservation has virtually no connectivity to any employment centers in the county. Of Erie County residents on the Cattaraugus Reservation, zero percent report using transit to get to work; 93% use cars and 7% walk.

Even where there is access, it is often infrequent. For example, Buffalo's East Side is served by 35 separate public transportation routes, but 23 of these are infrequent and provide fewer than two buses per hour during weekdays. Western Lackawanna and the Cattaraugus Reservation have only routes of low or rare frequency. Taking a closer look at Buffalo's East and West Sides, we see key gaps in transit access, with the result that residents are in fact isolated from many potential jobs.

Figure 15.



## Connectivity and Service for Buffalo's West Side

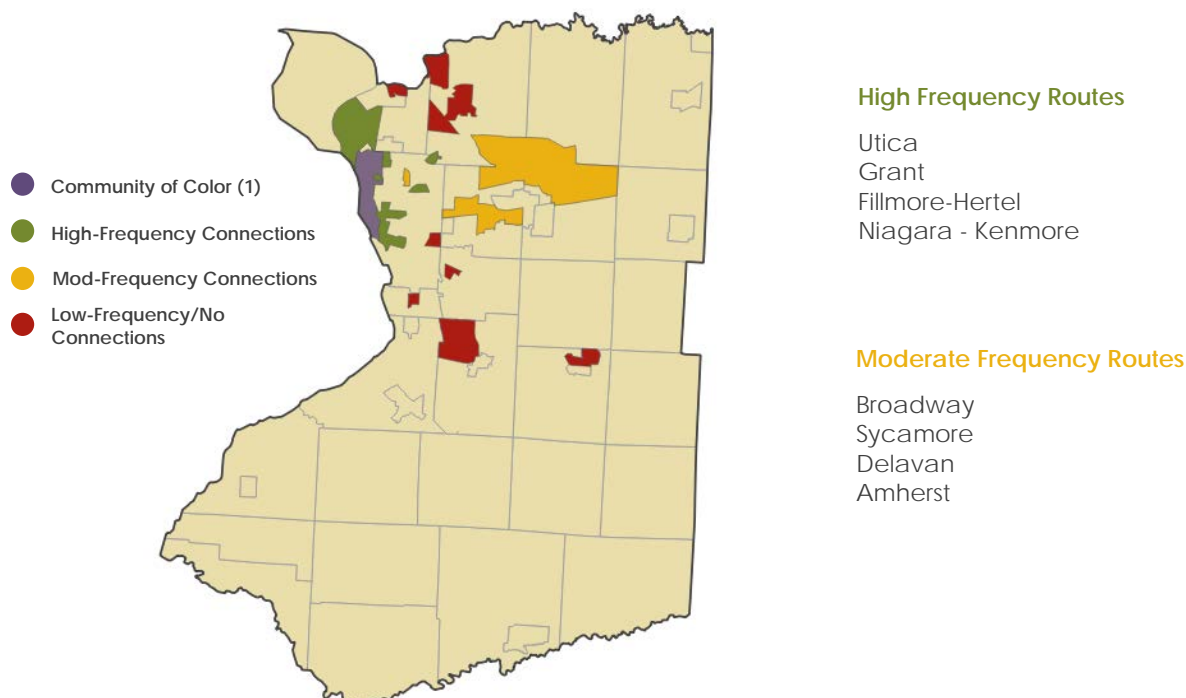
Buffalo's West Side is connected via public transportation to 13 out of 17 employment centers in Erie County. Residents can take high-frequency routes to Downtown Buffalo and the edge of the River Road employment center and moderate-frequency routes to the edges of the Walden Avenue and Airport-Main-Wehrle-Transit employment centers. In many cases, however, getting to the edge of an employment center does not really provide access to all the jobs within it. West Side workers cannot access the Sweet Home Road employment center via high- or moderate-frequency lines.

Minor employment centers are also accessible from Buffalo's West Side. Buffalo State College, Erie County Medical Center, and the minor employment area in and around UB South Campus are all accessible via high-frequency transit routes. Residents of this community can also reach the minor employment center that includes Tri-Main Development and Sisters of Charity Hospital via moderate-frequency routes. But minor employment centers in the northern, southern and eastern suburbs of Erie County are inaccessible via routes with sufficient frequency.

Comparing the racial composition of the West Side with the most accessible major employment centers reveals that there are substantial racial disparities in the workforce. There are also stark differences in the levels of education required by these jobs and the educational attainment of this community. While 56% of adults over 25 on the West Side have a high school education or less, more than 60% of the jobs in these major employment centers require at least some college education. This suggests that education gaps, as well as transportation gaps and other factors, play a role in the underemployment of people of color at these job centers.

**Figure 16. Connections and comparisons between "West Side - Buffalo" and Erie County major and minor employment centers.**

Data Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2015 5-yr estimates; NFTA



## Connectivity and Service for Buffalo's East Side

Buffalo's East Side is similarly connected via public transportation to 16 out of the 17 employment centers in Erie County. Like residents on Buffalo's West Side, workers from this community can easily access downtown Buffalo and the edge of the River Road employment center via high-frequency transit routes. Moderate-frequency routes also provide transportation links to the Airport-Main-Wehrle-Transit and Walden Avenue employment centers, but only to the edges of these areas. The Sweet Home Road employment center in Amherst is inaccessible from high- and moderate-frequency NFTA routes.

