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Sociology 201

Essay #2

March 26, 2014

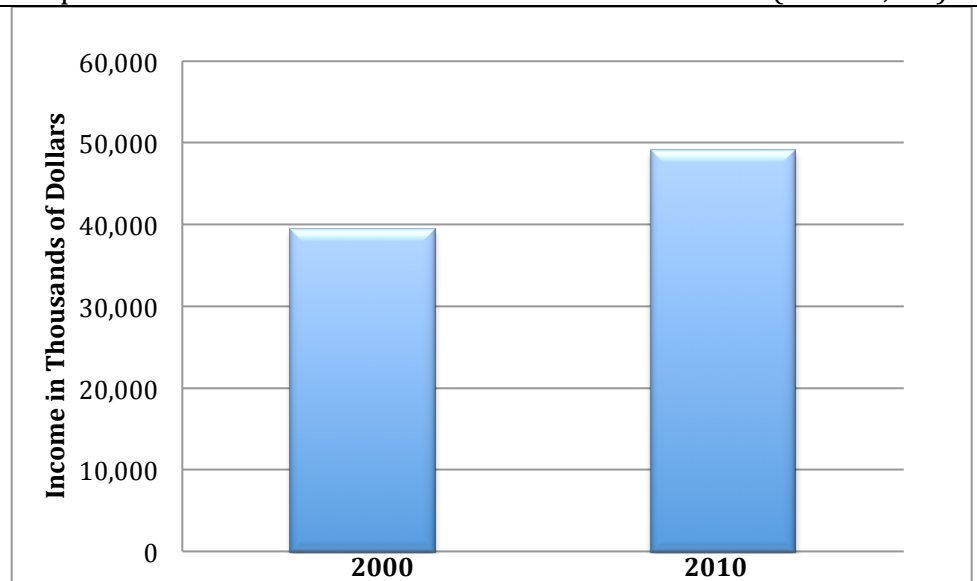
Denver, CO and the Lack of Education

Attainment Due to Poverty

Denver is the largest city in Colorado and also the capital of the state. It is exactly one mile above sea level at 5,280 feet and it is home to over 600,000 residents including myself. The county of Denver is the second largest in the State of Colorado below El Paso County. Denver has a large population of non-agricultural workers and the economy is based on wholesale merchants, management, professional, and related occupations. Denver is now most known for its large number of recreational marijuana dispensaries; one for every 1,535 people since the state of Colorado legalized recreational marijuana in November of 2012. It is also the largest growing industry in Denver. The city of Denver is an urbanized area and is the most diverse city in Colorado. The Hispanic or Latin population has increased by .10% according to the 2010 Census, making it second largest ethnic group in Denver after the white population. There are approximately 1,300 schools ranging from public schools, private schools, and charter schools. The Denver Public School district is one of the largest in the state with a 5.7% dropout rate. In this essay I will analyze median household incomes, unemployment, and families living in poverty. All these factors contribute to the lack of education attainment in youth and adolescents living in the urban area of Denver due to the lack of resources their families and schools can obtain, therefore, causing a huge drift in the future development of the city.

Denver is a tale of two cities, 17,500 people live in downtown Denver and it is expected to increase by 18% in the next five years (Meyer). Three-quarters of the downtown population are white, average age 33, with 60% having a college degree and an annual household income of \$76,263 (Meyer). These individuals are above the median household income of 2000 and 2010 as seen in Graph 1. The rest of the population is making less than those individuals living downtown and as interviewee one says, “Low income part of Denver has a lot of projects and poverty. The number of projects is huge, there’s a lot of violence and growth of gangs. This causes kids to drop out and stay in the government housing becoming a burden of the state (Interviewee one).” There is a great difference in the high-income and the low-income areas when it comes to education. Children living in high-income families are more likely to go to a private school or to a wealthier school district. Only a third of Denver’s population is earning higher than the median income and the rest of the parents providing for their children are barely managing or living in debt or in poverty.

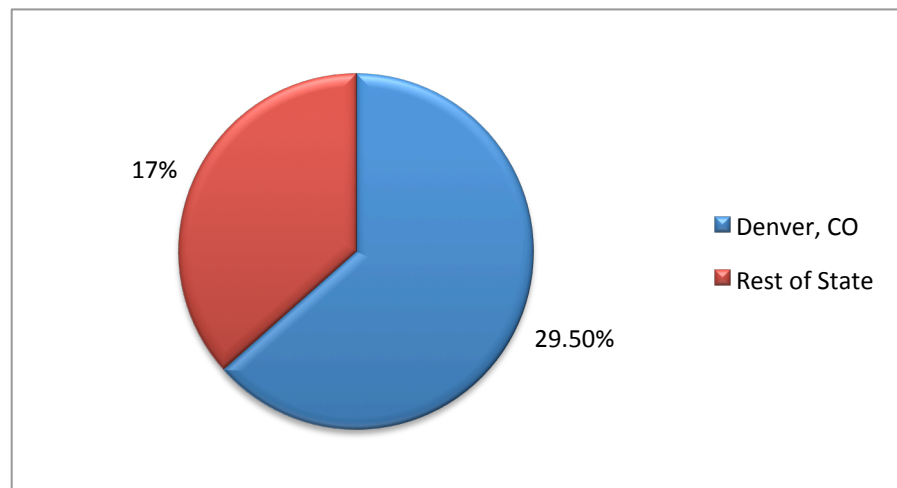
Graph 1: Median Household Income from 2000 to 2010 (Denver, CO)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2000, 2010.

