

MEMPHIS POVERTY FACT SHEET

*2016
Update*

The 2016 Update of the Memphis Poverty Fact Sheet, Produced Annually by
Dr. Elena Delavega of the Department of Social Work at the University of
Memphis. Data from the 2015 American Community Survey Released in
September 2016.



2016 Memphis Poverty Fact Sheet (Data from 2015 ACS)

Who are the Memphis Poor?

The city of Memphis has a poverty rate of 26.2%. Child poverty is 43.0%, while the poverty rate for people over age 65 is the lowest of any age group at 12.9%. The Memphis poverty rate for Blacks is 30.1%, while the poverty rate among non-Hispanic Whites has decreased to 13.0%. Poverty for Latinos at the city level is not available. In the Memphis Statistical Metropolitan Area (MSA), which includes parts of Tennessee, Arkansas, and Mississippi, overall poverty is 18.4%, child poverty is 28.8%, poverty for people over age 65 is 10.2%, Black poverty is 25.9%, non-Hispanic White poverty is 9.1%, and Latino poverty is 33.4%.

The Poverty Rate in Memphis and Shelby County Compared to National Rates

In general, poverty rates for the City of Memphis are higher than poverty rates in Shelby County for every category. Both are higher than poverty rates in Tennessee, and Tennessee poverty rates are higher than U.S. poverty rates in almost every category (racial and ethnic groups, and age groups). The exception to this is the poverty rate for non-Hispanic Whites, which is lower in Shelby County than elsewhere. However, even though the poverty rate for non-Hispanic Whites has declined in Memphis, it is slightly higher in Shelby County than in 2014.

Table 1 – Diverse Poverty Rates in Memphis, Shelby County, Tennessee, and the United States

2015 Poverty Rate	Overall	Under 18	18-64	Over 65	Non-Hispanic White	Black	Latino	Asian
United States	14.7%	20.7%	13.9%	9.0%	10.4%	25.4%	22.6%	12.0%
Tennessee	16.7%	24.2%	15.7%	9.8%	13.8%	25.4%	30.7%	10.3%
Shelby County	20.1%	32.4%	16.8%	10.9%	8.9%	26.4%	N/A	N/A
Memphis city, Tennessee	26.2%	43.0%	22.0%	12.9%	13.0%	30.1%	N/A	N/A
Memphis, TN-MS-AR Metro Ar.	18.4%	28.8%	15.8%	10.2%	9.1%	25.9%	33.4%	N/A

Table by the author from data from the 2015 ACS 1-Y Estimates (Table S0201), September 15, 2016.

New in 2015

Memphis is making great strides toward reducing poverty. Overall poverty and child poverty have decreased in more than three percentile points, which is very encouraging. However, among non-Hispanic Whites poverty has decreased in a much smaller percent in Memphis and even increased slightly in Shelby County.

Not-So-New in 2015

Poverty rates in Memphis and Shelby County are higher than poverty rates for the United States and for Tennessee. Poverty rates among non-Hispanic Whites have increased slightly in Shelby County.

Good News Overall

In Memphis and Shelby County as in the United States as a whole, overall poverty rates and in particular, among Latinos and Blacks, have decreased. Child poverty has declined as well.

Figure 1 – Percent of the Population under Poverty

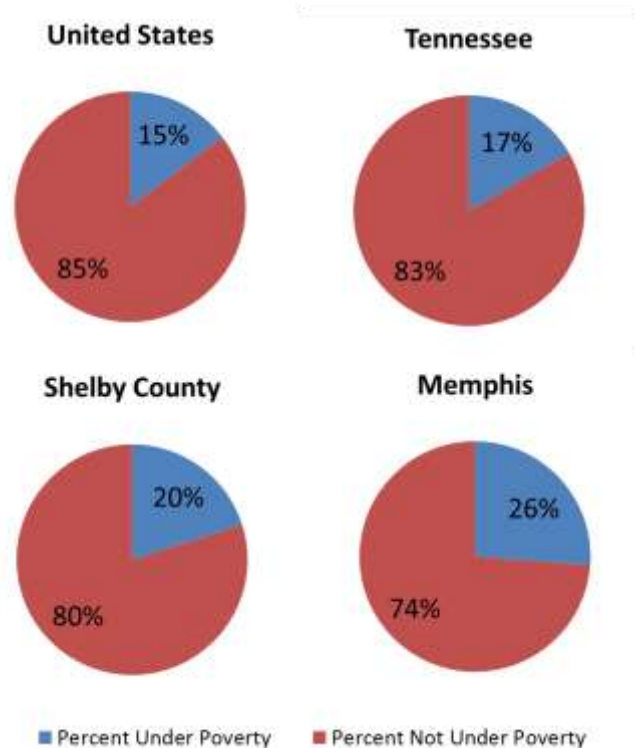


Chart by the author from data from the 2015 ACS 1-Y Estimates (Table S0201), September 15, 2016.

