



# THE POVERTY REPORT: MEMPHIS SINCE MLK

HOW AFRICAN AMERICANS AND THE POOR HAVE  
FARED IN MEMPHIS AND SHELBY COUNTY OVER THE  
PAST 50 YEARS



On August 16, 1967, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered a speech at the 11<sup>th</sup> annual Southern Christian Leadership Conference Convention titled *“Where Do We go from Here?”* In that speech, he stated that *“...in spite of a decade of significant progress, the problem is far from solved. The deep rumbling of discontent in our cities is indicative of the fact that the plant of freedom has grown only a bud and not yet a flower.”* The needs of the African- American community outlined, both in that speech and the book of the same name, emphasized the importance of economic equity, access to quality education, and a shift in public funding from a defense-centric federal budget to one that focused on the needs of its citizens.

In March of 1968, King traveled to Memphis, Tennessee to stand in solidarity with the striking sanitation workers to stress the importance of the next episode of the civil rights movement – the Poor People’s Campaign. The unequal treatment of African-American workers to their white counterparts, the low wages and lack of benefits was emblematic of the economic justice issues that were plaguing the nation. And although King would not have the opportunity to complete that next episode, he left us with several messages outlining areas of focus.

Fifty years later, the National Civil Rights Museum, in partnership with the University of Memphis Benjamin L. Hooks Institute for Social Change, presents the enclosed data to illuminate any progress achieved in Shelby County, Tennessee (Memphis) over the past 50 years. While this study is not exhaustive, and focuses solely on Shelby County, Tennessee, it does provide all those who review it with a clear direction for action to carry out the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Yours in Service,

Terri Lee Freeman  
President, National Civil Rights Museum

## **The National Civil Rights Museum**

The **National Civil Rights Museum**, located at the historic Lorraine Motel where civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated, gives a comprehensive overview of the American Civil Rights Movement from 1619 to the present. Since the Museum opened in 1991, millions of guests from around the world have visited, including more than 80,000 students annually. Serving as the new public square, the Museum is steadfast in its mission to chronicle the American civil rights movement, examine today's global civil and human rights issues, provoke thoughtful debate and serve as a catalyst for positive social change.

A Smithsonian Affiliate and an internationally acclaimed cultural institution, the Museum was recognized as TripAdvisor Travelers' Choice Top 5% U.S. Museum, *USA Today's* Top 10 Best American Iconic Attractions; Top 10 Best Historical Spots in the U.S. by TLC's *Family Travel*; Must See by the Age of 15 by *Budget Travel and Kids*; Top 10, American Treasures by *USA Today*; and Best Memphis Attraction by *The Commercial Appeal* and the *Memphis Business Journal*.

## **Elena Delavega**

**Elena Delavega**, PhD, MSW is Assistant Professor of Social Work at the University of Memphis, where she teaches Social Welfare Policy, Evaluative Research, and Poverty. Consistent with the values and goals of the profession of social work, her research aims to enhance human well-being, opportunity, and capacity, and to foster civil and human rights for all people. Her research is complex and multifaceted and consists of three broad areas, grounded in the promotion of social justice: 1) Understanding Poverty; 2) Social and Economic Exclusion; and 3) Promoting Social and Economic Development. Dr. Delavega was a policy Fellow of the Hooks Institute for Social Change in 2014, serves on the board of JustCity, Inc., an organization dedicated to bringing justice to those accused of crimes in Shelby County, and was appointed Associate Director of the Benjamin L. Hooks Institute for Social Change at the University of Memphis in 2015. She is dedicated to researching, teaching, and promoting civil rights and social justice.

## **Acknowledgements**

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## **POVERTY REPORT KEY FINDINGS**

- 1) The incidence of childhood poverty for all Shelby County children has risen in the new millennium. Childhood poverty rates for both African Americans and whites are higher than in 1980.
- 2) The childhood poverty rate for African American children is more than four times greater than that for whites.
- 3) The rate of poverty for African Americans in 2016 has fallen from its peak in 1960. However, African American poverty rates are two and a half times higher than that of whites.
- 4) Post Brown vs. Board of Education the rate of African Americans completing high school increased by 76%.
- 5) Bachelor's degree achievement for African Americans has also increased from 1.2% in 1950 to nearly 20% in 2016.
- 6) Median income for African Americans has stubbornly remained at approximately 50% of income for whites for the past half century.
- 7) Despite the increase in white-collar employment among African Americans, income for this group remains at about 50% of that of whites in Shelby County.
- 8) Whites in Shelby County enjoy a higher median income than that for African Americans and that of the general population in Shelby County.
- 9) The incarceration rate for African Americans has increased 50% since 1980, while the incarceration rate for whites has fallen slightly.
- 10) There is no doubt that the rate of incarceration of African American males since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century has had a dramatic impact on the unemployment rate for African American males.

We can thus hypothesize that the removal of African American men from the community has had a positive correlation to the increase in childhood poverty rates.

## **INTRODUCTION**

In the 50 years since Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination on April 4, 1968 on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee, this country has been convulsed by momentous events and social change in many diverse spheres. We celebrate the progress wrought by the Civil Rights Movement, and by those like Dr. King who gave their lives to improve the lives of everyone in their communities.

Many people are not aware that for Dr. King, the next step in the battle for social justice and civil rights was economic inclusion: the Poor People's Campaign. When Dr. King came to Memphis in 1968, he came to support sanitation workers who were on strike; it was the extension of the fight for civil rights into economic rights. For Dr. King, economic rights were both human rights and civil rights.

On this 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Dr. King's cruel assassination, and more than fifty years after the passage of the Civil Rights Act (1964) and the Voting Rights Act (1965) African Americans still lag far behind whites in Shelby County. Despite gains in education and increased participation in the white-collar labor market (a 650% increase), African Americans still lag behind whites in income and are overrepresented in poverty. Poverty for African Americans in Shelby County is three times that of whites, and median income for African Americans has remained at about half that of whites through the decades. More troubling, the percent of African Americans who are institutionalized (criminal and otherwise) is now double that of institutionalized whites.

In the 50 years since Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination many things have changed for minorities in America; some for the better, and some for the worse.

## Shelby County

Shelby County, Tennessee, where the city of Memphis is located, was chosen for this project because of regional stability. Boundary changes would make statistical inferences impossible or meaningless, and the boundaries of the city of Memphis and the definition of the Metropolitan Statistical Area have changed over time while the boundaries of Shelby County have remained constant.

2016	United States		Shelby County	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total Population	308,758,105	100.0%	934,603	100.0%
White Population		76.9%		41.4%
African American Population		13.3%		54.1%
Hispanic Population		17.8%		6.1%
Asian Population		5.7%		2.6%
Population 25+ with High School Diploma or More		87.0%		87.1%
Population 25+ with Bachelor Degree or More		30.3%		30.2%
Population in the Labor Force		63.1%		65.0%
Median Household Income	\$55,322		\$46,854	
Median Household Income for Non-Hispanic Whites	\$63,155		\$71,158	
Median Household Income for African Americans	\$38,506		\$35,632	
Per Capita Income	\$29,829		\$26,963	
Population Under Poverty		14.0%		20.8%
Non-Hispanic White Population Under Poverty		10.0%		8.3%
African American Population Under Poverty		23.8%		29.2%
Total Number of Firms 2012	27,626,360	100.0%	95,433	100.0%
Minority Owned Firms 2012	7,952,386	28.8%	52,295	54.8%

Table 1: Demographic comparisons between the United States and Shelby County. U.S. Census Bureau Quick Facts, July 2016 and U.S. Census American Community Survey 2016 Data.



Shelby County in the 1980 Census. Photo from the author from the U.S. Census.



## **POVERTY**

What is poverty? There are many ways to define poverty, usually done by calculating an income threshold. However, in terms of social justice, poverty is defined as lacking some or all of the necessary goods for full participation in the society in which one lives.

Exclusion and lack of access trap people as surely as metal chains. There is no freedom with exclusion. There is no freedom when people are prevented from participating with health and wellbeing in the fullness of social, political, and economic life. Amartya Sen famously said that freedom was not possible without development, and that includes full access for all people. Freedom is freedom to act, to think, to move, and to choose. Clearly, poverty and lack of access prevent freedom by removing choice and the ability to decide to do something, to move, to accept, to be. Freedom also involves the ability to say no. Poverty prevents freedom precisely because it removes the ability to say no from people.