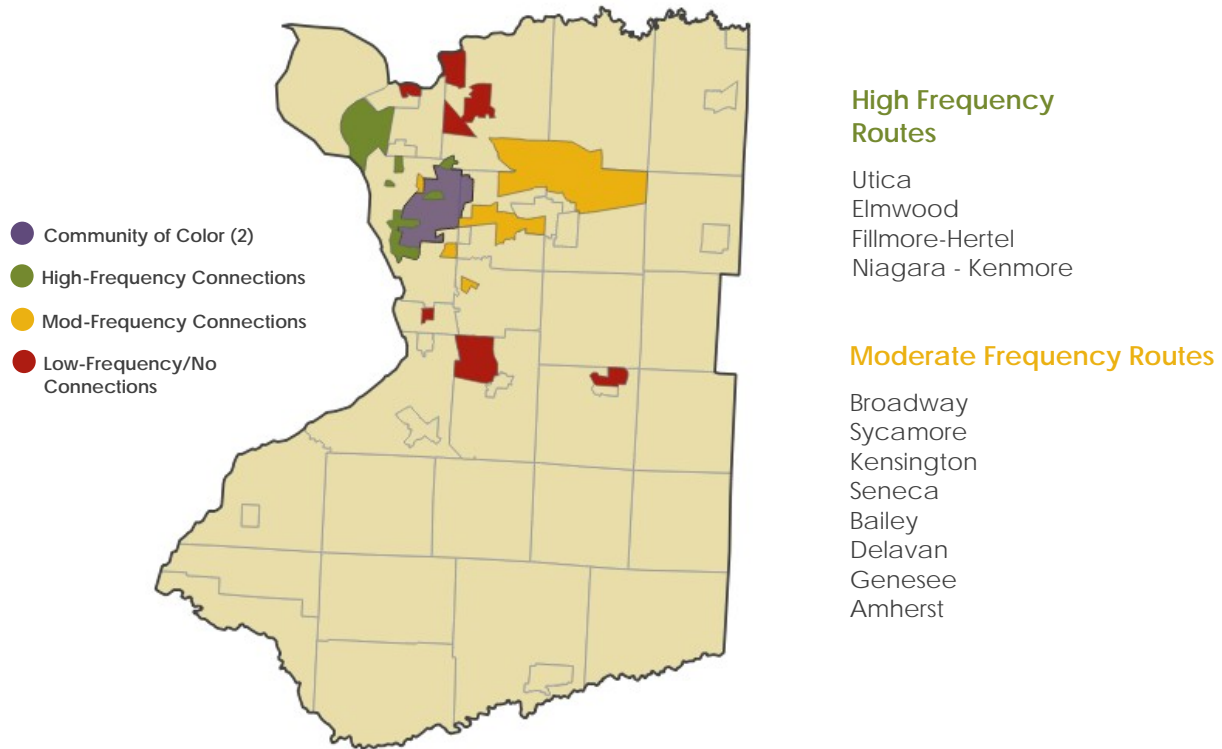
Residents on Buffalo's East Side can also access 11 minor employment centers, but six of these can only be reached via low-frequency routes. The employment center that houses Ingersoll Rand, Snyder Industries, and Columbus McKinnon cannot be reached via public transportation from the East Side. Buffalo State College, the University at Buffalo South Campus, Erie County Medical Center, and retail areas in North Buffalo are the most easily accessible. Moderate-frequency lines can also take workers to the minor employment centers that host Sisters of Charity Hospital, Tri-Main Development, the Niagara Frontier Food Terminal, Erie 1 BOCES, and Multisorb Technologies. As with Buffalo's West Side, it is a challenge to reach any of the minor employment centers in the northern, eastern, or southern suburbs from the East Side.

There are also considerable differences between the race and ethnicity of residents of Buffalo's East Side and the workforces found in the county's major employment centers. 77% of the residents in this community of color identify as black, but black workers make up only 13.8% of Downtown Buffalo's workforce, and only 7.7% in the Airport-Main-Wehrle-Transit employment center. Black workers are most commonly found in the county's minor employment areas, particularly those located in Buffalo. For example, almost 20% of workers in the area of the Erie County Medical Center are black, and black workers make up approximately 14% of the workforce in the retail centers of North Buffalo, the area around Sisters of Charity Hospital, and the Niagara Frontier Food Terminal. Outside the city, black workers often face difficulty accessing employment. Less than 2% of the workers in the employment center of East Aurora are black, and only 4% of workers in the employment centers in Tonawanda and Orchard Park are black.



Figure 17. Connections and comparisons between "East Side - Buffalo" and Erie County major and minor employment centers.

Data Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2015 5-yr estimates; NFTA



The differences in travel time for an average commuter can help give a better idea of the impact made by these disparities in transportation. If a commuter from Buffalo's West Side needs to arrive at work by 9am on a weekday, it takes substantially longer to travel via public transportation than to drive. Going from the intersection at Niagara and Porter to Sumitomo Rubber Industries in the River Road employment center takes 25 minutes by bus, but only 10 minutes by car. This is an area served by high-frequency transportation routes. If that same individual were going to GEICO in the Sweet Home Road employment center, served only by low- or rare-frequency lines, it would take that person 77 minutes to get to work, 56 minutes more than driving.

For a commuter coming from Buffalo's East Side, using public transportation also involves a large time penalty. For workers leaving from the intersection of Bailey Avenue and Genesee Street, it takes 58 minutes to travel to Sumitomo Rubber Industries by bus. This is 39 minutes longer than it would take to drive the same distance.

Table 2. Connections between communities of color and employment centers in Erie County, NY.

Data Source: NFTA Public Datasets.

NO.	COMMUNITY	MAJOR EMP. CENTERS (OF 5)	MINOR EMP. CENTERS (OF 12)	ALL EMP. CENTERS (OF 17)
1	WEST SIDE - BUFFALO	5	8	13
2	EAST SIDE - BUFFALO	5	11	16
3	WESTERN LACKAWANNA	1	1	2
4	CATTARAUGUS RESERVATION	1	0	1
5	TONAWANDA RESERVATION	0	0	0

Table 3. Level of service between communities of color and employment centers in Erie County, NY.

