

Black Americans: A Profile

The Black population in the United States was 31 million in March 1991, 12 percent of America's total. This Brief uses data collected by the Current Population Survey (CPS) to provide a demographic and economic portrait of the Black population in March 1991.

It also explores changes over the past several decades. Data for years prior to 1991 were collected in both the CPS and the census.

Age Structure

In 1991, the Black population's median age was 28 years, 6 years younger than that of the White population. Each group's age structure reflects this: 33 percent of Blacks were under 18; 8 percent were age 65 or over. For Whites, the comparable figures were 25 and 13 percent, respectively.

Education

Young Black adults made notable gains during the 1980's in their high school completion rates. In 1991, 82 percent of Blacks 25 to 34 years old had completed at least 4 years of

high school, up from 75 percent in 1980. For Whites, the corresponding percentage held steady over the period (87 percent). The proportion aged 25 to 34 who were college graduates remained unchanged for both Blacks and Whites, at 12 and 25 percent, respectively.

Families

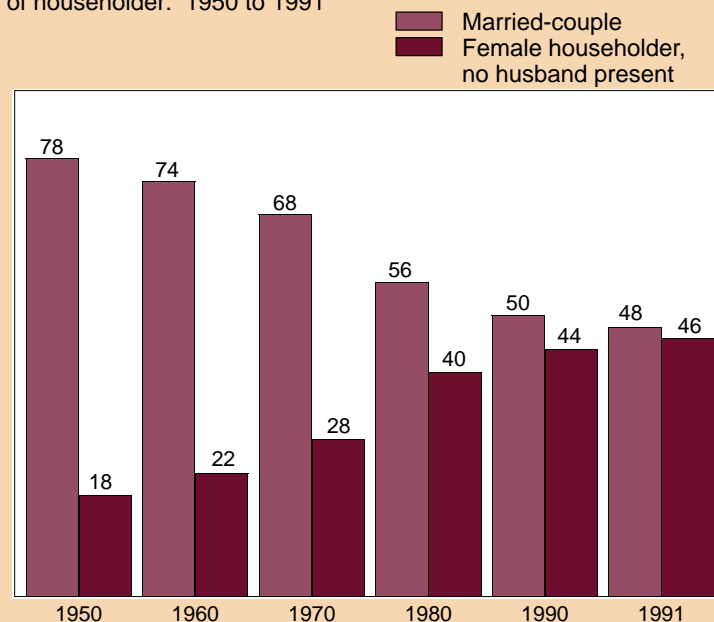
The graph below shows the changes in the composition of Black families that have taken place over the last several decades. Married-couple families have declined from 78 percent of all Black families in 1950 to 48 percent in 1991; comparable figures for Whites are 88 and 83 percent, respectively.

At the same time, the percentage of Black families maintained by women with no husband present more than doubled. Much of this growth occurred between 1970 and 1980, when the proportion of such families climbed from 28 to 40 percent. High rates of marital separation and divorce, as well as a larger proportion of never-married women with children maintaining families are factors.

As a consequence, fewer Black children under 18 years old live with two parents. In 1960, about 2 in 3 (67 percent) lived with two parents; a little over 1 in 3 (36 percent) did in 1991. The respective figures for White children are 91 and 79 percent.

Changes in Family Composition

Percent of Black families, by type of householder: 1950 to 1991



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Income

Between 1967 and 1990, Black families saw their median income rise 12 percent in real terms (constant 1990 dollars), from \$19,080 to \$21,420.

White families experienced a similar real increase — \$32,220 to \$36,920, a 15-percent rise. In 1990, Black median family income was 58 percent of White median family income, a gap statistically unchanged from 1967. Income gains, differed considerably by family type:

- Black *married-couple families* saw their real median income rise 47 percent over the period, from \$22,910 to \$33,780; in 1990, their income stood at 84 percent of comparable White families, up from 68 percent in 1967. This reflects gains made by Black families with working wives (see graph below) and also the fact that those families comprise an increasing share of all Black married-couple families: 66 percent in 1990, up from 50 percent 23 years earlier.

- Real median income of Black families maintained by *women with no husband present* remained (in 1990 dollars) virtually unchanged over the period: \$11,800 in 1967, \$12,130 in 1990. They earned 62 percent of comparable White families in 1990, no change from 1967.

Changes between 1967 and 1990 differed by region:

- Black families in the South saw their real median income rise 33 percent, to \$20,610.
- However, for Black families in the rest of the Nation, real income remained statistically unchanged, at \$23,070.

Poverty

Twenty-nine percent of Black families were poor in 1990, down from 34 percent in 1967. For White families, the rate dropped from 9 percent to 8 percent over the period. Among Black families maintained by a woman with no husband present, 48 percent were poor in 1990, compared with 27 percent of comparable White families. Black related children under 18 in families had a poverty rate of 44 percent; Blacks 65 and over had a rate of 34 percent.

More information:

The Black Population in the United States: March 1991, Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 464. For sale by the U.S. Government Printing Office. Stock No. 803-005-00065-6. \$7.

Extensive demographic and economic information on the Black population for small geo-

graphic entities is available from the 1990 Census in *Summary Tape File 3*; data are contained on computer tape, CD-ROM, and in printed reports. For more information on 1990 Census products, contact Customer Services (301-763-4100).

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This Brief is one of a series that presents information of current policy interest. It may include data from businesses, households, or other sources. All statistics are subject to sampling variability, as well as survey design flaws, respondent classification errors, and data processing mistakes. The Census Bureau has taken steps to minimize errors, and analytical statements have been tested and meet statistical standards. However, because of methodological differences, use caution when comparing these data with data from other sources.

