

## QUICK BRIEF:

# Impact of a Growing Minority Workforce in Fort Myers, Florida



## Introduction

The City of Fort Myers has received several media spotlights in recent years for its status as one of the fastest growing cities in America. In 2016, 2017 and 2018, the U.S. Census Bureau featured Fort Myers on its annual lists<sup>1</sup> of the 15 fastest-growing cities in the nation, by growth rate. Scenes of Fort Myers' bustling downtown (like the one above) are often used to herald the trend.

**Yet little is reported on the fast-changing demographics of the city, and how population changes may be impacting employment and economic outcomes for Fort Myers.**

This **QUICK BRIEF** compiles high-level summary research on the city's growing multiculturalism, and related impacts on employment, earnings and income.

Analysis for this brief was done by Urban Market Analytics (UMA) following a December 2018 strategic planning session for the future of the Southwest Florida Enterprise Center in Fort Myers. The session was convened by elected and appointed city leaders. The research herein is designed to contribute to on-going dialogue about uses of the Center to accelerate Fort Myers' progress toward inclusive growth.

# Summary Facts About Race as an Economic Factor in Fort Myers

## Fast-Changing Demographics

Since the year 2000, Fort Myers' population has remained nearly half white (48% in 2017). Yet the city's minority population has changed significantly. African Americans are still the city's largest minority group, but they no longer comprise a lion's share of the minority population. In 2000, black residents were 70% of Fort Myers' minority residents. By 2017, they were 49%.

*The pace of change is so rapid that Hispanics are on track to become the largest minority group in Fort Myers by 2021.*



## Changing Workforce

Fort Myers' demographic shifts are causing dramatic changes in its workforce. In 2000, white residents were a 57% majority of the city's employed workers. But their share fell by 9 points by 2017, when they were 48% of employed workers. Hispanics are now the fastest growing sub-group in the city's employed workforce. From 2000 to 2017, they accounted for close to half (45%) of the 10,349-person growth in Fort Myers' workforce.

## Racial Employment Gaps

Growth in Fort Myers' minority workforce combined with racial disparities in employment have

the effect of heightening the city's overall unemployment rate, which in 2017, was higher than 7 of Florida's 10 largest cities.

Using 2017 Census data for Fort Myers, Hispanics' 8% unemployment rate was 1.6 times higher than whites' at 5%, while blacks' 11% unemployment was 2.2 times higher. Other minorities had even higher unemployment, e.g., Asians 12% and American Indians 20%.

*Non-white workers are 52% of Fort Myers' workforce, but account for 79% of the city's unemployed population.*

In addition to race gaps *within* the city, most of Fort Myers' minority groups have higher rates of unemployment than minorities across Florida. While white workers in Fort Myers had a lower 2017 unemployment rate than whites across Florida, Fort Myers' Hispanic, Asian, & bi/multi-racial worker groups had higher unemployment rates than their peers across Florida.

## Racial Gaps in Income

Apart from racial disparities in employment, Fort Myers residents also suffer racial disparities in earnings and income.



Median earnings for white residents were 1.3 times higher than black residents' and 1.4 times higher than Hispanics' in 2017. Blacks and Hispanics were virtually tied at the bottom of the median earnings spectrum (at c. \$21,000 vs \$29,300 for white workers).

Average income disparities are even larger. Average income per person is 2.5 times higher for whites, compared blacks and Hispanics (both at c. \$15,000 vs \$37,300 for whites).

## Some of Florida's Highest Income Inequality Levels

Compared to Florida's 10 most populous cities, Fort Myers had some of the state's highest levels of racial income inequality in 2017.

Fort Myers' white residents' average income was 2.81 times higher than black residents' (which is a larger disparity than 7 of Florida's 10 largest cities), and 2.48 times higher than Hispanic residents' (which is a bigger gap than 9 of the top 10 cities).

