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Income Of Black Married Couples And Per Capita Income Improve In 1988: Poverty Levels Stable, Census Bureau Reports

The real median income of Black married-couple families and per capita income increased from 1987 to 1988, while the number and percent of Blacks in poverty were unchanged, according to the Commerce Department's Census Bureau.

The real median income of Black married-couple families rose by 6.8 percent to \$30,390, while Black per capita income increased by 3.9 percent to \$8,270 after adjusting for a 4.1 percent increase in consumer prices.

About 9.4 million or 32 percent of all Black persons lived below the official government poverty level in 1988. The comparable figures for Black families were 2.1 million or 28 percent. These figures were not significantly different from those in 1987.

These income and poverty figures are based on pre-tax money income only, before any deductions. They do not include the value of noncash benefits such as food stamps, public housing, Medicaid or Medicare, or employer-provided benefits. (An appendix to the report, however, provides distributions of income and poverty when certain noncash benefits are valued.)

The median income of White married-couple families was \$36,840 compared with \$25,670 for Hispanic married couples. Neither showed a significant change from 1987 in real terms.

The real per capita income of Whites rose by about 1.5 percent to 13,900, while that of Hispanics was unchanged at \$7,960.

About 20.8 million or 10 percent of the White population was poor in 1988, compared with 5.4 million or 27 percent of Hispanics. These figures were unchanged from 1987 levels.

Here are additional highlights from the report:

* Sixty-five percent of the nation's poor population was White in 1988, followed by Blacks (30 percent) and persons of "other races" (5 percent). About 17 percent of the poor were Hispanic (these persons may be of any race, but

the vast majority identified themselves as White in the Current Population Survey).

* Forty-four percent of the nation's 9.8 million Black children lived in poverty, compared with 37 percent of Hispanic children and 15 percent of White children.

* About one-half of poor Blacks were either children under age 18 (46 percent) or elderly (8 percent). The poverty rate for children under age 18 (44 percent) continues to be higher than for other age groups.

* Female household with no spouse present comprised 76 percent of all poor Black families, compared with 48 percent of poor Hispanic families and 44 percent of poor White families.

* About five in 10 Black families with a female householder, no husband present, were in poverty in 1988, compared with about two in 10 Black families with a male householder and no wife present and one in 10 Black married couple families.

* Among poor Black householders, 40 percent worked in 1988, 12 percent working year-round and full time.

* Real median income for all Black families (\$19,330) and Black families with a female householder, no husband present (\$10,660) were not significantly different from 1987; the comparable medians for White and Hispanic families also were unchanged.

* The median earnings for Black men who worked year-round, full time was \$20,370 in 1988, compared with \$27,230 for White men and \$17,850 for Hispanic men. The comparable figures for women were \$16,540 for Blacks, \$17,820 for Whites, and \$14,850 for Hispanics.

Trends in Income and Poverty: The CPI-U Versus the CPI-U-X1

This report for the first time includes income and poverty figures based on an alternative price index developed by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Price indexes, used to adjust for annual price changes, denote the cost of a market

basket of goods and services representing average consumption.

The CPI-U is the index the Census Bureau uses to adjust poverty thresholds for inflation and to compare changes in real income over time. According to many analysts, prior to 1983 this index measured housing costs in a way that led to excessive growth in the index during the late 1970s.

In 1983, the BLS began using a revised method for determining housing costs, and this method was determining housing costs, and this method was incorporated in the subsequent annual CPI-U series. The BLS created an alternative series (the experimental CPI-U-X1) based on the new methodology to cover the period from 1967 to 1982 to provide a consistent series over time.

Substituting the CPI-U-X1 for the CPI-U produced a lower inflation rate from 1967 to 1988, down from 254.3 percent to 222.2 percent. Using the CPI-U, median family income did not show any statistically significant change between 1973 and 1988. Using the CPI-U-X1, however, median family income grew by 7.5 percent.

Lowering the estimate of past inflation produces lower current poverty thresholds as well, since the effect of adjusting poverty thresholds for inflation is cumulative. Applying the alternative index provides a similar picture of trends in the poverty population and rate from 1967 to 1988, but it produces lower estimates of the prevalence of poverty. For instance, the number of poor in 1988 was 3.6 million lower using the CPI-U-X1 (28.3 million instead of 31.9 million). Using this alternative price index, the poverty rate is 11.6 percent, 1.5 percentage points lower than the official rate of 13.1 percent.

Incorporating Noncash Benefits into the Definition of Income

The income and poverty data in the main body of the report are based on cash income received during the calendar year preceding the survey, excluding taxes, capital gains, and the value of

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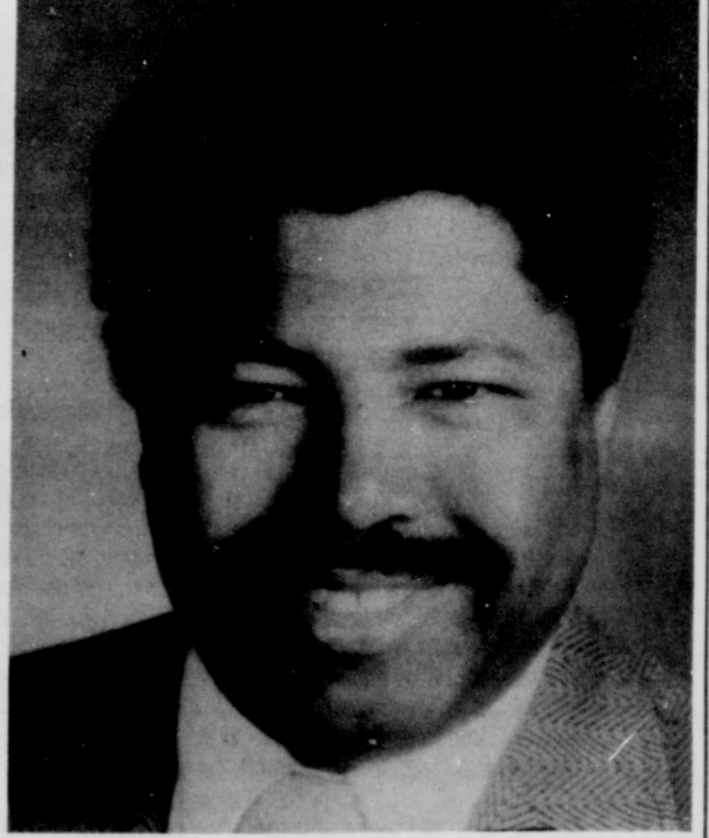
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