Figure 2 – Poverty Rates in 2014 and 2015 in Memphis and Shelby County

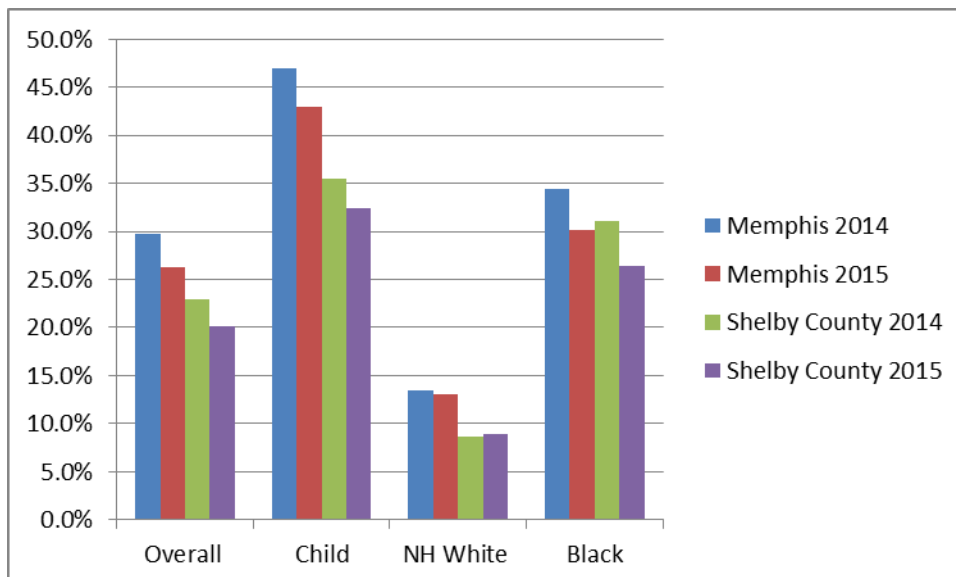


Chart by the author from data from the 2014 and 2015 ACS 1-Y Estimates (Tables C01001, C17001 and S0201), September 17, 2015 and September 15, 2016.

Table 2 – Percent Change in Poverty Rates in Memphis and Shelby County

	Overall			Child			NH White			Black		
	2014	2015	% Change	2014	2015	% Change	2014	2015	% Change	2014	2015	% Change
Memphis	29.8%	26.2%	-12.1%	46.9%	43.0%	-8.3%	13.5%	13.0%	-3.7%	34.4%	30.1%	-12.5%
Shelby County	22.9%	20.1%	-12.2%	35.5%	32.4%	-8.7%	8.6%	8.9%	3.5%	31.1%	26.4%	-15.1%

Table by the author from data from the 2014 and 2015 ACS 1-Y Estimates (Tables C01001, S0201, and C17001), September 17, 2015 and September 15, 2016.