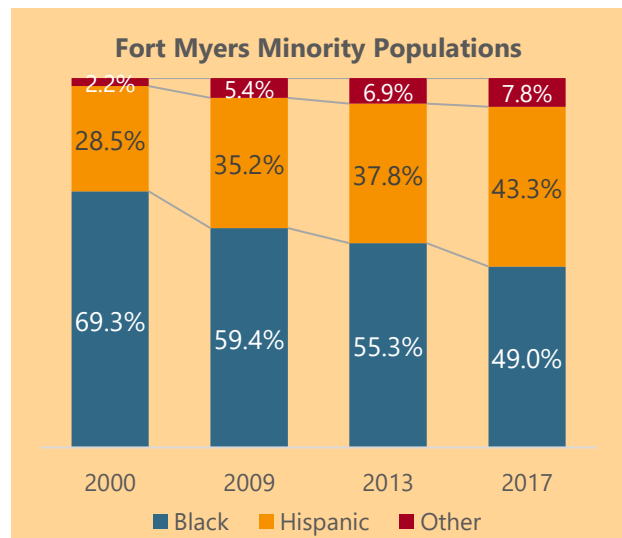
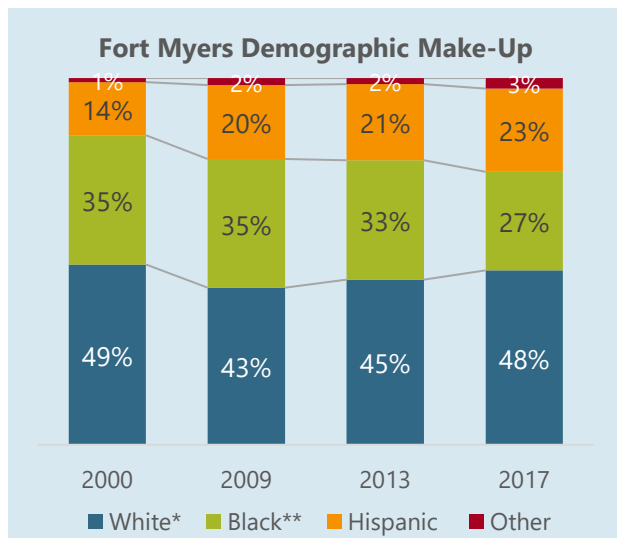
White residents' average income in Fort Myers (\$34,743) is higher than white residents' income in 5 of Florida's top 10 largest cities. Meanwhile, Fort Myers' Hispanic and black residents rank last and second-to-last (respectively) among the 10 cities. In 2017, Hispanics' average incomes was \$14,024 and blacks' average was \$12,372.

# Fast-Changing Demographics<sup>2</sup>

Fort Myers' population has remained roughly half white\* since the turn of the century (it was 49% white in 2000 and 48% white in 2017). Yet the city's minority population has changed significantly. From 2000 to 2017, Latinos gained 9 points in population share (they were 23% of Fort Myers' population in 2017, vs 14% in 2000), while black residents lost 8 points of their population share (they were 35% of Fort Myers' population in 2000, vs 27% in 2017).

Though African Americans are still Fort Myers' largest minority group, they no longer comprise a lion's share of Fort Myers' minority population. In 2000, black residents were 70% of Fort Myers' minority residents. By 2017, they were 49%.

**■ The pace of change is so rapid, Hispanics are on track to become the largest ethnic or racial minority group in Fort Myers by 2021.**



\*White = "White Alone, Not Hispanic or Latino" \*\*Black = "Black Alone, Not Hispanic or Latino"

## Population Growth by Race & Ethnicity

**Measuring by growth rates**, Fort Myers' Asian and Hispanic populations have seen the biggest gains. From 2000 to 2017, the city's Asian population grew 168% while its Hispanic population grew 139%.

**Measuring by number**, whites and Hispanics had the biggest gains. From 2000 to 2017, the city added

nearly 11,400 white residents and over 9,700 Hispanics. For the most recent five years reported (2012 to 2017), the African American population lost 5% of its number, while the white population expanded 23%, the Hispanic population grew 28%, and the Asian population expanded by 41%.

Groups	Number of People		Change 2000 to 2017		Share of Growth	Change 2000 to 2012		Share of Growth
	2000	2017	#	%	%	#	%	%
White	23,700	35,068	11,368	48%	45%	6,646	23%	65%
Black	16,095	18,929	2,834	18%	11%	-969	-5%	-9%
Hispanic	6,984	16,720	9,736	139%	38%	3,808	28%	37%
Asian	623	1,671	1,048	168%	4%	527	41%	5%
Other Minorities	806	1,324	518	64%	2%	273	24%	3%
City Total	48,208	73,712	25,504	53%	100%	10,285	16%	100%
All Minorities	24,508	38,644	14,136.0	58%	55%	3,639	10%	35%