Data Source: NFTA Public Datasets.

NO.	COMMUNITY	HIGH FREQUENCY	MODERATE FREQUENCY	LOW/RARE FREQUENCY	ALL ROUTES
1	WEST SIDE - BUFFALO	4	4	10	18
2	EAST SIDE - BUFFALO	4	8	23	35
3	WESTERN LACKAWANNA	0	0	4	4
4	CATTARAUGUS RESERVATION	0	0	1	1
5	TONAWANDA RESERVATION	0	0	0	0

Table 4 provides more detailed time estimates for driving and taking public transit to work from Erie County's communities of color. When one maps the average travel time to work for city of Buffalo residents by census tract, one finds that almost all the tracts with the longest travel times (over 23 minutes) are located on the east and west sides of Buffalo.

Table 4. Travel times to work from the East and West Sides of Buffalo, for driving and public transit on a weekday.

Data Source: Google Maps Search

Arrive By	Home	Employer	Drive	Public Transit	Difference
9:00 AM	Niagara/Porter	Sumitomo	10	25	15
		Airport	21	64	43
		GEICO	21	77	56
	Bailey/Genesee	Sumitomo	19	58	39
		Airport	13	22	9
		GEICO	23	52	29
5:00 PM	Niagara/Porter	Sumitomo	10	25	15
		Airport	23	41	18
		GEICO	23	69	46
	Bailey/Genesee	Sumitomo	21	64	43
		Airport	17	24	7
		GEICO	25	53	28
1:00 AM	Niagara/Porter	Sumitomo	9	23	14
		Airport	20	85	65
		GEICO	22	70	48
	Bailey/Genesee	Sumitomo	16	51	35
		Airport	12	22	10
		GEICO	20	74	54

## Improving Transit Funding, Service, and Connectivity

Buffalo-Niagara's economy depends heavily on mass transit, with the NFTA providing 27 million passenger trips per year. Roughly 84% of riders use NFTA to get to work; of these, 77% do not own a car.<sup>23</sup> Public transit investments create jobs. It is estimated that every \$1.25 billion invested in transportation infrastructure supports 35,000 jobs.<sup>24</sup> Public transit saves families money. Families in large metropolitan areas save \$9,656 per year by taking transit instead of driving.<sup>25</sup>

Better public transit is an ecological imperative. Under Executive Order 24, New York State is attempting to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions 80% by 2050. Transportation accounts for over one third of the State's emissions; no climate strategy can succeed without significant investment in public transit; and thus the State's climate action plan calls for the State to "invest in the maintenance, enhancement, and expansion of public transit systems."<sup>26</sup> Expanding public transit, as called for by the plan, would save 900 million gallons of gas by 2030.<sup>27</sup>

The biggest reason for the inadequate bus service in Erie County is the simplest: inadequate funding. The NFTA receives funding from many sources, but the most important is New York State transit operating assistance, which amounts to \$52.5 million in 2017-2018. Since 2008-2009, the average increase in funding has been only 1.8% per year. Meanwhile, key costs have been rising at much faster rates. For example, since fiscal year 2012, the NFTA's health insurance costs have increased an average of 6.7% per year; pension costs by 4.9% per year; and worker's compensation costs by 6.7% per year.<sup>28</sup>

The NFTA's state funding lags behind that of New York City's Metropolitan Transit Authority. Furthermore, the NFTA does not receive additional operating funding for its light rail system, which makes the NFTA's costs higher than those of other upstate cities like Rochester and Albany. These inequities are felt directly by NFTA riders.

The State has also declined to increase NFTA's low-cost power allocation from the New York Power Authority. PPG reported in a 2012 policy brief that the NFTA was receiving only one megawatt in low cost power and had to pay market rate for the other eight megawatts of power it used, whereas the investment bank JP Morgan Chase received 24.2 megawatts per year,<sup>29</sup> and the aluminum company Alcoa received 478 megawatts of power from NYPA each year, in a 30-year subsidy valued at \$56 billion.<sup>30</sup>

Local funding sources, while smaller, are also important. Erie County could improve public transit by increasing the share of the sales tax and mortgage recording tax that it allocates to the NFTA.

Even without additional funding, there are steps the NFTA can take to become more responsive and successful. One imperative is reaching a new and more fair contract with its drivers, whose current salaries start at \$12.95 per hour, which is not a family sustaining wage. Another priority is to give riders a real voice in decision-making, as advocated by Buffalo Transit Riders United (BTRU). The State should aid in this effort by giving riders voting seats on the board of the NFTA.

Particularly with additional funding, the NFTA can add more busses and routes, with special attention to connecting communities of color with major and minor employment centers. The NFTA could also explore discounted passes for people with low incomes, as other transit authorities around the nation have done.

Equally important as improving transit is to locate more jobs in or near communities of color and along public transit routes. Through Empire State Development, the New York Power Authority, and the multitude of industrial development agencies, the state provides a wide array of tax incentives and other rewards to businesses with the goal of attracting and retaining jobs. Adding stricter "smart growth" criteria to all these programs is crucial to connecting jobs to people, especially people of color.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Racial disparities in employment and earnings are shockingly large throughout the nation and even worse than average in the Buffalo region. These disparities have many causes, starting with the long history of racial discrimination in employment and other sectors of life. One cause is the disconnect between people of color and jobs, especially quality jobs. This disconnect has three main elements: the region's "sprawl without growth" which dispersed jobs and people; racial and economic segregation, which concentrates people of color in high-poverty, low-employment neighborhoods; and a failure to invest in adequate public transit to connect people with jobs.