# Exclusion and lack of access trap people as surely as metal chains

The poverty that excludes someone from visiting a restaurant or traveling by plane is as restrictive as the overt discrimination of 50 years ago. Poverty and exclusion are more insidious. Lives lived in poverty are often plagued by disease and lack of access to the things that promote healthy lives. People living under the weight of poverty cannot reach their full potential. In some ways, perhaps in many ways, a life in poverty is often a life denied.



## Measuring Poverty

The U.S. Census Bureau began collecting and reporting poverty information in 1970. Prior to 1963-1964, no method existed to measure poverty objectively, defining poverty was extremely difficult. In 1963, Molly Orshansky developed a method to measure poverty by estimating the cost of the basic diet for a family of four and multiplying this number by three (Hauver, Goodman, & Grainer, 1981). Although poverty can be defined in many other ways, for the purposes of the present report we utilize Orshansky's measures as well as 50% and 65% of the median income for the region under consideration, Shelby County.

## Poverty & Child poverty

	PERCENT PERSONS BELOW POVERTY			PERCENT CHILD POVERTY		
	Overall	White	Black	Overall	White	Black
1950						
1960						
1970	20.6%		42.0%			
1980	19.6%	7.1%	36.5%	27.4%	7.4%	45.2%
1990	18.3%	6.5%	33.6%	26.7%		
2000	16.0%	6.1%	25.6%	22.9%	5.7%	34.5%
2010	20.4%	9.4%	28.8%	29.9%	12.9%	39.9%
2016	20.8%	9.4%	29.2%	34.5%	11.4%	48.3%

**An embarrassing  
number of African  
American children  
continue to live in  
poverty in Shelby  
County**

Table 2 – Poverty and Child Poverty in Shelby County

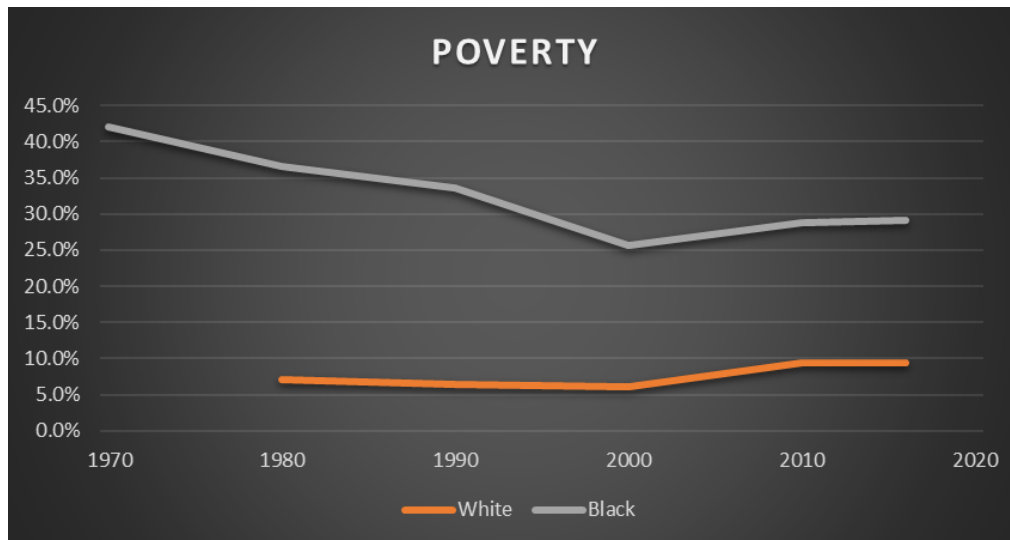


Figure 1 – White and Black Poverty in Shelby County

It is interesting to note that poverty among African Americans declined in the second part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, post the Civil Rights Movement, but has increased in the new millennium. Also of note is the fact that poverty among whites, although much lower than among African Americans, has also seen increases in the first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

	PERCENT FAMILIES BELOW POVERTY			PERCENT FEMALE-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS BELOW POVERTY			PERCENT FEMALE-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS WITH CHILDREN BELOW POVERTY		
	Overall	White	Black	Overall	White	Black	Overall	White	Black
1950									
1960									
1970	15.8%		36.9%	43.8%					
1980	15.3%	4.9%	32.5%	41.2%	15.2%	53.6%	50.0%	22.0%	59.8%
1990	14.7%	5.1%	30.1%	38.3%			48.0%		
2000	12.9%	3.8%	22.7%	31.5%	13.0%	36.1%	37.7%	18.0%	41.9%
2010	16.4%	7.6%	24.2%	34.3%	21.0%	37.6%	42.9%	30.7%	45.4%
2016	16.0%	5.5%	24.3%	33.5%	15.0%	36.6%	44.7%	21.7%	48.1%

Table 3 – Families in Poverty in Shelby County

As always, women and children suffer the worst rates of poverty, and African-American children bear the brunt of poverty. Almost half of African-American children live in poverty in Memphis and Shelby County, and rather than showing improvement over the past 50 years, the situation has gotten worse since the year 2000. Of note is the fact that the poverty differential between African Americans and whites has actually increased since the year 2000.

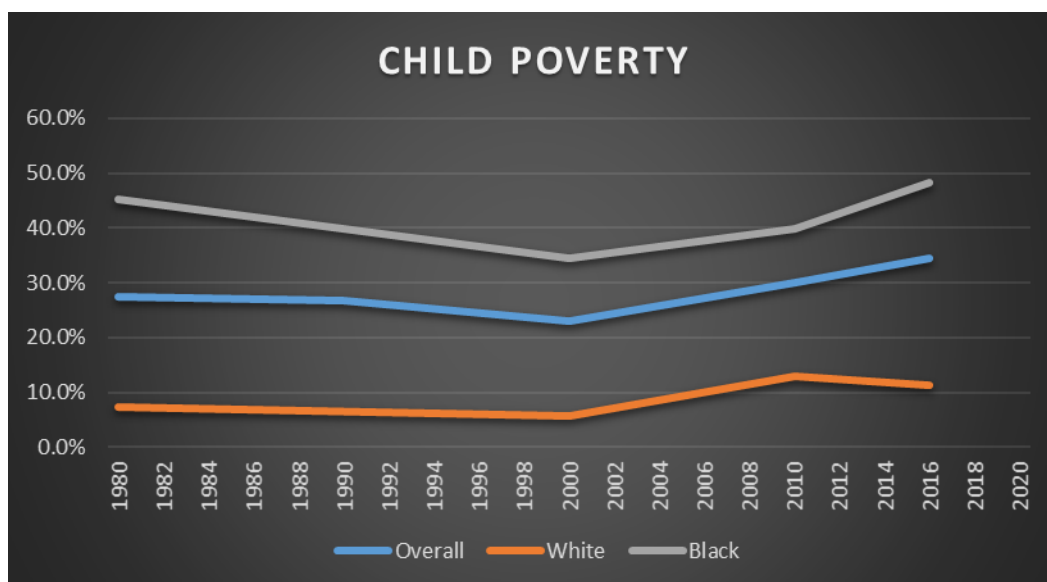


Figure 2 – White and Black Child Poverty in Shelby County

Additionally, it is important to note that poverty reversed the declining trend observed during the last part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century precisely at the turn of the century. Thus, it is possible to consider the policies put in place during the 1960's as effective remedies against poverty, whereas the policies created and legislation of the last years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996, specifically) have had the opposite effect.

## **An Alternative Measure for Poverty**

As proposed by Buhmann, Rainwater, Schmaus, & Smeeding, (1988), and as is currently used in countries such as France, an alternative manner to measure poverty is to estimate the number of households with earnings below a certain percent of the median wage for the region under consideration. This method provided a measure that allows for an estimate of poverty prior to 1970. This report examines poverty at 50% of the median, and at 65% of the median, based on data availability.