# A Changing City Workforce<sup>3</sup>



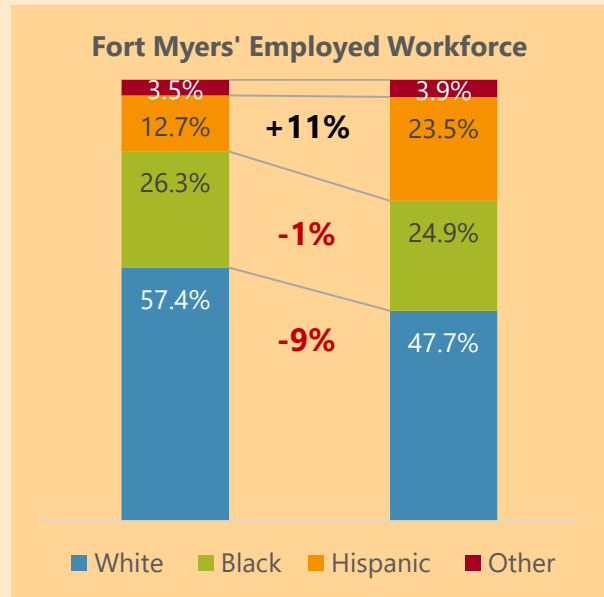
The city's demographic shifts are contributing to dramatic changes in Fort Myers' labor force. In 2000, white residents were a 57% majority of the city's employed workforce. But their share fell by 9 points between 2000 and 2017 when they were 48% of employed workers.

Hispanics are now the fastest growing sub-group in Fort Myers' employed workforce - a fact recently reported by local Latino leaders.

*In the Photo Above:*<sup>4</sup> Antonio Guernica of Media Vista Group (left) presented research about Southwest Florida's growing Hispanic population and its economic impact, at a Bonita Springs Area Chamber event.

From 2000 to 2017, Hispanics' share of Fort Myers' employed workforce climbed nearly 11 points (from 12.7% in 2000 to 23.5% in 2017).

African Americans' share of the workforce shrank slightly over the same timeframe. They were 26.3% of employed workers in the city in 2000 and 24.9% of employed workers in 2017.



## Employment Growth by Race & Ethnicity

**Measured by growth rates,** from 2000 to 2017, the Hispanic workforce had the biggest gains. Fort Myers' Hispanic workforce grew 179%, compared to 43% for black workers and 25% for white workers.

**Measuring by number,** Hispanics had the biggest gain, followed by white workers. From 2000 to 2017, the city added nearly 4,700 Hispanic workers and just

over 2,900 white workers, along with close to 2,300 additional black workers.

**Hispanics account for a plurality of growth in the workforce since 2000 (45% of the total 10,349 increase in employed workers in Fort Myers, from 2000 to 2017).**

	Number Employed		Change		Share of Growth	Share of City Total		Change
	2000	2017	#	%		2000	2017	%
White Alone*	11,758	14,687	2,929	25%	28%	57.4%	47.7%	-9.8%
Black Alone	5,384	7,679	2,295	43%	22%	26.3%	24.9%	-1.4%
Hispanic	2,603	7,250	4,647	179%	45%	12.7%	23.5%	10.8%
Other	725	1,202	477	66%	5%	3.5%	3.9%	0.4%
Total	20,470	30,819	10,349	51%	100.0%			

\*White Alone, Not Hispanic or Latino

# Racial Differences in Unemployment

Growth in Fort Myers' minority workforce is heightening the city's unemployment rate due to racial disparities in employment.