People without cars – who are disproportionately people of color – cannot access many of the region's jobs. Of course, this is bad for them, but it is also bad for employers, who lose access to a large percentage of the applicant pool for their available jobs. Even when workers can reach the jobs by public transit, they are paying large "travel time penalties" in their commutes. Time spent commuting means less time to earn money, get further education and training, participate in civic activities, and raise children. Long commute times and inadequate service make employees more likely to be late for work and lose jobs, imposing costs on both workers and employers.

There are many public policies that can improve our local economy's productivity and sustainability while reducing racial disparities by addressing the transit disconnect.

### Increase Public Transit Funding

- New York State should increase its transit operating assistance to the NFTA;
- The NYPA should increase the NFTA's allocation of low cost power;
- Erie County should increase the portion of the sales tax and mortgage recording tax that it dedicates to the NFTA;

### Improve NFTA Service

- NFTA should use the increased funding to:
  - Pay all its workers family-sustaining wages;
  - Offer discounted fares to people with low incomes;
  - Add more busses and routes, with a particular focus on better connecting neighborhoods with high poverty to employment centers.
- New York State should appoint transit riders to voting seats on the NFTA board.

### Locate Jobs More Accessibly

In locating public sector jobs and in offering incentives to private sector employers, state and local governments and authorities should prioritize jobs that are located in or near high-poverty neighborhoods in central locations and/or are located on high-frequency public transit lines. Economic development programs such as the IDAs and NYPA's low cost power allocations should add and strengthen criteria that reward companies for these "smart growth" practices.



## Appendix

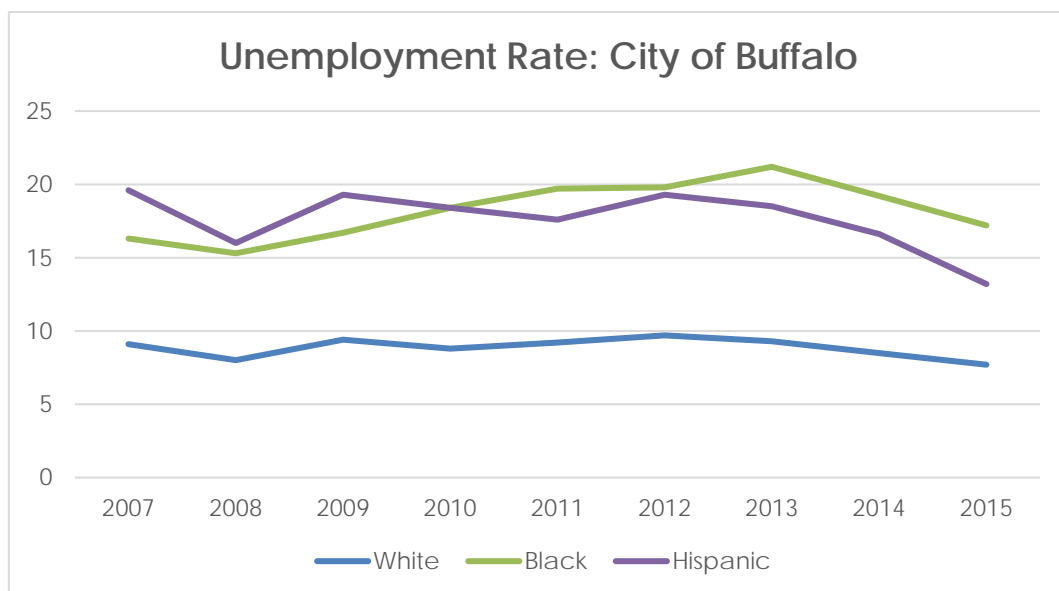
**TABLE A1. Unemployment rates for white, black, and Hispanic workers in the City of Buffalo, County of Erie, and State of New York**

Data Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2007-2015 estimates.

*Note that the data from 2007 and 2008 are based on three-year estimates and from 2009 forward are based on five-year estimates. Note also that ACS uses a broader definition of employment than the Bureau of Labor statistics, resulting in large discrepancies between those two sources.*