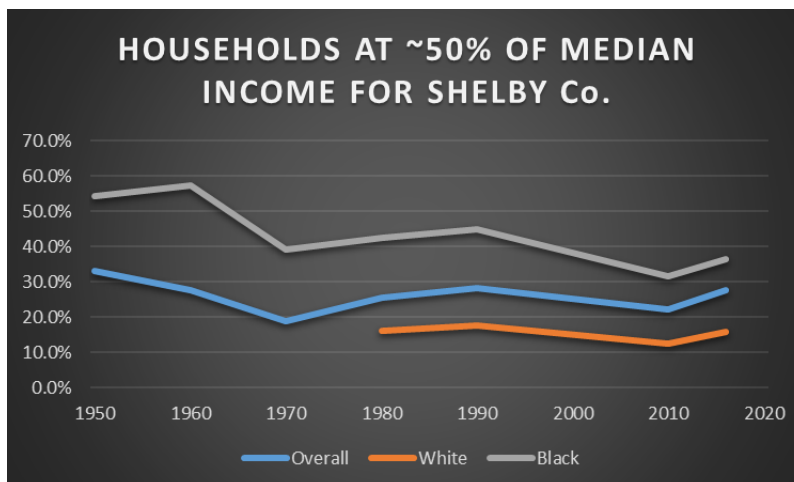
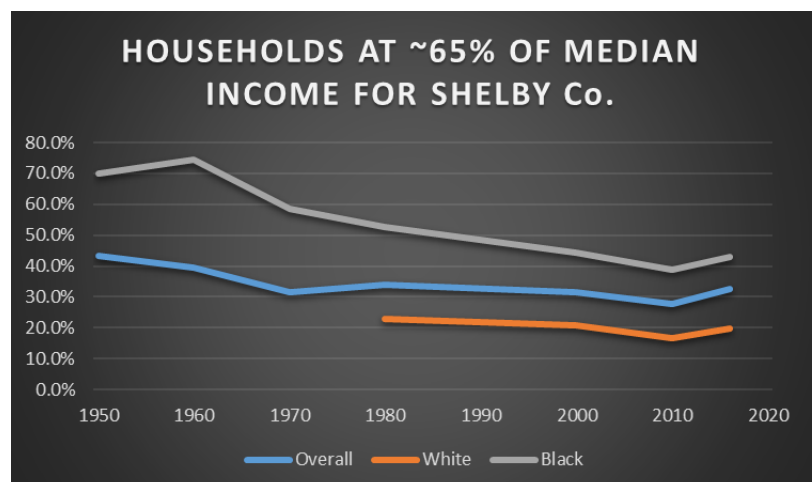


Figure 3 – Percent of Households at 50% of Median in Shelby County

Naturally, establishing poverty as 65% or below of the median household income for the region results in higher poverty rates than estimating it at 50% or below of the median.

Figure 4 – Percent of Households at 65% of Median in Shelby County



It is interesting to note that in 1970 the measure developed by Orshansky was very close to the 50% of median measure. However, the poverty measure currently utilized in the United States is not consistent and is wildly inexact. Some years poverty is underestimated, and others, it is overestimated. Today, it is much more expensive to participate fully in social and economic life of the community, and thus measures of poverty that seemed adequate in the 1960s, such as Orshansky's measure, do not capture the extent of the problem of poverty and exclusion today. As a result, we have an inaccurate picture of poverty.

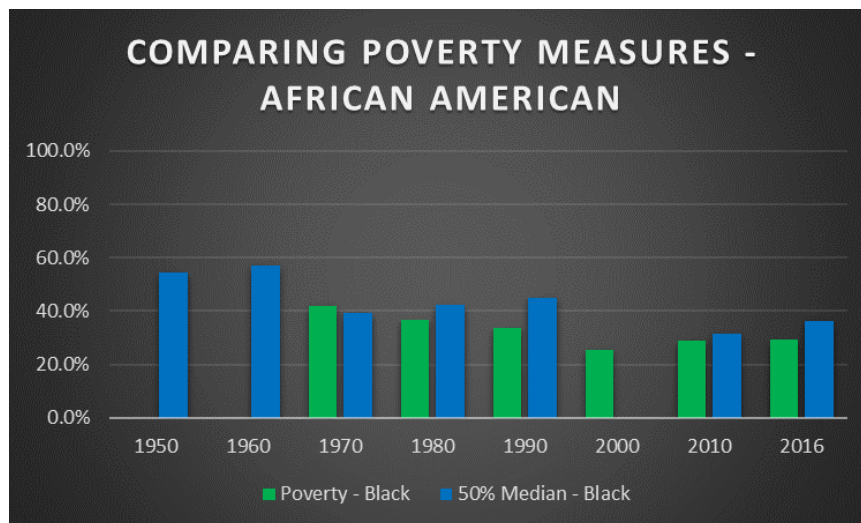


Figure 5 – Poverty for African Americans in Shelby County

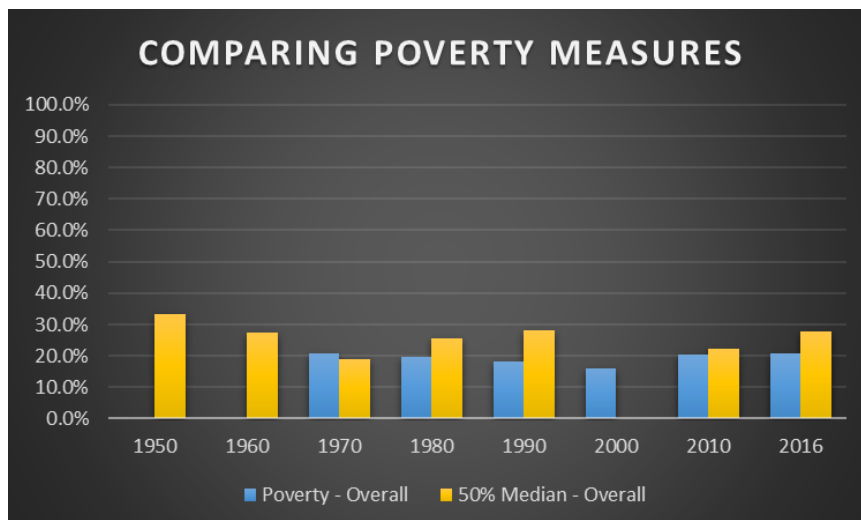


Figure 6 – Overall Poverty in Shelby County

# EDUCATION

## Educational Attainment

Educational attainment is measured in three ways; percent of the population that completed high school, percent of the population that completed four or more years of college, and the mean number of years of education, where 12 is equivalent to high school completion, 13 is the first year of college, and 16 is equivalent to college degree attainment. The Census collected data on mean years of education until 1980, but even then, it is possible to see racial differences and gains by African Americans.

More specifically, while rapid progress has been achieved for both high school completion and post secondary degree attainment by African Americans, they still lag whites in in college degree attainment by nearly 24%. However, it is important to note that post Brown vs. Board of Education there has been a 76% increase in securing a high school diploma by African Americans, lagging whites by 8.5% in 2016 as opposed to the more than 30% difference in 1970.

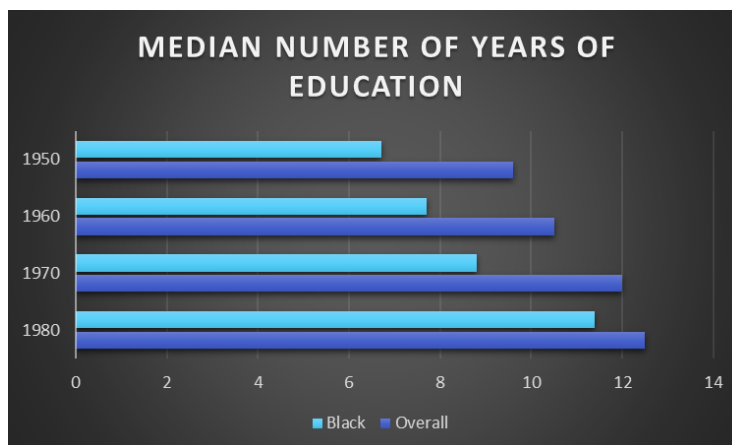


Figure 7 – Median Years of Education in Shelby County

**African Americans have taken advantage of Educational opportunities available to them since 1954 and made impressive gains**

	High School or Higher			Bachelor's Degree or Higher -		
	Overall	White	Black	Overall	White	Black
1950	21.60%		5.90%	5.20%		1.20%
1960	24.70%		9.06%	6.50%		2.04%
1970	50.40%		15.50%			3.90%
1980	65.90%	77.40%	45.30%	15.90%	20.80%	6.90%
1990	75.10%	84.80%	60.00%	20.80%	27.50%	9.80%
2000	80.80%	89.40%	71.10%	25.30%	34.90%	12.80%
2010	86.60%	92.80%	82.20%	28.20%	40.80%	15.50%
2016	88.30%	94.00%	85.50%	30.80%	43.30%	19.60%