Figure 3 – Percent Change in Poverty Rates

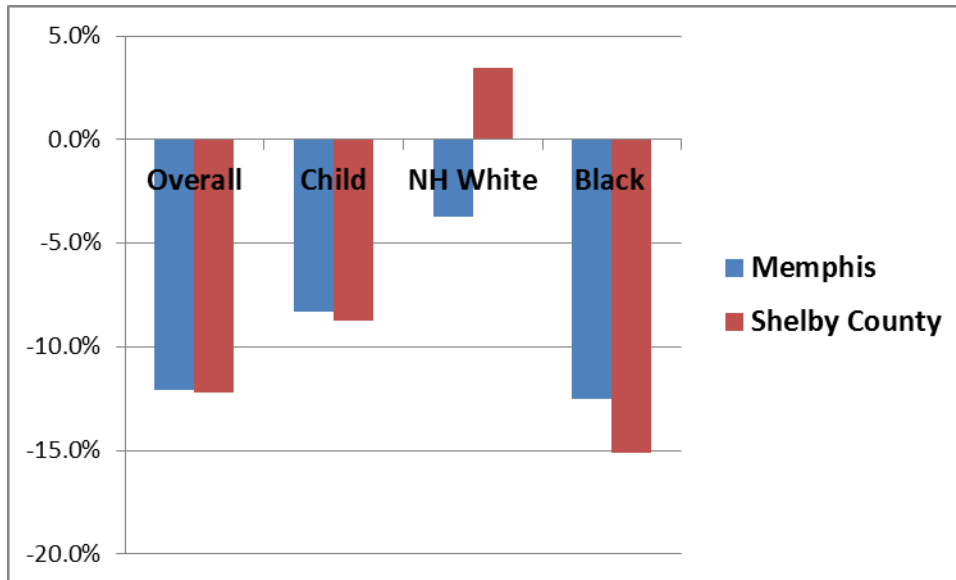


Chart by the author from data from the 2014 and 2015 ACS 1-Y Estimates (Tables C01001 and C17001), September 17, 2015 and September 15, 2016.

Tables 3-4 – The Poverty Intersection of Race and Age

United States						
	Overall	Non-Hispanic White	Black	Latino	Asian	Native American
Total Population	321,418,821	234,940,100	40,695,277	56,496,122	17,273,777	2,597,249
Overall Poverty Rate	14.7%	10.4%	25.4%	22.6%	12.0%	26.6%
Child (Under 18) Poverty Rate	20.7%	12.5%	36.5%	30.5%	12.1%	33.8%
Poverty Rate for People 18 to 64	13.9%	10.7%	22.2%	18.8%	11.9%	24.8%
Poverty Rate for People 65+	9.0%	6.9%	16.8%	18.5%	12.7%	17.2%

Table by the author from data from the 2015 ACS 1-Y Estimates (Table S0201), September 15, 2016.

Tennessee					
	Overall	Non-Hispanic White	Black	Latino	Asian
Total Population	6,600,299	5,129,336	1,110,412	333,460	107,075
Overall Poverty Rate	16.7%	13.8%	25.4%	30.7%	10.3%
Child (Under 18) Poverty Rate	24.2%	18.2%	37.8%	40.4%	7.7%
Poverty Rate for People 18 to 64	15.7%	13.9%	21.1%	24.4%	10.9%
Poverty Rate for People 65+	9.8%	8.5%	19.1%	19.6%	12.9%

Table by the author from data from the 2015 ACS 1-Y Estimates (Table S0201), September 15, 2016.

Tables 5-8 – The Poverty Intersection of Race and Age

Shelby County, Tennessee			
	Overall	Non-Hispanic White	Black
Total Population	938,069	371,647	498,328
Overall Poverty Rate	20.1%	8.9%	26.4%
Child (Under 18) Poverty Rate	32.4%	12.0%	40.4%
Poverty Rate for People 18 to 64	16.8%	8.9%	21.5%
Poverty Rate for People 65+	10.9%	5.6%	18.0%

Table by the author from data from the 2015 ACS 1-Y Estimates (Table S0201), September 15, 2016.

The City of Memphis			
	Overall	Non-Hispanic White	Black
Total Population	655,760	194,557	415,300
Overall Poverty Rate	26.2%	13.0%	30.1%
Child (Under 18) Poverty Rate	43.0%	19.4%	47.0%
Poverty Rate for People 18 to 64	22.0%	13.7%	24.5%
Poverty Rate for People 65+	12.9%	5.4%	18.8%

Table by the author from data from the 2015 ACS 1-Y Estimates (Table S0201), September 15, 2016.

Memphis, TN-MS-AR Metro Area				
	Overall	Non-Hispanic White	Black	Latino
Total Population	1,343,572	634,193	626,698	71,118
Overall Poverty Rate	18.4%	9.1%	25.9%	33.4%
Child (Under 18) Poverty Rate	28.8%	11.8%	38.8%	45.2%
Poverty Rate for People 18 to 64	15.8%	9.2%	21.3%	26.0%
Poverty Rate for People 65+	10.2%	5.7%	18.5%	5.3%

Table by the author from data from the 2015 ACS 1-Y Estimates (Table S0201), September 15, 2016.

Poverty Rankings

In 2015, Memphis dropped to second place in overall poverty, but it retained the unfortunate top spot in child (under 18) poverty rate among Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSA) with populations greater than 1,000,000, even though poverty rates overall have fallen appreciably. When including MSA with populations greater than 500,000, Memphis has shown an improvement in rank in overall poverty, moving from third place to fourth. However, even though the child poverty rate in Memphis declined in three percentile points, its overall ranking did not change.

The rank number denotes the position of a city or MSA relative to others. The higher the rank number, the higher the poverty rate for that locality. In other words, a higher ranking is not desirable. Rank change denotes the number of “spots” a city or MSA has moved up or down in the rankings.