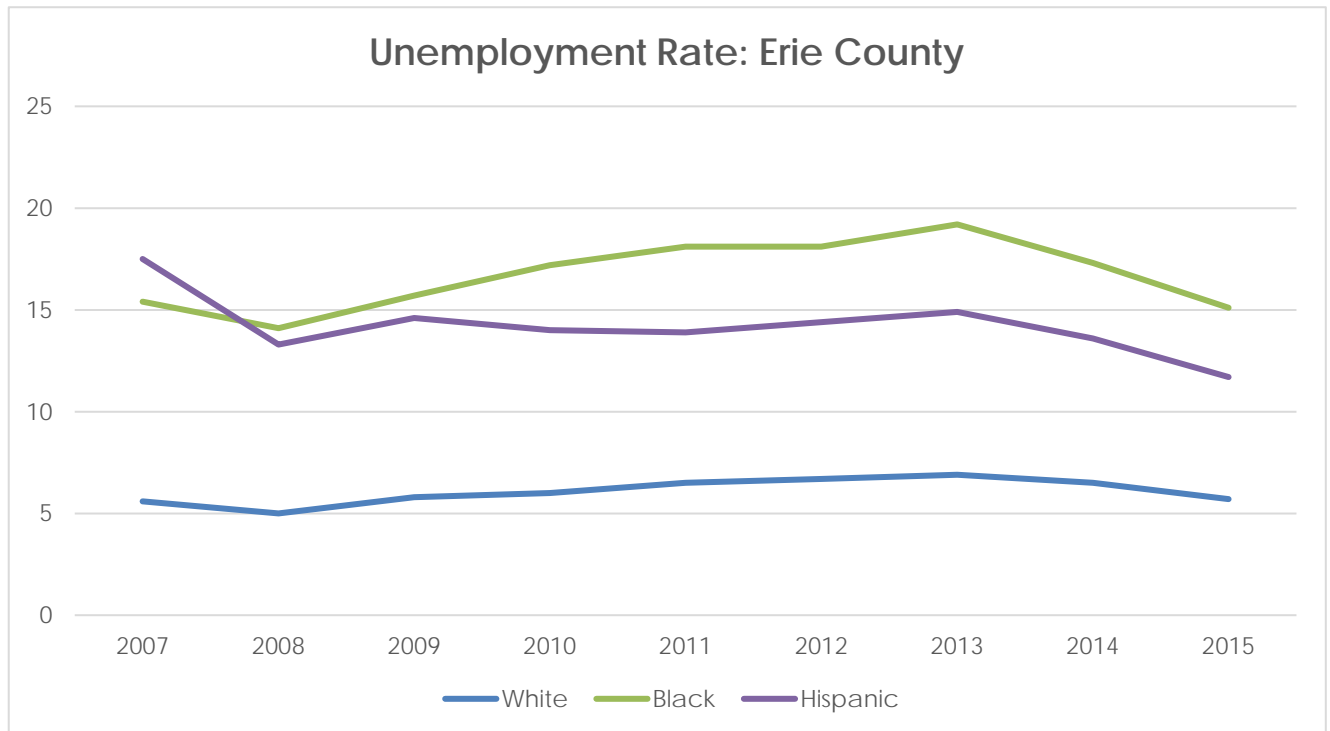
### CITY OF BUFFALO

Year	White	Black	Hispanic
2007	9.1%	16.3%	19.6%
2008	8.0%	15.3%	16.0%
2009	9.4%	16.7%	19.3%
2010	8.8%	18.4%	18.4%
2011	9.2%	19.7%	17.6%
2012	9.7%	19.8%	19.3%
2013	9.3%	21.2%	18.5%
2014	8.5%	19.2%	16.6%
2015	7.7%	17.2%	13.2%



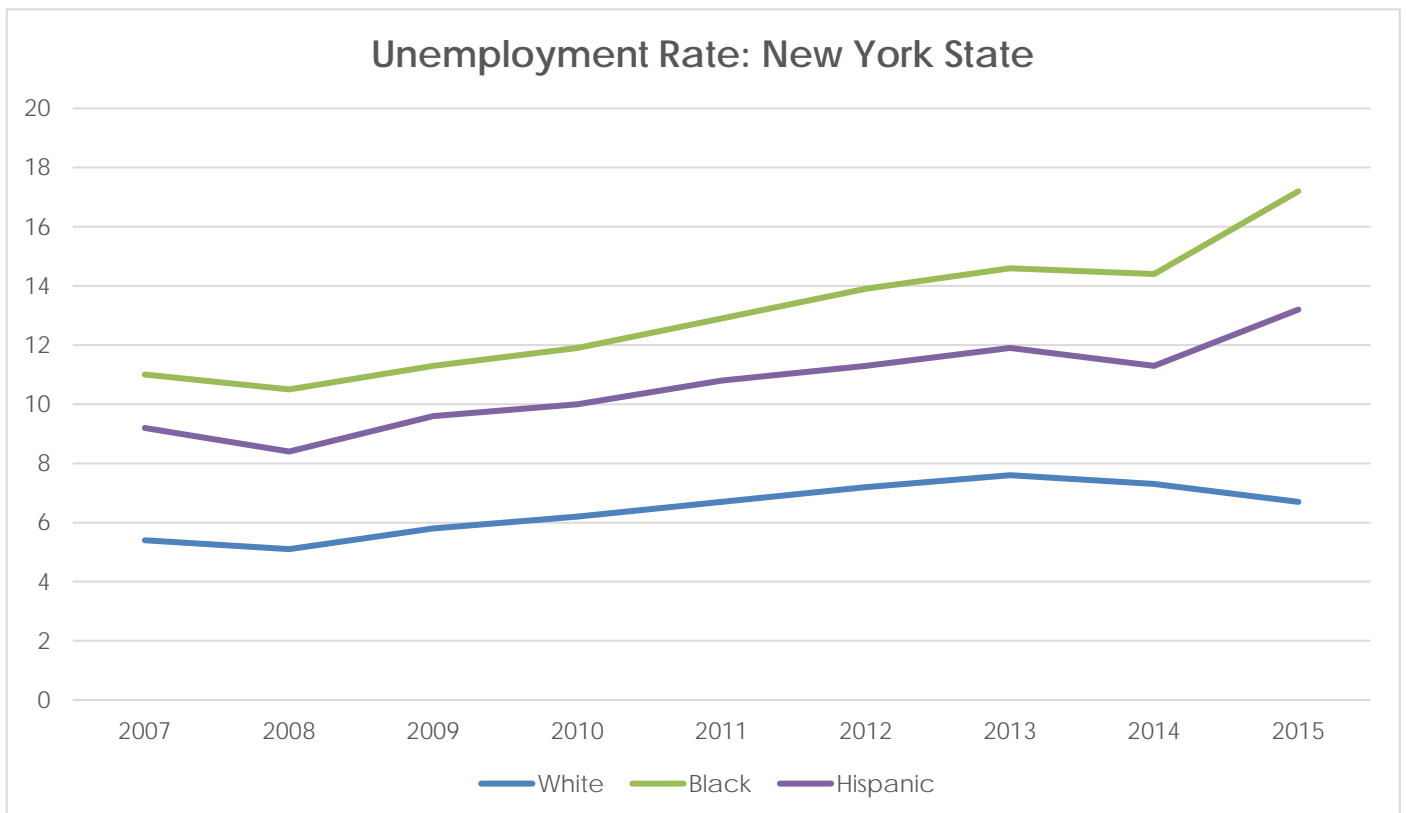
## ERIE COUNTY

Year	White	Black	Hispanic
2007	5.6%	15.4%	17.5%
2008	5.0%	14.1%	13.3%
2009	5.8%	15.7%	14.6%
2010	6.0%	17.2%	14.0%
2011	6.5%	18.1%	13.9%
2012	6.7%	18.1%	14.4%
2013	6.9%	19.2%	14.9%
2014	6.5%	17.3%	13.6%
2015	5.7%	15.1%	11.7%