Table 4 – Educational Attainment by Race in Shelby County

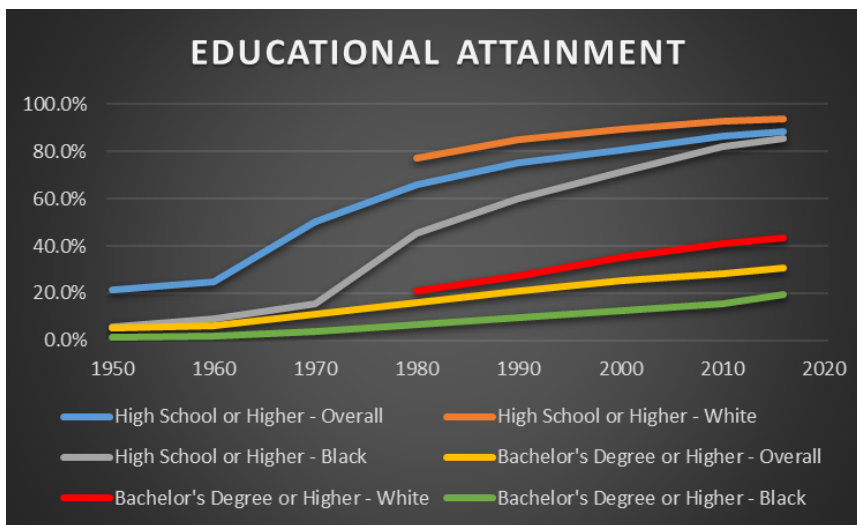


Figure 8 – Educational Attainment in Shelby County

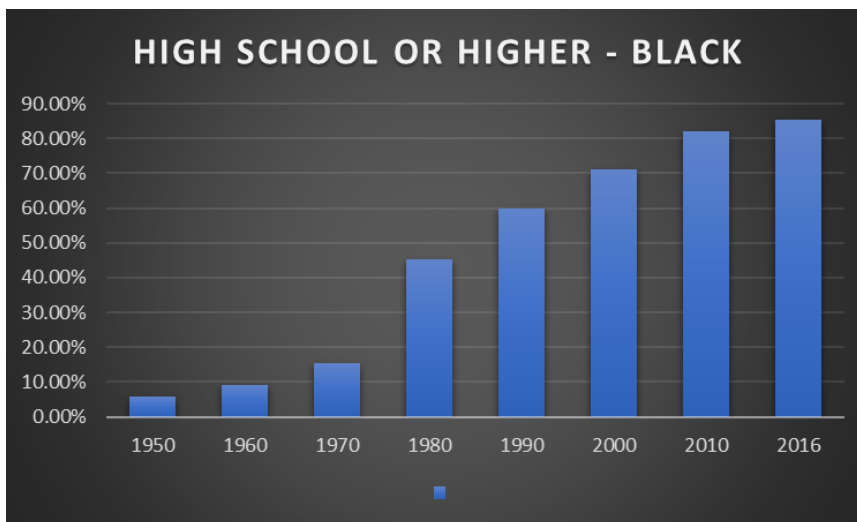


Figure 9 – High School Completion among African Americans in Shelby County

## Educational attainment and Poverty

As can be seen from the data, greater levels of educational attainment are associated in all cases with reduced poverty rates. It is important to note that greater levels of education appear to be associated with lower poverty rates particularly among the overall population. It is interesting to note that greater high school completion seems to have a dramatic impact on African American poverty rates.

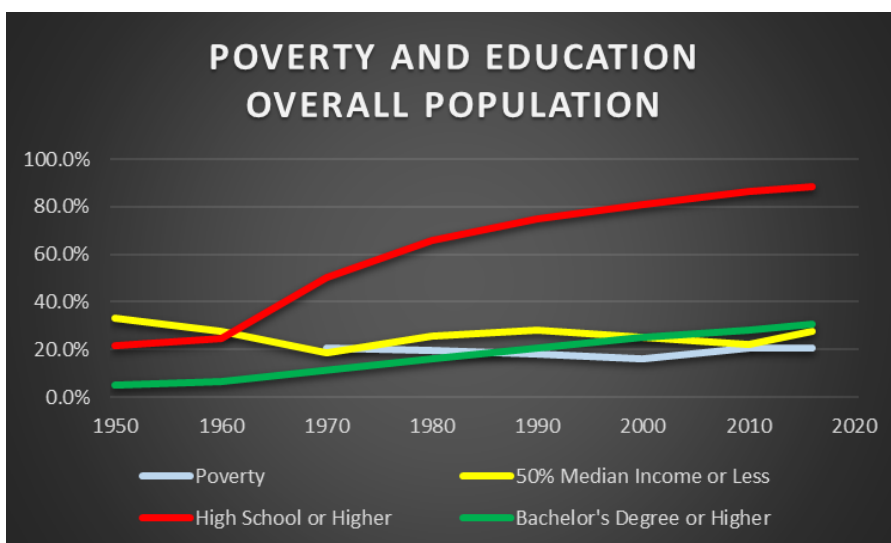


Figure 10 – Relationship between Poverty and Education in Shelby County

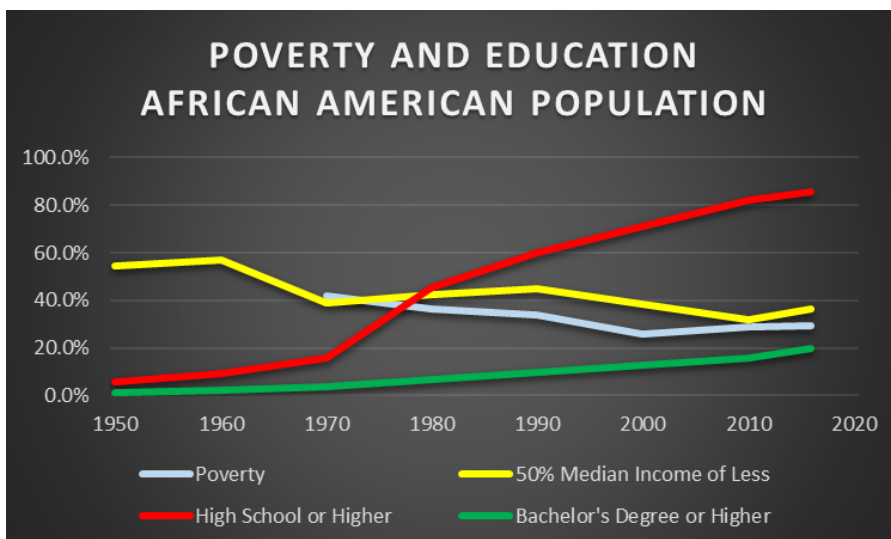


Figure 11 – Relationship between Poverty and Education among African Americans in Shelby County

The charts on the left illustrate the relationship between increases in education and the reduction in poverty. This is particularly dramatic for the African American population, where the increase in education is associated with a corresponding decrease in poverty. As educational attainment among African Americans increased from 1970, poverty decreased dramatically. However, a high school diploma is helpful only up to a point; beyond that, a college degree becomes necessary for economic progress.



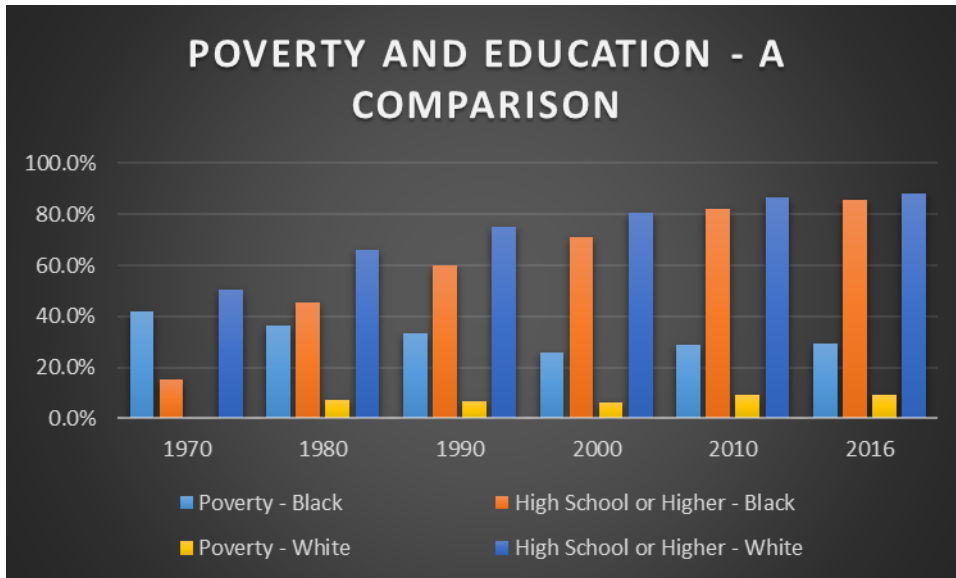


Figure 12 – Relationship between Poverty and High School in Shelby County

While the completion of a bachelor's degree seems to have a greater impact on the reduction of poverty in recent years, from 1970 to 2000, it was the increase in high school completion among African Americans that was associated with reductions in poverty. However, this relationship was not sustained in the 21<sup>st</sup> century when a bachelor degree appears to be more important in reducing poverty. Note that this relationship does not seem to hold true for whites, whose poverty rate does not seem to change based on educational gains. This is an important consideration: education appears to have a greater effect on the poverty rate of African Americans rather than whites in Shelby County.