Note: There are 53 MSA with populations over 1,000,000 and 107 MSA with populations over 500,000 in 2015; in 2014 there were 52 MSA with populations over 1,000,000 and 104 MSA with populations over 500,000

Table 9 – Memphis’ Rank in Poverty Rates

Memphis		2014		2015		
		Poverty Rate	Poverty Rank	Poverty Rate	Poverty Rank	Rank Change
Among Cities with Populations Greater than 500,000 (34 Cities)	Overall	29.8%	3 rd	26.2%	4 th	-1
	Under 18	46.9%	2 nd	43.0%	2 nd	----
Among MSA with Populations Greater than 500,000 (107 MSA)	Overall	20.3%	6 th	18.4%	11 th	-5
	Under 18	30.8%	5 th	28.8%	6 th	-1
Among MSA with Populations Greater than 1,000,000 (53 MSA)	Overall	20.3%	1 st	18.4%	2 nd	-1
	Under 18	30.8%	1 st	28.8%	1 st	----

Table by the author from data from the 2014 and 2015 ACS 1-Y Estimates (Tables C01001 and C17001), September 17, 2015 and September 15, 2016.

Table 10 – Highest Poverty Rates in Cities and MSA in the United States

Highest Poverty Rates Rank 1		2014		2015	
		Rank 1	Poverty Rate	Rank 1	Poverty Rate
Among Cities with Populations Greater than 500,000 (34 Cities)	Overall	Detroit City, Michigan	39.3%	Detroit City, Michigan	39.8%
	Under 18	Detroit City, Michigan	57.1%	Detroit City, Michigan	57.6%
Among MSA with Populations Greater than 500,000 (107 MSA)	Overall	McAllen-Edinburg-Mission, TX Metro Area	34%	McAllen-Edinburg-Mission, TX Metro Area	31.5%
	Under 18	McAllen-Edinburg-Mission, TX Metro Area	46.5%	McAllen-Edinburg-Mission, TX Metro Area	43.8%
Among MSA with Populations Greater than 1,000,000 (53 MSA)	Overall	Memphis, TN-MS-AR Metro Area	20.3%	Tucson, AZ Metro Area	18.9%
	Under 18	Memphis, TN-MS-AR Metro Area	30.8%	Memphis, TN-MS-AR Metro Area	28.8%

Table by the author from data from the 2014 and 2015 ACS 1-Y Estimates (Tables C01001 and C17001), September 17, 2015 and September 15, 2016.

What the Rankings Mean

The rank number denotes the position of a city or MSA relative to others. The higher the rank number, the higher the poverty rate for that locality. In other words, a higher ranking is not desirable. Note that there are fewer cities with more than half a million people than Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSA) with more than a million people. This is because MSA comprise a larger territory. As a result, Memphis is both a city with more than 500,000 people and an MSA with a population greater than one million, but not all MSA with more than 1,000,000 people include cities with more than half a million people.

Rankings provide the necessary context to understand poverty rates. A low poverty rate that is still higher than other similar populations is not necessarily a good thing; and a high poverty rate when examined in the context of other populations may indicate that the city is performing better than others. In 2015, Memphis shows great improvements not only in poverty rates, but also in the context of other populations. Memphis is no longer the poorest city in the nation overall, although the city needs to continue working toward the elimination of child poverty. Clearly, much work remains to be done, but the 2015 results provide encouragement.

Memphis is no longer the poorest MSA in the nation overall, although remains the MSA with the highest child poverty.

The Relationship between Poverty and Race

It has now been observed for several years that the poverty rate among non-Hispanic Whites Only is much lower in Shelby County than in the state or the nation as a whole. Although in 2014 and in 2015 the poverty rate for non-Hispanic Whites increased both in Memphis and Shelby County, the poverty rate for this group continues to be lower in Shelby County than in the rest of the nation. It is important to note, however, that the poverty rate for this group is also bucking the national trend and increasing. Poverty rates for Blacks and Latinos are dropping nationwide and now this is happening in Memphis and Shelby County as well.

The poor in Memphis tend to be minorities. The poverty rates for Blacks and Latino are higher than the overall poverty rate, and poverty rates for minorities are higher in every age category than poverty rates for non-Hispanic Whites. Moreover, poverty rates for non-Hispanic Whites are lower in Memphis and Shelby County than in Tennessee as a whole or the United States in every age category.