## NEW YORK STATE

Year	White	Black	Hispanic
2007	5.4	11.0	9.2
2008	5.1	10.5	8.4
2009	5.8	11.3	9.6
2010	6.2	11.9	10.0
2011	6.7	12.9	10.8
2012	7.2	13.9	11.3
2013	7.6	14.6	11.9
2014	7.3	14.4	11.3
2015	6.7	17.2	13.2

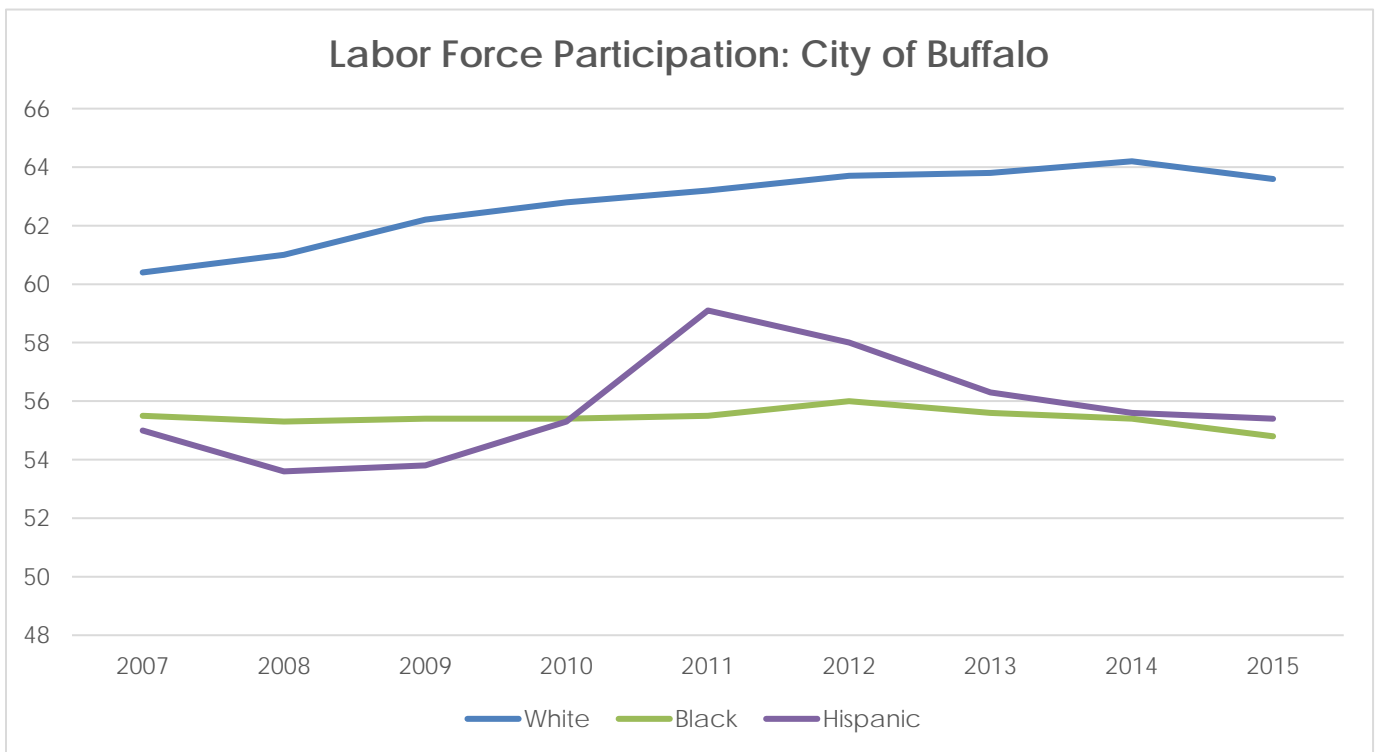


**TABLE A2. Labor force participation rates for whites, blacks, and Hispanics in the City of Buffalo, County of Erie, and State of New York**