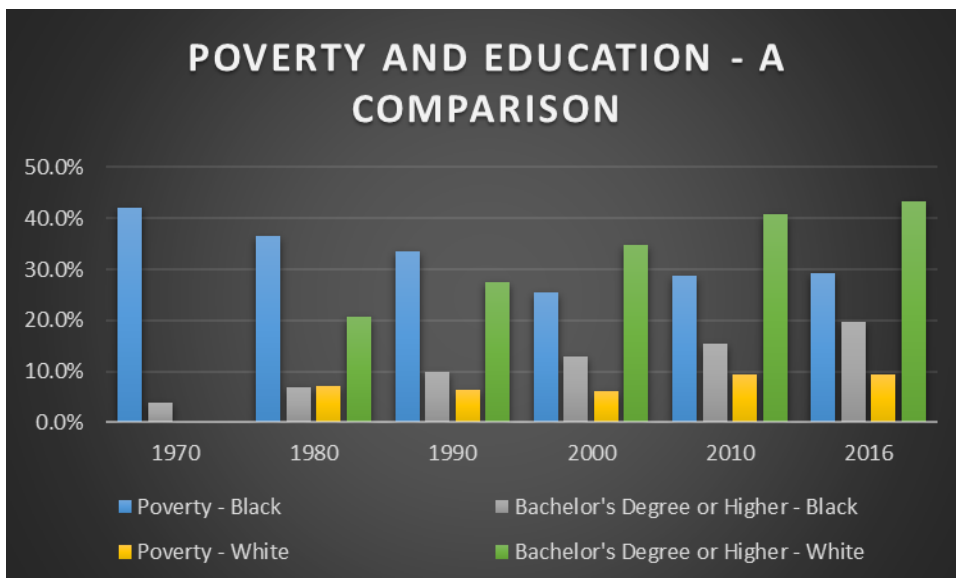


Figure 13 – Relationship between Poverty and College in Shelby County

# These results show the importance of education to social justice and for the eradication of poverty

## EMPLOYMENT

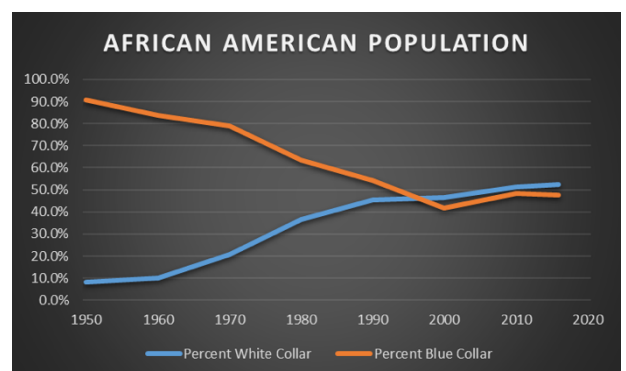
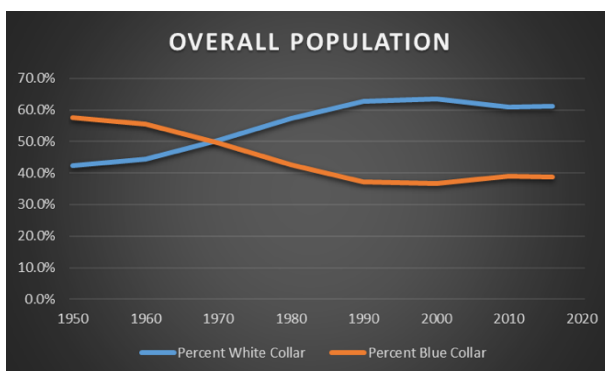
### Types of Work by Race

Just like the enormous gains in educational attainment, African Americans have achieved over the past 50 years and more, the types of jobs (blue collar or white collar) have changed substantially for African Americans. While in 1950, the vast majority of African Americans engaged in blue-collar jobs, today almost half of African American workers labor in white-collar professions.

	Percent White Collar			Percent Blue Collar		
	Overall	White	Black	Overall	White	Black
1950	42.4%		8.1%	57.6%		90.5%
1960	44.5%		10.0%	55.5%		83.9%
1970	50.4%		20.9%	49.6%		79.1%
1980	57.4%	67.6%	36.5%	42.6%	32.4%	63.5%
1990	62.7%	72.7%	45.5%	37.3%	27.3%	54.5%
2000	63.4%	72.4%	46.7%	36.6%	27.6%	41.8%
2010	61.0%	72.1%	51.4%	39.0%	27.9%	48.5%
2016	61.2%	72.7%	52.5%	38.8%	27.3%	47.5%

See median income table (Table 8) on page 18. The median income for African American households has remained at about 50% that of the median income for white households through the decades.

Table 5 – Class of Worker by Race in Shelby County



Figures 14 & 15 – Percent White-Collar and Blue-Collar Jobs in Shelby County

It is important to note that a white-collar job in the economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century may not be as meaningful as a white-collar job at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Even though there has been a 650% increase in African American participation in white-collar jobs, income for African Americans remains stubbornly at about 50% of whites in Shelby County. Many questions remain as to why this is so. Wages do not seem to have kept up with the type of job. It is important to remember that it is entirely possible, and in today's economy even quite probable, that a worker can be both white collar and poor!

In 1950, only **8.1%** of African Americans had white-collar jobs.

In 2016, it was **52.5%**.

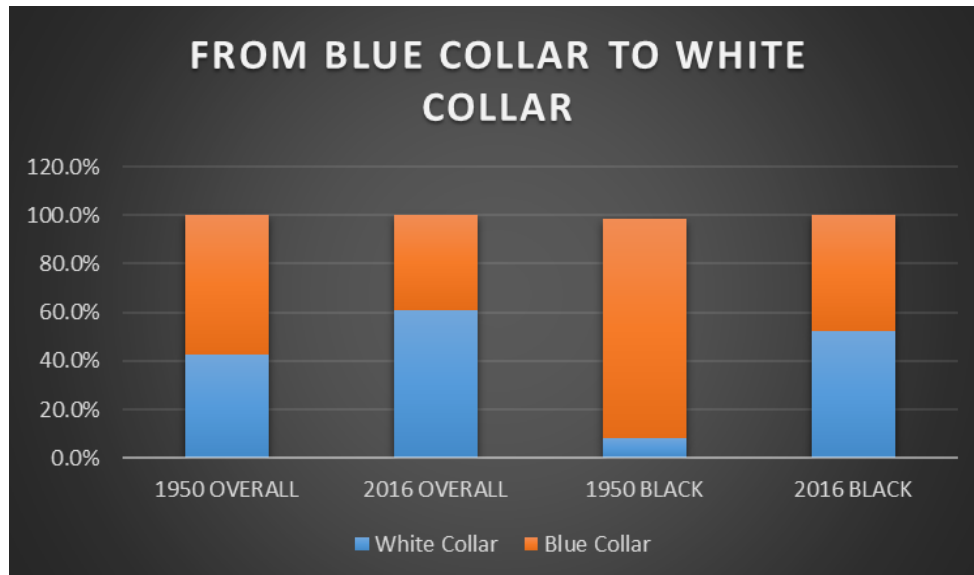


Figure 16 – Percent White-Collar and Blue-Collar Jobs in Shelby County

However, as can be seen in the following charts and tables, while African Americans have made impressive gains in professional and managerial occupations, the percent of African Americans in these jobs has remained at about half the percent of whites.

Employed Persons in Managerial & Professional Occupations			
	Total Population	White	African American
1950	16.3%		4.4%
1960	19.0%		5.2%
1970	22.0%		9.1%
1980	22.8%	27.7%	12.8%
1990	26.8%	32.7%	16.2%
2000	33.4%	41.3%	20.2%
2010	34.7%	45.2%	24.4%
2016	36.0%	47.5%	26.7%

Table 6 – Percent of employed persons in professional and managerial occupations by race in Shelby County.