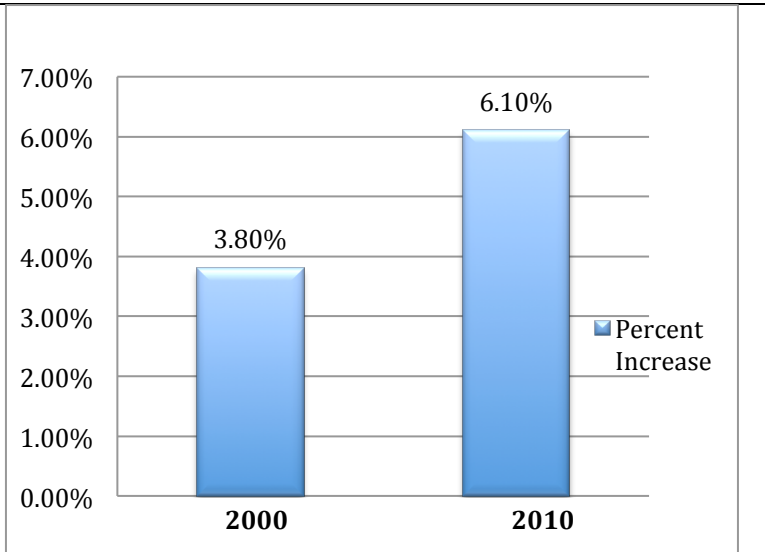
As seen in Graph 2 the percentage of children living in poverty in Denver is larger than the percentage living in poverty for the rest of the state. According to interviewee one the problem with people living on unemployment is that it becomes a habit and creates the growth in children living in poverty. “People stay at low incomes and always depend on the state. They then live off unemployment and do not help the economy as much as they can. Then have children and the number of children living in poverty has grown” (Interviewee one). The rate of unemployment has increase by a little less than half as seen in the Graph 3. This is said to be caused by the economic downfall of 2008 but also the number of people on welfare or living off unemployment benefits. What this causes is a social stigma that it is okay to continue the pattern of living off the government. Children are affected by what they see; parents living in poverty have had parents living in poverty and continue that pattern. They lack the ability in some cases to push their children to succeed in school (Torres).

Graph 2: Children Below Poverty Level 2012 (Denver, CO)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2012.

Graph 3: Unemployment Percent Increase from 2000 to 2010 (Denver, CO)

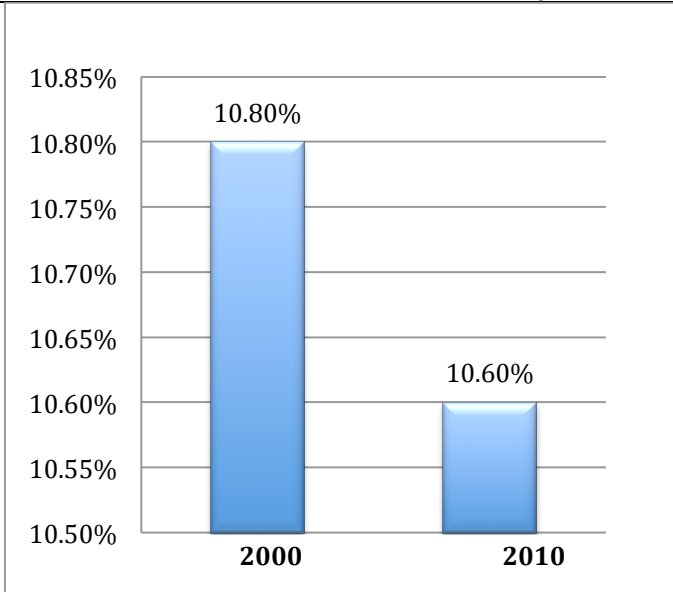


Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2000, 2010.

“Education is lacking which is causing Denver to produce more people with lower incomes. Most people decide to live in rural areas or smaller cities and just travel to Denver once in a while (Interviewee two).” In the Denver Public School system many schools are not offered the resources needed to accommodate the students living in poverty. It is hard for children of single-parents to continue an education when their families are in need of financial help. Many students reaching the age of sixteen, who can work, usually drop-out. There is nothing pushing them to finish high school- teachers do not feel like they are paid enough or have the resources to keep students interested in their education (Torres). In my personal experience, I lived in Denver but decided to move to a different district when I started middle school. The reason was that the teachers were not fully committed to my education, there was a lack of resources and it was difficult to learn certain subjects without the proper equipment. In Graph 4 we see that the percentage of single- mother households has decrease by .2%, although this is not a huge