Data Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2007-2015 estimates

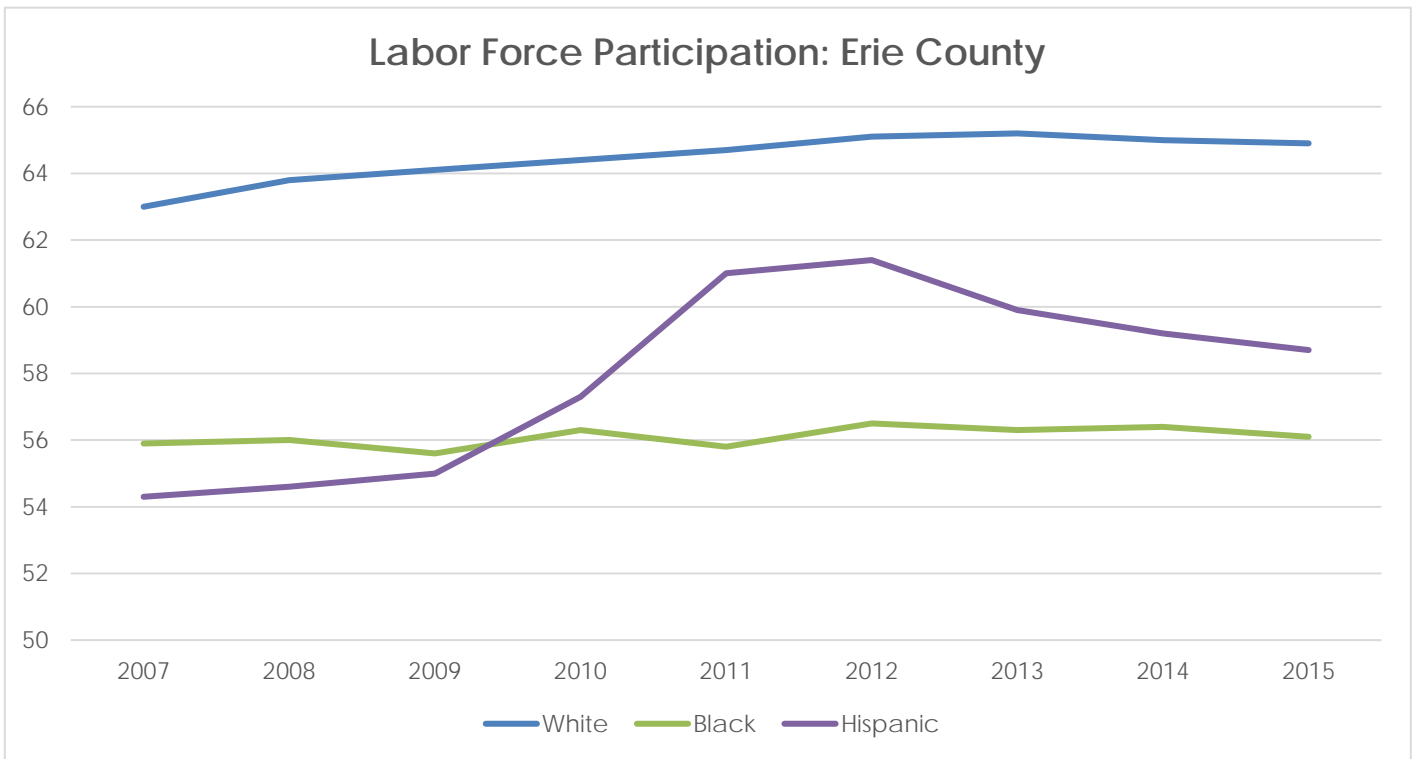
### CITY OF BUFFALO

Year	White	Black	Hispanic
2007	60.4%	55.5%	55.0%
2008	61.0%	55.3%	53.6%
2009	62.2%	55.4%	53.8%
2010	62.8%	55.4%	55.3%
2011	63.2%	55.5%	59.1%
2012	63.7%	56.0%	58.0%
2013	63.8%	55.6%	56.3%
2014	64.2%	55.4%	55.6%
2015	63.6%	54.8%	55.4%



## ERIE COUNTY

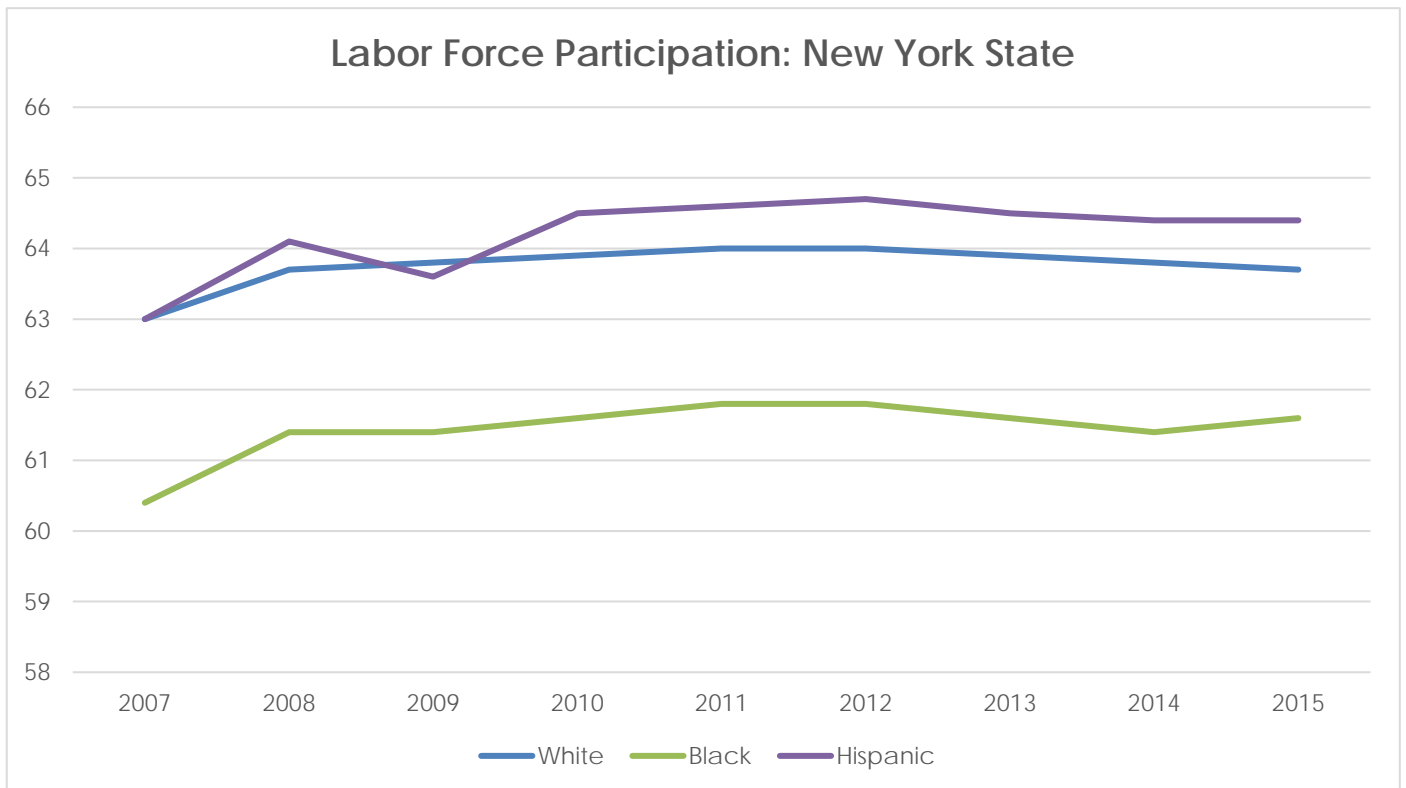
	White	Black	Hispanic
2007	63.0%	55.9%	54.3%
2008	63.8%	56.0%	54.6%
2009	64.1%	55.6%	55.0%
2010	64.4%	56.3%	57.3%
2011	64.7%	55.8%	61.0%
2012	65.1%	56.5%	61.4%
2013	65.2%	56.3%	59.9%
2014	65.0%	56.4%	59.2%
2015	64.9%	56.1%	58.7%