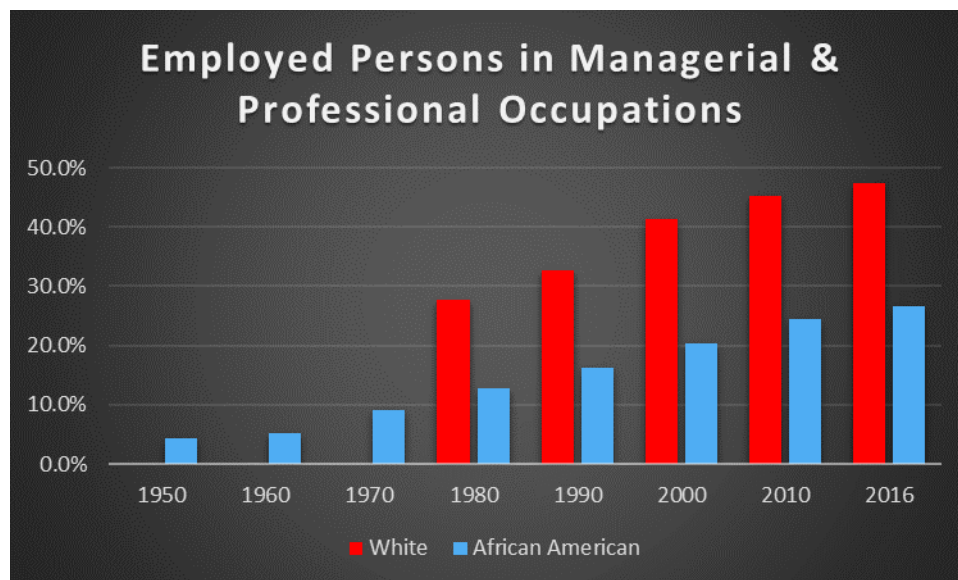


Figure 17 – Percent of employed persons in professional and managerial occupations by race in Shelby County.

**As African Americans have made impressive gains in white-collar jobs, the question remains whether the uptick in white-collar jobs will result in increases in income**

# INCOME

## Median Household Income

Median income is a measure which indicates that half the households make incomes below the “median” point of income, and half the households make incomes above the “median” point. Median income is the usual measure for reporting household or individual income because it controls for the effects of extreme incomes on the average. Extremely high incomes tend to artificially inflate the average income, with the result that the “average” income is much higher than the typical income for the population.

To illustrate racial disparities in income, this section of the report also includes the percent of households at or below 50% of median income and at or below 65% of median income, as well as the per-capita income (what every man, woman, and child would receive if the total income for the region were divided equally among the population).

Median income for the various racial groups was calculated by multiplying the median income reported by the Census for each group by the equivalence in 2016 US dollars. For example, one dollar in 1950 was equivalent to \$10.08 in 2016 dollars. This conversion allows the comparison of incomes by race over time.

The results show that median income in Shelby County has been consistently higher for whites than for African Americans and that for the general population. The relationship between median income for whites and median income for African Americans in Shelby County appears to be resistant to change. Consistently through the decades and social events notwithstanding, African Americans in Shelby County have had a household median income that is about half that of whites for the same geographical area (Shelby County). The relationship between the incomes of African Americans and whites remains stable, regardless of gains in education and employment.

Year	Median Income			Approximately 50% of Median Income for Region	Percent of Households at 50% median income or less			Approximately 65% of Median Income for Region	Percent of Households at 65% median income or less			Per capita income		
	Overall	White	Black		Overall	White	Black		Overall	White	Black	Overall	White	Black
1950	\$2,763		\$1,315	\$1,499	33.2%		54.3%	\$1,999	43.2%		70.1%			
1960	\$5,929		\$2,666	\$2,999	27.5%		57.2%	\$3,999	39.4%		74.5%			
1970	\$8,671		\$5,073	\$3,999	18.8%		39.1%	\$5,999	31.5%		58.5%	2,762		\$1,402
1980	\$15,289	\$19,165	\$9,343	\$7,645	25.6%	16.0%	42.4%	\$9,999	33.8%	22.7%	52.7%	\$6,697	\$8,807	\$3,800
1990	\$27,132	\$35,068	\$16,946	\$14,999	28.2%	17.5%	45.0%	\$19,999				\$13,330	\$18,216	\$7,262
2000	\$39,593	\$52,551	\$28,354	\$19,999				\$24,999	31.4%	20.7%	44.3%	\$20,856	\$29,086	\$13,207
2010	\$43,990	\$62,460	\$33,658	\$19,999	22.2%	12.6%	31.7%	\$24,999	27.8%	16.7%	38.9%	\$23,560	\$34,630	\$15,485
2016	\$47,690	\$69,860	\$35,664	\$24,999	27.7%	15.7%	36.3%	\$29,999	32.4%	19.8%	43.0%	\$27,880	\$41,135	\$19,421

Table 7 – Median Income and 50% and 65% of Median Income by Race in Shelby County

	Median Income in January 2016 Dollars			Median Income for African Americans as Percent of	
	Total Population	White	Black	The Total Population	The White Population
1950	\$ 27,851		\$ 13,255	47.6%	
1960	\$ 47,966		\$ 21,568	45.0%	
1970	\$ 54,367		\$ 31,808	58.5%	
1980	\$ 46,631	\$ 58,453	\$ 28,496	61.1%	48.8%
1990	\$ 50,466	\$ 65,226	\$ 31,520	62.5%	48.3%
2000	\$ 55,430	\$ 73,571	\$ 39,696	71.6%	54.0%
2010	\$ 47,949	\$ 68,081	\$ 36,687	76.5%	53.9%
2016	\$ 47,690	\$ 69,860	\$ 35,664	74.8%	51.1%

Table 8 – Median Income in 2016 USD by Race in Shelby County

Income in 2016 US dollars (USD) was calculated utilizing the Consumer Price Index (CPI) Inflation Calculator of the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Median income for African Americans is compared to median income for the total population and median income for the white population.

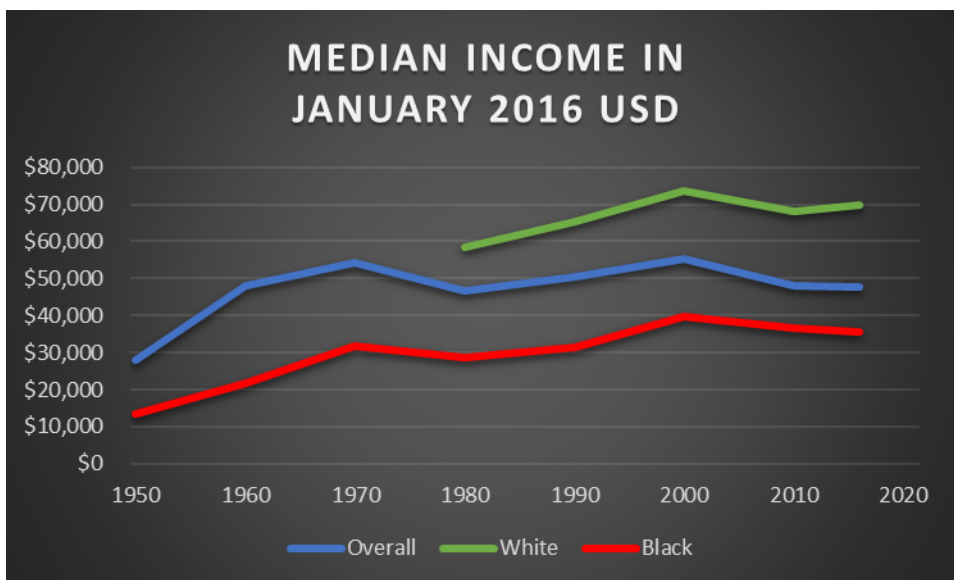


Figure 18 – Racial Disparities in Median Income over Time in Shelby County

**Median income for African Americans remains stubbornly at about 50% of median income for whites in Shelby County**

Note that the proportion of median income for African Americans to median income for whites has remained almost unchanged at about 50% since the 1950s. While median household income has increased for both groups when controlling for inflation, the relationship between median income for African Americans and median income for whites has remained.