## Race Gaps in Fort Myers<sup>5</sup> (Graph 1)

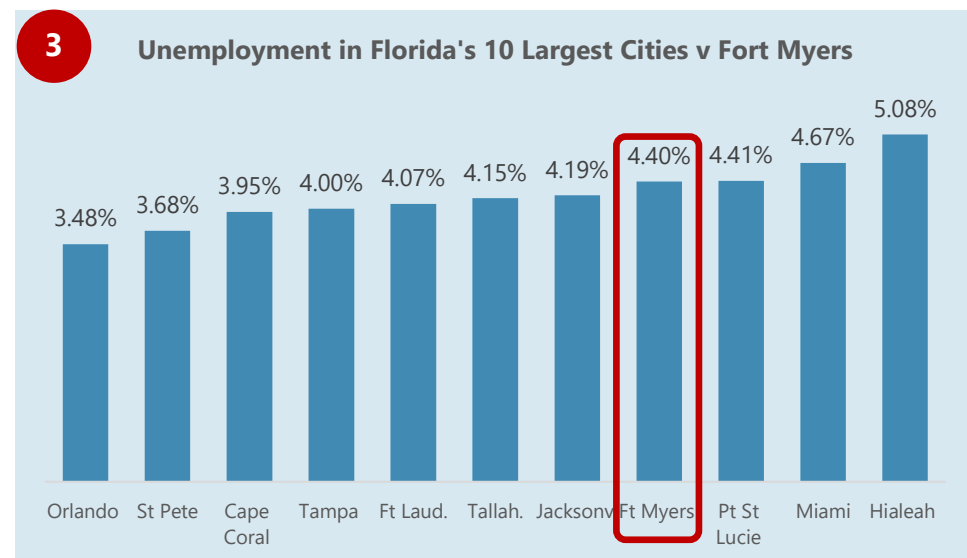
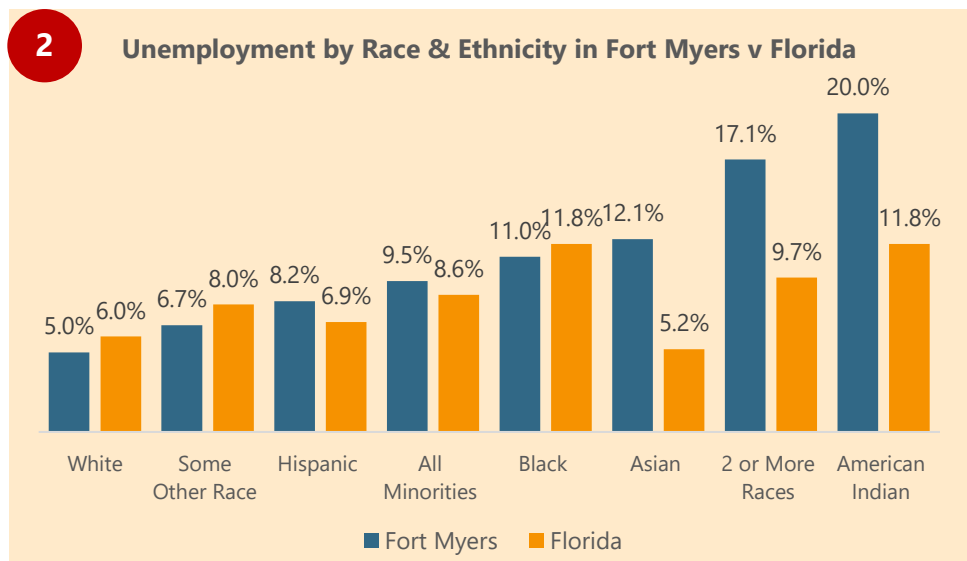
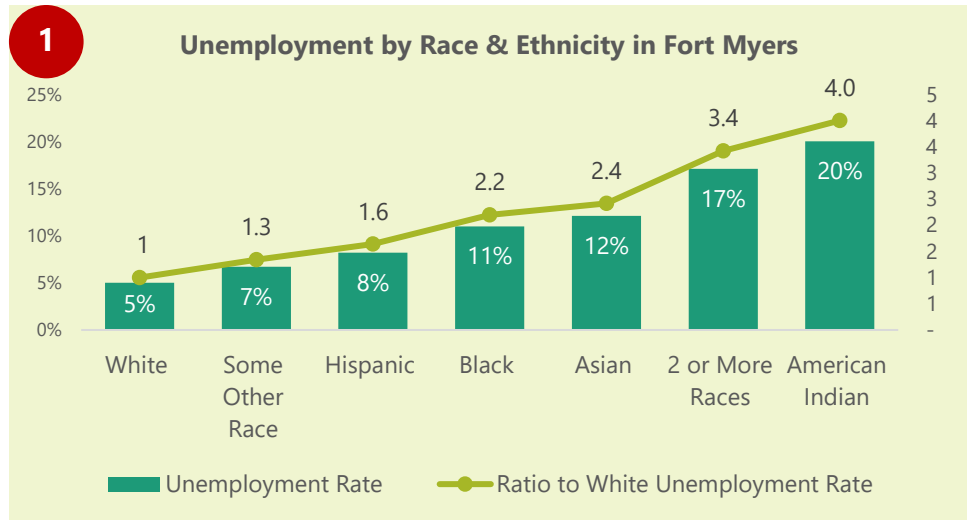
Using 2017 Census data to compare race groups in Fort Myers, Hispanic workers' 8% unemployment rate was 1.6 times higher than white workers', while blacks' 11% unemployment rate was 2.2 times higher than whites'. Other minority groups had even higher unemployment, e.g., 12% for Asians and 20% for American Indians.

## Gaps with Minorities Statewide<sup>6</sup> (Graph 2)

In addition to race gaps within the city, most of Fort Myers' minority groups also have higher unemployment than minorities elsewhere in Florida, including Hispanics, Asians, American Indians & bi/multi-racial workers.