## NEW YORK STATE

Year	White	Black	Hispanic
2007	63.0%	60.4%	63.0%
2008	63.7%	61.4%	64.1%
2009	63.8%	61.4%	63.6%
2010	63.9%	61.6%	64.5%
2011	64.0%	61.8%	64.6%
2012	64.0%	61.8%	64.7%
2013	63.9%	61.6%	64.5%
2014	63.8%	61.4%	64.4%
2015	63.7%	61.6%	64.4%



**TABLE A3. Change in proportions of the workforce by occupation, for workers 16 years and older**

Data Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2015 5-yr estimates

Occupation	2010			2015			Change		
	White	Black	Hispanic	White	Black	Hispanic	White	Black	Hispanic
Management, business, science, and arts	86.2%	7.2%	1.9%	87.6%	6.6%	2.6%	1.4%	-0.6%	0.7%
Service	77.0%	15.7%	4.0%	75.1%	17.7%	5.7%	-1.9%	2.0%	1.7%
Sales and office	85.7%	9.0%	2.8%	85.9%	9.2%	3.6%	0.2%	0.2%	0.8%
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance	88.7%	6.4%	3.1%	89.1%	7.4%	2.4%	0.4%	1.0%	-0.7%
Production, transportation, and material moving	79.6%	12.7%	4.8%	81.8%	12.1%	4.3%	2.2%	-0.6%	-0.5%

**TABLE A4. Change in proportion of the workforce by industry, by race and ethnicity**

Data Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015 4th quarter estimates of employment, LEHD QWI

Industry	2010			2015			Change		
	White	Black	Hispanic	White	Black	Hispanic	White	Black	Hispanic
<i>All Industries</i>	85.2%	8.9%	3.4%	83.8%	9.6%	4.0%	-1.5%	0.7%	0.6%
Accommodation and Food Services	81.2%	9.9%	5.1%	78.8%	10.8%	6.0%	-2.4%	0.9%	0.9%
Administrative, Support, Waste Management , Remediation Services	78.7%	13.7%	5.8%	73.9%	16.9%	7.3%	-4.7%	3.1%	1.6%
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	90.3%	3.1%	5.3%	89.1%	3.3%	5.9%	-1.2%	0.2%	0.6%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	89.8%	5.5%	2.9%	88.2%	6.4%	3.2%	-1.6%	0.8%	0.4%
Construction	91.3%	4.0%	2.9%	91.0%	3.9%	3.4%	-0.2%	-0.2%	0.5%
Educational Services	87.6%	8.0%	2.6%	86.8%	7.7%	3.0%	-0.8%	-0.2%	0.5%
Finance and Insurance	87.1%	7.4%	2.9%	86.8%	7.1%	3.1%	-0.2%	-0.3%	0.2%
Health Care and Social Assistance	79.0%	15.2%	3.0%	77.8%	16.1%	3.6%	-1.2%	0.9%	0.6%
Information	87.3%	8.0%	2.7%	87.3%	7.1%	3.1%	0.0%	-1.0%	0.4%
Management of Companies and Enterprises	86.1%	9.1%	2.6%	85.3%	9.2%	3.0%	-0.9%	0.1%	0.3%
Manufacturing	87.8%	6.6%	3.2%	87.0%	7.0%	3.5%	-0.7%	0.4%	0.3%
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	97.4%	1.7%	0.0%	96.5%	1.5%	0.0%	-1.0%	-0.2%	0.0%
Other Services (except Public Administration)	87.2%	7.5%	3.1%	84.3%	8.8%	3.8%	-3.0%	1.3%	0.7%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	87.5%	5.0%	2.8%	88.2%	4.7%	3.1%	0.7%	-0.3%	0.3%
Public Administration	86.8%	8.6%	2.8%	86.2%	9.1%	3.0%	-0.6%	0.5%	0.2%
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	85.0%	9.2%	4.8%	83.7%	9.2%	5.6%	-1.3%	0.0%	0.9%
Retail Trade	87.4%	6.2%	3.7%	85.3%	7.4%	4.6%	-2.1%	1.2%	1.0%
Transportation and Warehousing	81.9%	13.8%	3.0%	77.7%	16.5%	4.5%	-4.2%	2.6%	1.4%
Utilities	89.3%	8.2%	1.7%	90.0%	7.0%	2.2%	0.7%	-1.3%	0.5%
Wholesale Trade	90.6%	4.4%	3.4%	88.8%	5.4%	3.9%	-1.7%	1.1%	0.5%

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## Acknowledgments

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