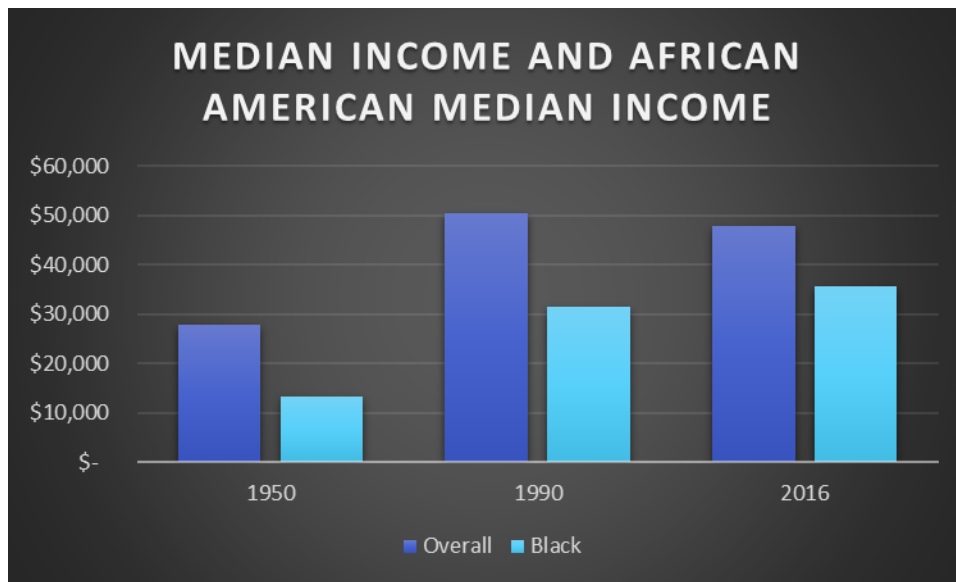


Figure 19 – Median Income in 2016 USD by Race in Shelby County

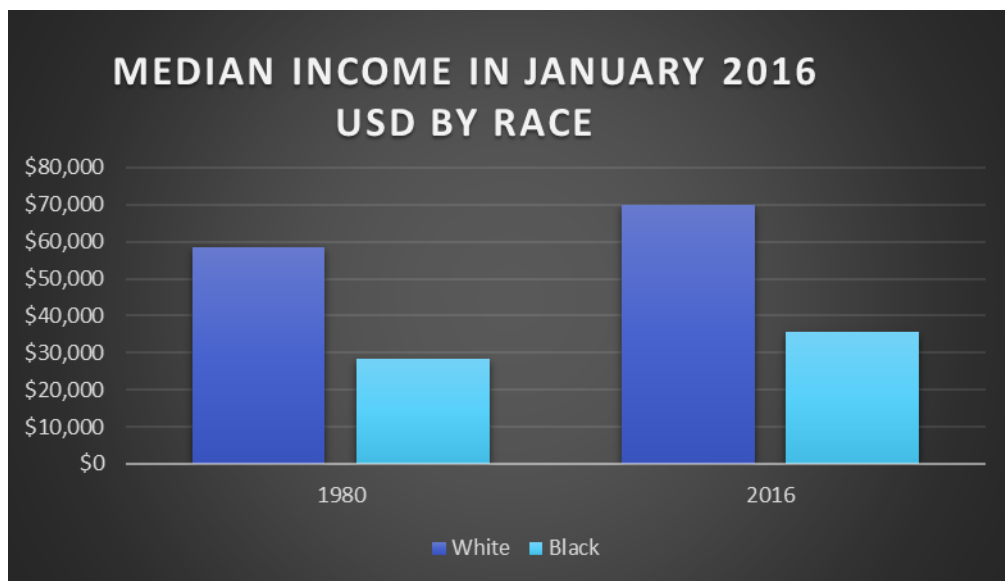


Figure 20 – Median Income in 2016 USD by Race in Shelby County



## OTHER EXCLUSION

### Unemployment & Males Not in the Labor Force

Unemployment among African Americans in Shelby County has actually gotten much worse since the passage of the Civil Rights Act. It is difficult to explain why this is so, because educational attainment has increased in the same period. It is possible that the high unemployment rate for African Americans is associated with the War on Drugs because African Americans have been disproportionately targeted for arrest (Diprizio, 2018) and conviction for drug possession, leading to criminal records that make African Americans less employable.

	UNEMPLOYMENT RATE		
	Overall	White	Black
1950	4.5%		7.6%
1960	4.2%		7.2%
1970	4.5%		8.1%
1980	7.6%	4.1%	14.2%
1990	7.1%	3.4%	13.3%
2000	6.8%	2.3%	7.0%
2010	10.4%	5.1%	15.8%
2016	7.2%	3.9%	10.1%

Table 9 – Unemployment Rate by Race in Shelby County

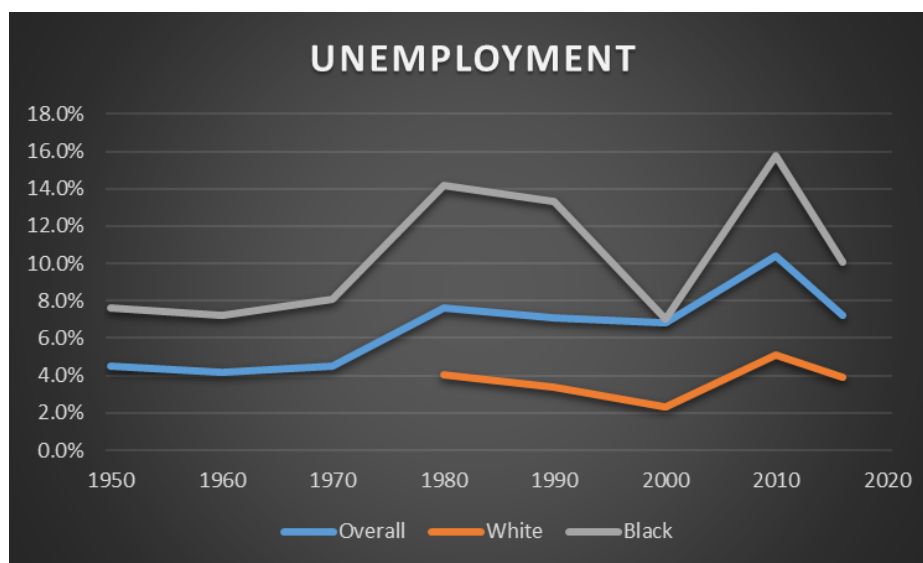


Figure 21 – Unemployment Rate by Race in Shelby County

In addition to the discrimination people with criminal records experience, professional licensing boards deny licenses to people with felony convictions, which create additional barriers to employment among those in the criminal justice system. For a detailed discussion on the effects of the War on Drugs on minorities in America, see Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow* (2011).

### **Males Not in the Labor Force**

	MALES NOT IN THE LABOR FORCE		
	Overall	White	Black
1950	17.90%		20.50%
1960			
1970	22.40%		32.30%
1980	24.70%	18.60%	35.40%
1990	25.10%	19.70%	33.90%
2000	27.90%	22%	35.70%
2010	28.40%	23.20%	35.20%
2016	35.60%	27.70%	35.60%

Table 10 – Males Not In the Labor Force by Race  
in Shelby County

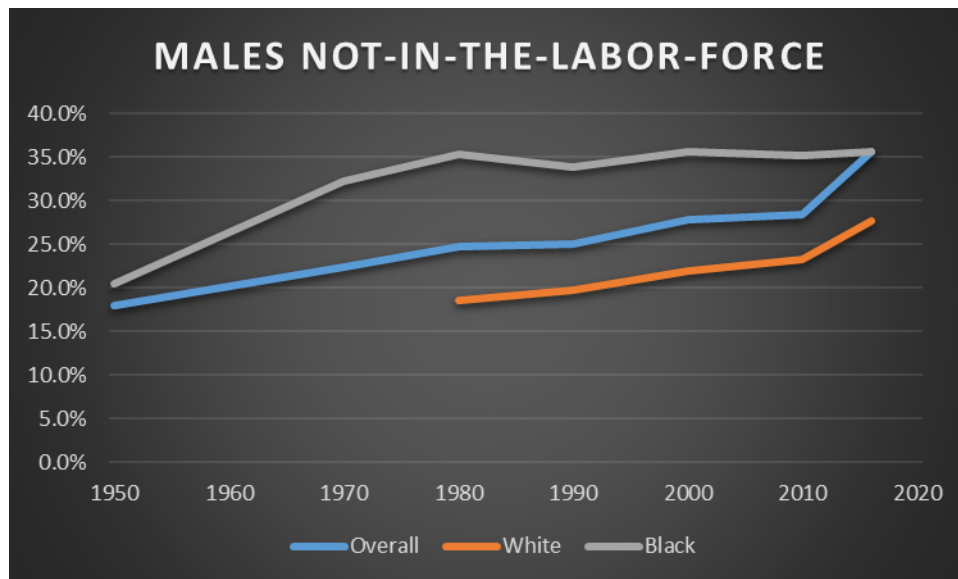


Figure 22 – Percent of Males Not in the Labor Force by Race in Shelby County

The percent of African American males not in the labor force is much greater now than in 1950, and the percent of white males not in the labor force is increasing as well. It is difficult to assign an exact cause, but it is probable that this is the result of the War on Drugs.