## Higher Unemployment Overall<sup>7</sup> (Graph 3)

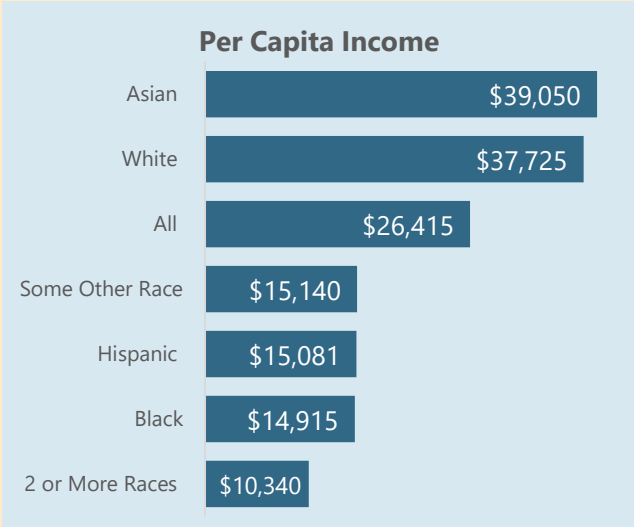
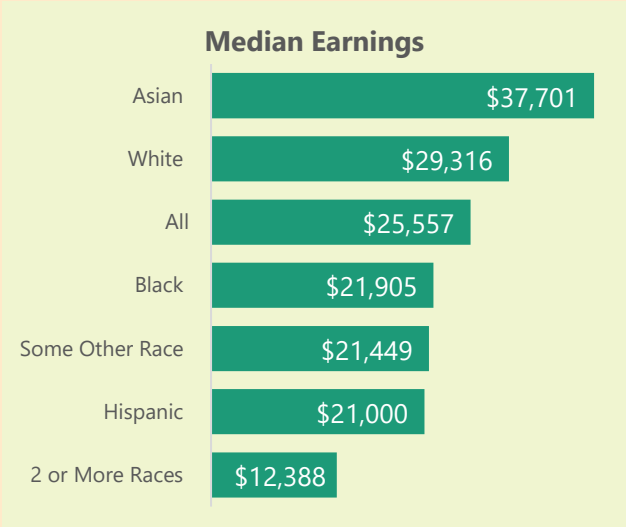
Fort Myers' racial gaps have the effect of raising the citywide unemployment rate. While white workers in Fort Myers have a lower unemployment rate than whites across Florida, the situation among minorities in Fort Myers makes the city's overall unemployment rate higher than most of Florida's 10 largest cities.



# Racial Differences in Earnings & Income

Apart from racial disparities in employment, Fort Myers residents also suffer racial disparities in earnings and income.

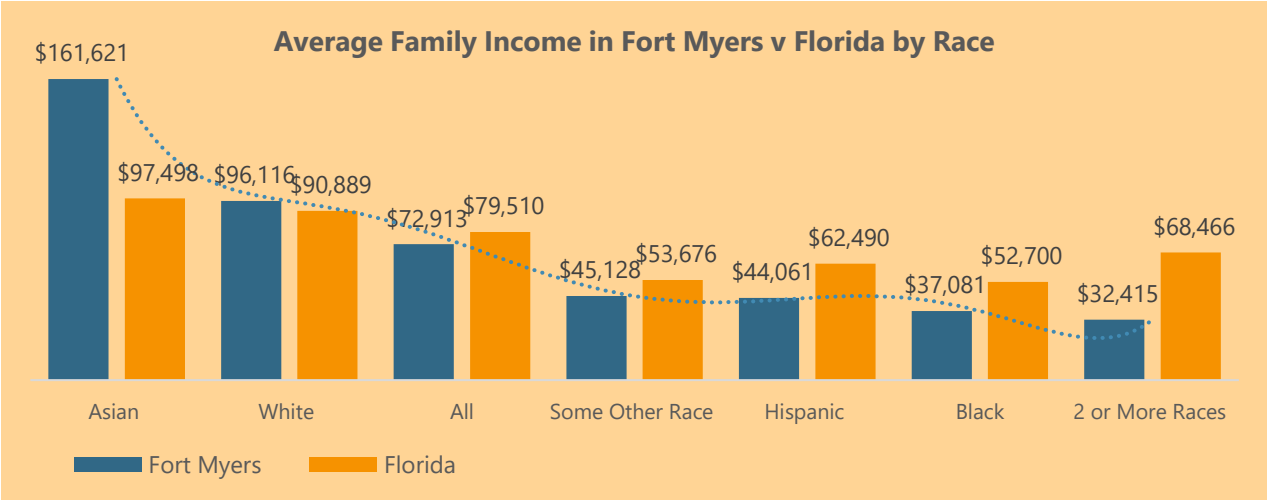
- **Median earnings**<sup>8</sup> for white residents is 1.3 times higher than black residents' and 1.4 times higher than Hispanics' (left graph)
- **Average income**<sup>9</sup> disparities are larger. Per person, average income is 2.5 times higher for whites, compared to blacks and Hispanics (right graph).