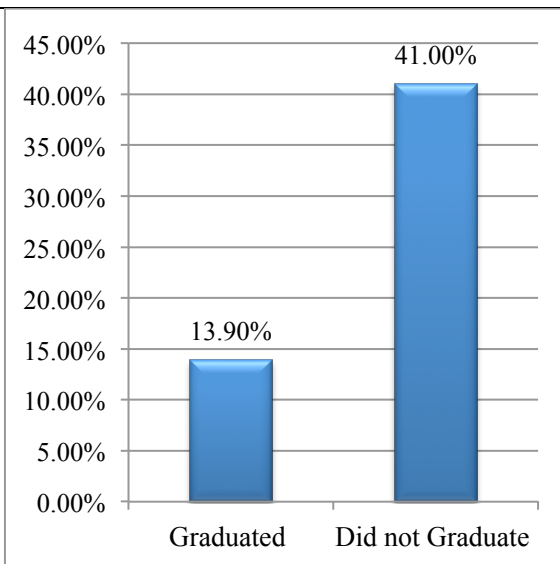
decrease it is a step toward more stable families, therefore more children possibly reaching at least a high school diploma.

Graph 4: Single Mother- Households from 2000 to 2010 (Denver, CO)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2000, 2010.

Graph 5: Percentage of High School Students Living in Poverty (Denver, CO)

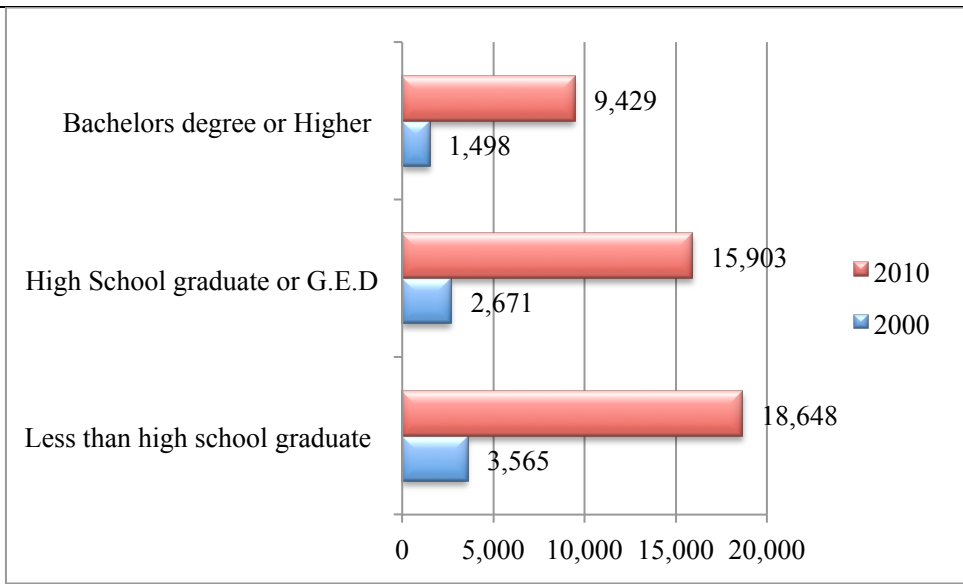


Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2012.

In the graph above 41% of the students living in poverty in Denver in 2012 did not graduate, contributing factors were that they decided to work drop- out and help their families financially or were not interested in staying in school. About 14% of the students living in poverty graduate high school but it is hard to say if they continued to pursue higher education.

Graph 6 shows an increase of students obtaining a high school diploma or higher education that were living in poverty. The numbers have increased drastically from 2000 to 2010 but the number of students that have not received a high school diploma has increased by over 15,000 students. The number of children in the school system that are living in poverty is increasing dramatically in the city of Denver and it affects the future of the city.

Graph 6: Students ages 15-25 Living in Poverty and Education Attainment from 2000 to 2010
(Denver, CO)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2000, 2010.

Based on the Census information I have gathered and further research I have presented in this essay I believe that there are several policies the government can consider to help end the problem of poverty in the city of Denver, therefore increasing the education attainment amongst the youth. The first would be to increase the funding in schools that have the largest percentage in students living in poverty, this will help get better resources and more involved teachers. The second would be to be stricter with welfare, according to Interviewee three; welfare is contributing to the cycle of poverty in urban areas (Interviewee three). This includes unemployment and other government help. For example, there could be a time limit to how long they could have these benefits before they need to start finding a job. Although some people really need it to get back on their feet many continue to be on welfare through generations, only setting the example that the government will give them money to survive and there is no need to seek further education. The last policy that I believe would help is to open more jobs to parents and single parents living in poverty. Recreational marijuana is a booming industry in Colorado and the state could open these dispensaries to provide those in poverty with jobs. This would be more beneficial instead of the dispensaries being privately owned.

Children living in poverty would reach higher education if they first notice the example in their parents working themselves out of poverty and gaining higher education to live a comfortable lifestyle.

Works Cited

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Interviewee 2. Personal interview. 31 January 2014.

Interviewee 3. Personal interview. 31 January 2014.

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