## The Criminal Justice System

	INSTITUTIONALIZED POPULATION OR INMATES		
	Overall	White	Black
1950	0.81%		
1960	0.70%		0.72%
1970	0.85%		0.95%
1980	1.12%	1.08%	1.20%
1990	1.90%	1.40%	2.70%
2000	1.86%	1.58%	2.59%
2010	1.40%	1.09%	1.59%
2016	1.30%	0.95%	1.67%

Table 11 – Institutionalized Population by Race in Shelby County

In the 1980's the percent of African Americans in institutions diverged substantially from the rest of the population. This is the result of the War on Drugs, as Michelle Alexander has so clearly detailed in her 2011 book, *The New Jim Crow*. In her book, Alexander describes how the 1980's War on Drugs has been systematically utilized to create a black underclass with limited rights despite the legal gains made post the Civil Rights Movement.

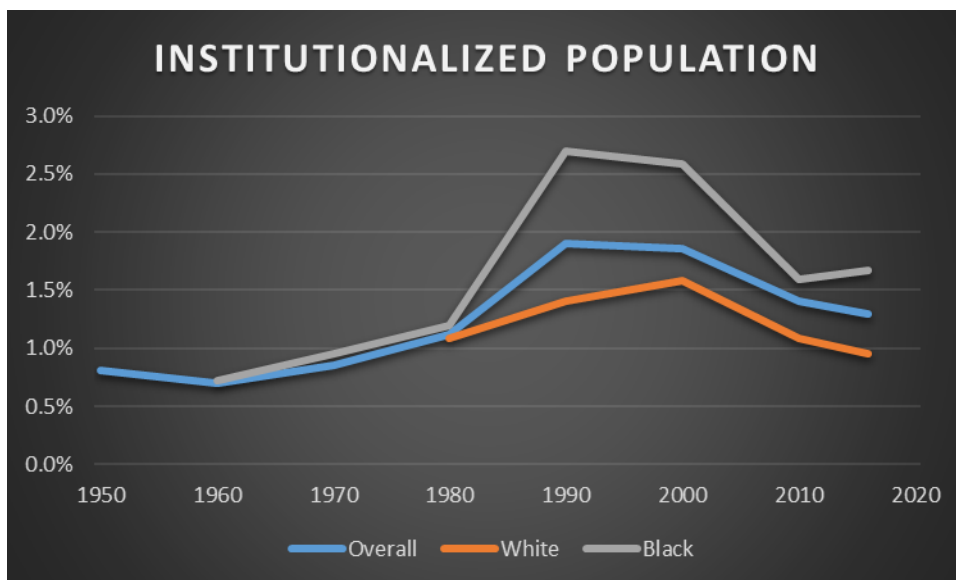


Figure 23 – Percent of Institutionalized Population by Race in Shelby County

The disproportionate increase in the institutionalized African American population in Shelby County from 1980 to 2016 mirrors the disproportionate increase of African Americans in federal and state prisons throughout the United States in the same time period, per a 2018 report by the Institute of Policy Studies in Washington, DC.

**There has been a dramatic increase in African American institutionalization from 1980 to 2016 while the proportion of institutionalized whites has declined both in the United States and in Shelby County**

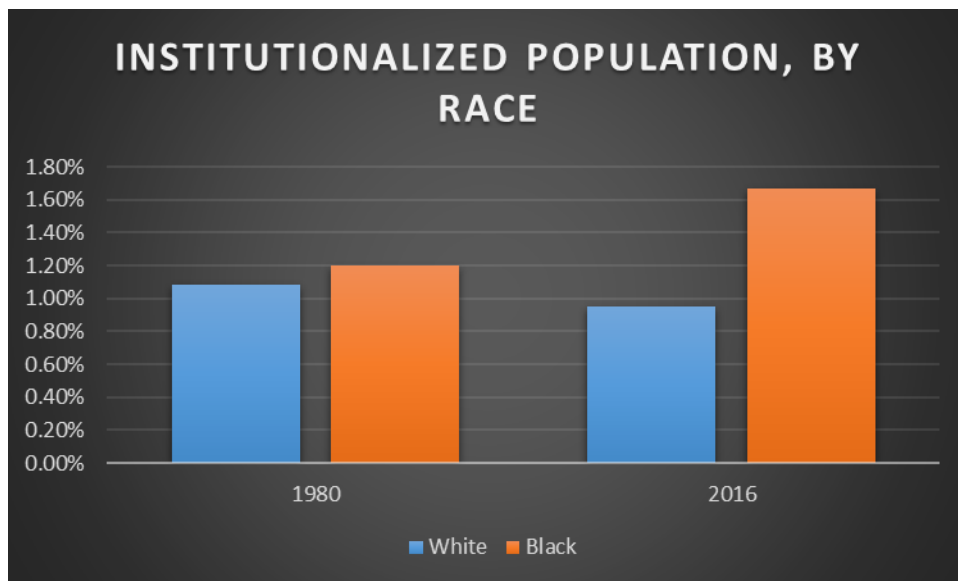


Figure 24 – Percent of Institutionalized Population by Race in Shelby County. A comparison between 1980 and 2016.

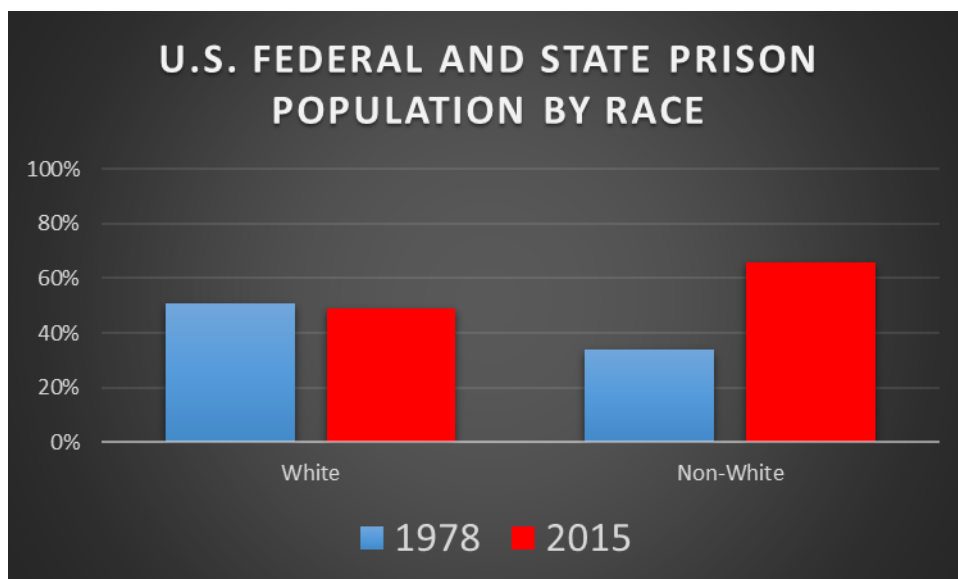


Figure 25 – Percent of Institutionalized Population by Race in the U.S. A comparison between 1980 and 2016.

## **NOTES**

It is important to note that data collection methods and definitions changed over time, and thus are not exactly comparable. For instance, in 1960, the labor force included people over the age of 14, but today the labor force includes people over 16. Racial definitions also changed over time, as did the particular data points collected. Educational attainment also changed. In 1960, it was clarified that the highest grade was completed, not simply attended, as recorded in the 1940 and 1950 Censuses (Brunsman, 1960).

### **Poverty**

Whenever possible, poverty is reported as reported in the Census, but poverty is not included before 1970 because the method we use to calculate poverty was developed in 1963-1964. Although there were minor changes made in the 1980's, the measure has remained more or less stable (Fisher, 1992). However, it is far from perfect. In fact, no measure of poverty can ever be deemed perfect.

A method used to calculate poverty is to take 50% and 60% of the median wage. France uses 60% of the Median wage, and others (Buhmann, et al., 1988) have utilized 50% of the median household income to estimate poverty. Because of data availability, this report uses approximate measures when calculating 50% and 65% of median income.

### **Race**

In 1960, the Census reports race as white and non-white

### **Institutionalized population**

After 1970, the institutionalized population was calculated by estimating total civilian population 18+ and estimating total civilian non-institutionalized population 18+ and then deducting number of civilian noninstitutionalized population from total civilian population. The remainder is the civilian institutionalized population. From that number, a percent was calculated. Note that the Census does not clarify whether "institutionalized population" (or inmates) refers to prisons, mental institutions, or both.

### **Employed persons**

Prior to 1970, the Census reports employed persons age 14 and older. After 1970, the Census reports employed persons age 16 and older.

Males not in the labor force were calculated from various data points, including total persons in the labor force and females in the labor force.

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