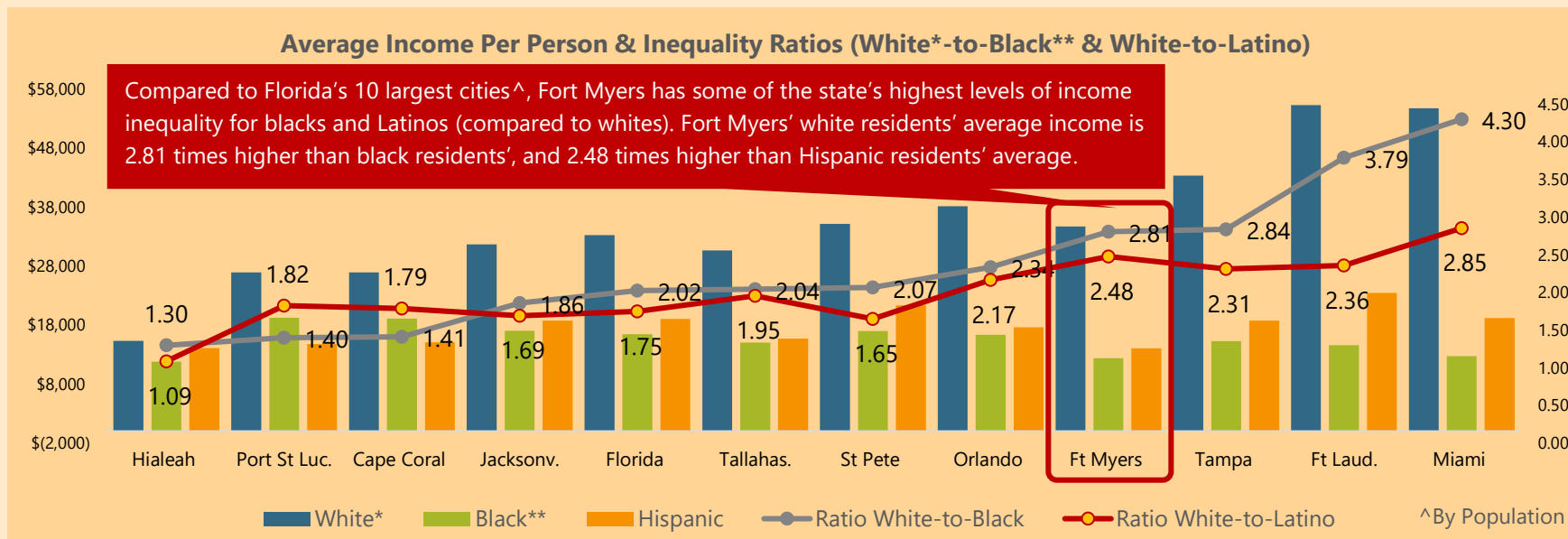
## Average Family Income by Race, Ft Myers v Florida<sup>10</sup>

According to the most recent racial comparison table by the Census (in 2015), Fort Myers' Asian and white families had higher incomes than their race peers across Florida. But most minority groups in Fort Myers

lagged their peers statewide, which put Fort Myers behind the state average family income overall. The average in 2015 was \$72,913 in Fort Myers versus \$79,510 statewide.



# Fort Myers Has Some of Florida's Highest Inequality Ratios<sup>11</sup>



## Average Income Rank by Race Group in 2015

Fort Myers' white residents' average income is higher than 5 of Florida's top 10 largest cities (column 1), but Hispanics and blacks (columns 2 & 3) rank last and second-to-last (respectively) among the 10 cities. This weighs down Fort Myers' overall income rank, behind 6 of the top 10 cities (col 4).

**Fort Myers has some of the highest income inequality ratios in Florida.** The city's white-to-black ratio is higher than 7 of Florida's 10 largest cities. Its white-to-Latino ratio is higher than 9 of the top 10 cities.

	White	Black	Latino	All	White-to-Black	White-to-Latino
Ft Laud.	\$ 55,295	Port St Luc. \$19,248	Ft Laud. \$23,466	Ft Laud. \$36,777	Miami 4.30	Miami 2.85
Miami	\$ 54,779	Cape Coral \$19,086	St Pete \$21,325	Tampa \$30,269	Ft Laud. 3.79	<b>Fort Myers 2.48</b>
Tampa	\$ 43,349	Jacksonville \$17,047	Miami \$19,189	Florida \$29,681	Tampa 2.84	Ft Laud. 2.36
Orlando	\$ 38,156	St Pete \$17,006	Florida \$19,035	St Pete \$28,944	<b>Fort Myers 2.81</b>	Tampa 2.31
St Pete	\$ 35,152	Florida \$16,428	Tampa \$18,762	Orlando \$25,866	Orlando 2.34	Orlando 2.17
<b>Fort Myers</b>	<b>\$ 34,743</b>	Orlando \$16,326	Jacksonville \$18,735	Jacksonville \$25,554	St Pete 2.07	Tallahassee 1.95
Florida	\$ 33,252	Tampa \$15,277	Orlando \$17,608	Cape Coral \$24,056	Tallahassee 2.04	Port St Luc. 1.82
Jacksonville	\$ 31,669	Tallahassee \$15,024	Tallahassee \$15,705	<b>Fort Myers \$23,929</b>	Florida 2.02	Cape Coral 1.79
Tallahassee	\$ 30,678	Ft Laud. \$14,593	Cape Coral \$15,069	Tallahassee \$23,808	Jacksonville 1.86	Florida 1.75
Port St Luc.	\$ 26,939	Miami \$12,733	Port St Luc. \$14,770	Port St Luc. \$22,988	Cape Coral 1.41	Jacksonville 1.69
Cape Coral	\$ 26,918	<b>Fort Myers \$12,372</b>	Hialeah \$14,100	Miami \$22,493	Port St Luc. 1.40	St Pete 1.65
Hialeah	\$ 15,306	Hialeah \$11,800	<b>Fort Myers \$14,024</b>	Hialeah \$14,128	Hialeah 1.30	Hialeah 1.09

# About Race & Ethnicity in this Brief

This **QUICK BRIEF** uses a different approach to reporting on race and ethnicity than the approach often used by analysts. The major difference in this report is in its method of reporting on “white” and “Hispanic” populations in Fort Myers.

This brief effectively separates Hispanic whites out of the white population, reporting on the groups known (in Census terms) as “Hispanic or Latino of any race,” **separate from** “White Alone, Not Hispanic or Latino.”

## Approach Often Used

Below is a snapshot of Lee County’s demographic profile for Fort Myers, which uses a common approach to reporting on population demographics.<sup>12</sup> It reports on the “Population Reporting One Race” with 34,309 white residents in 2010.

That figure includes people who self-identify as being white as their sole race group, but who are also Hispanic, (i.e., “white Hispanics”). This is because the Census views “Hispanics” as an ethnic group, not as a race group. Hispanics may choose to identify as being “white,” “black,” “Asian,” or another race.

2010 Census Profile	
CITY: Fort Myers compared by Esri Area: 48.9 square miles 26.61953989 -81.8301104	
	<b>2000-2010 Annual Rate</b>
Population	1.49%
Households	1.79%
Housing Units	3.87%
<b>Population by Race</b>	
Total	100.0%
Population Reporting One Race	97.2%
White	55.1%
Black	31.8%
American Indian	0.6%
Asian	1.6%
Pacific Islander	0.1%
Some Other Race	8.0%
Population Reporting Two or More Races	2.8%
Total Hispanic Population	20.2%

According to the Census, the white race includes people “having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa. It includes people who indicate their race as “White” or report entries such as Irish, German, Italian, Lebanese, Arab, Moroccan, or Caucasian.”<sup>13</sup>

## Approach with More Detailed Race & Ethnic Group Breakdown

This **QUICK BRIEF** reports on the “White Alone, Not Hispanic or Latino” group as Fort Myers’ “white population” (circled in red below) and separately reports on the “Hispanic or Latino” population as a stand-alone group (circled in orange below). The difference is large: in 2017, there were 47,100 white residents in Fort Myers (64% of the population) but only 35,100 of them were white non-Hispanic residents (48% of the population, red circle below). Other groups reported on include the following:

- Black Alone
- Asian Alone
- Some Other Race Alone
- Two or More Races Alone

Subject	Estimate	Percent
<b>RACE</b>		
Total population	73,712	73.712
One race	72,408	98.2%
Two or more races	1,304	1.8%
<b>One race</b>		
White	47,084	63.9%
Black or African American	19,291	26.2%
American Indian and Alaska Native	77	0.1%
Cherokee tribal grouping	26	0.0%
Chippewa tribal grouping	24	0.0%
Navajo tribal grouping	0	0.0%
Sioux tribal grouping	0	0.0%
Asian	1,738	2.4%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	64	0.1%
Some other race	4,154	5.6%
<b>Two or more races</b>		
White and Black or African American	461	0.6%
White and American Indian and Alaska Native	298	0.4%
White and Asian	202	0.3%
Black or African American and American Indian and Alaska Native	7	0.0%
<b>Race alone or in combination with one or more other races</b>		
Total population	73,712	73.712
White	48,281	65.5%
Black or African American	19,801	26.9%
American Indian and Alaska Native	425	0.6%
Asian	1,973	2.7%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	119	0.2%
Some other race	4,420	6.0%
<b>HISPANIC OR LATINO AND RACE</b>		
Total population	73,712	73.712
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	16,720	22.7%
Mexican	3,980	5.4%
Puerto Rican	4,391	6.0%
Cuban	1,754	2.4%
Other Hispanic or Latino	6,595	8.9%
Not Hispanic or Latino	56,992	77.3%
White alone	35,068	47.6%



# For More Detail

## About Urban Market Analytics (UMA)

UMA works with visionary people and organizations to help design, fund and evaluate place-based solutions to accelerating inclusive growth for majority-minority cities and communities. UMA has consulted with 40+ development organizations, in the U.S., Caribbean and Africa, to create and evaluate regional, city-level and communitywide solutions to:



- Strengthen the talent supply chain and bridge more people into the workforce and up the career ladder [**WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**]
- Grow jobs & income in the micro & small business sectors [**BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT**]
- Accelerate poverty reduction for high-poverty communities [**POVERTY REDUCTION**]
- Speed commercial revitalization and redevelopment in blighted and low-income areas [**ECONOMIC RE/DEVELOPMENT**]
- Grow and strengthen low-performing community economies [**ECONOMIC GROWTH**]

## UMA's Equity & Impact Analysis

UMA's analysis work includes innovative approaches to identifying the richest opportunities to accelerate economic gains for lower-income people and communities. Through drill-down analyses, UMA helps local governments, foundations, funders and economic leaders to create a more comprehensive understanding of employment, earnings, income, and education levels for people and communities that lag the American dream.

UMA's specialty is elevating little-known but crucial facts that can speed economic growth for targeted communities. To this end, UMA has pioneered new metrics and methods such as the *Racial Income Inequality Index*, and measuring the pace of progress in closing educational & economic gaps for people of color.

UMA has conducted impact, market and gap analyses, along with labor market and community economy studies for corporate, government, philanthropic and community-based organizations.

## Sources Cited [ACS = American Community Survey]

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census, "Census Bureau Reveals Fastest-Growing Large Cities," Table 2, May 24, 2018 ([available here](#))

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census ACS, ACS Demographic & Housing Estimates, 5-Year Estimates for Multiple Years

<sup>3</sup> (2017) U.S. Census ACS Employment Status 2017 5-Year Estimates for Multiple Race Groups; and (2000) Census 2000 Summary File 3 Sex by Employment Status (Black, Hispanic & White Alone, Not Hispanic) and Census 2000 Summary File 4 QT-P24-Population Group-Total population: Employment Status by Sex

<sup>4</sup> Southwest Florida Business Today, "Research about SWFL's growing Hispanic population presented at luncheon," Undated ([available here](#))

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Census ACS, Employment Status, 2017 5-Year Estimates

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Census ACS, Employment Status, 2017 5-Year Estimates (Florida & Fort Myers)

<sup>7</sup> Florida Department of Economic Opportunity Data Center, Local Area Unemployment Statistics, Year Average 2017, Released March 23, 2018 ([available here](#))

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Census ACS, Median Earnings in the Past 12 Months by Sex by Work Experience, 2017 5-Year Estimates for Multiple Race Groups

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Census ACS, Per Capita Income in the Past 12 Months, 2017 5-Year Estimates for Multiple Race Groups

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Census ACS, Selected Economic Characteristics, 2015 5-Year Estimates for All Available Races

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Lee County, Demographic & Income Profile, Viewed January 30, 2019 ([available here](#))

<sup>13</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Census Glossary, Term "White" ([available here](#))