Table 11 – Comparison of Poverty Rates and Poverty Trends for non-Hispanic Whites Only and Blacks Only

Memphis non-Hispanic Whites Only	2015			
	Overall Poverty Rate	Overall Poverty Rank	non-Hispanic White Poverty Rate	non-Hispanic White Poverty Rank
Among Cities for which data are provided (34 cities)	26.2%	2 nd	9.1%	10th
Among MSA for which data are provided (106 MSA)	18.4%	11 th	9.1%	59th

Table by the author from data from the 2015 ACS 1-Y Estimates (Table S0201), September 15, 2016.

It is very interesting to note that while Memphis ranks first in poverty among large metro areas (population greater than 1,000,000), when the rate for non-Hispanic Whites is considered by itself, Memphis ranks much lower. The differences between the poverty rates of minority groups and non-Hispanic Whites are striking.

Nonetheless, the health of a community does improve when all people are included and can participate fully, as evidenced by the fact that poverty rates for non-Hispanic Whites in Memphis and Shelby County have not only not dropped but increased, bucking national trends.

Figures 4-5 – Comparison of Poverty Rates and Poverty Trends for non-Hispanic Whites Only and Blacks Only

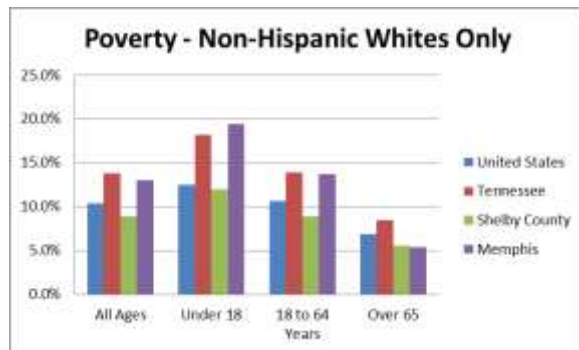


Chart by the author from data from the 2015 ACS 1-Y Estimates, September 15, 2016.

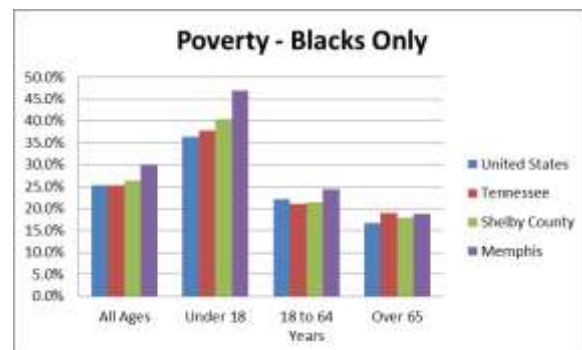


Chart by the author from data from the 2015 ACS 1-Y Estimates, September 15, 2016.

Minorities suffer greater rates of poverty than non-Hispanic Whites in Memphis and Shelby County

Trends in Poverty Rates

The poverty rates for non-Hispanic Whites are better in Shelby County than for the same group in Tennessee or the United States, while the rates for Blacks are generally worse in Memphis and Shelby County than Tennessee or the nation. It is also interesting to note that for non-Hispanic Whites, the worst poverty rates are at the state level. It has been observed that for two years in a row now, poverty rates for non-Hispanic Whites in Memphis are increasing, although it is still too early to tell if the increase means anything.

Poverty Trends – Has Poverty Gotten Worse?

Since 2005, poverty rates in Memphis have risen and the 2008 economic crisis resulted in increased poverty rates for all racial and age groups at that time. It is important to note that some groups were able to recover much sooner. Note that poverty rates among people over age 65 are lower than for the rest of the population. This is attributed to Social Security. In 2012 there was an increase in the poverty rate for people over 65. The overall picture in Memphis in 2016, from the 2015 Census estimate, is

encouraging. It appears that all groups in Memphis are participating in the recovery. Poverty appears to be dropping for almost every group except for non-Hispanic Whites in Shelby County, and even there the increase is only modest.

A Narrowing Gap?

Since their highest point in 2009, poverty rates for non-Hispanic Whites alone have decreased in every age category (although elevated in 2014, this may be a statistical anomaly), but poverty rates for Blacks and Latinos have remained high and the increase in the poverty rate for Latinos appears to have accelerated. A decline in the poverty rate for Latinos observed in the 2011 American Community Survey (ACS, U.S. Bureau of the Census) is now attributed to a statistical anomaly. An interesting observation is that poverty rates among non-Hispanic Whites are now much lower in Memphis and Shelby County than in the state or the nation as a whole. This relationship was not expected.

Figure 6 – Trends in Poverty Rates by Age, Memphis

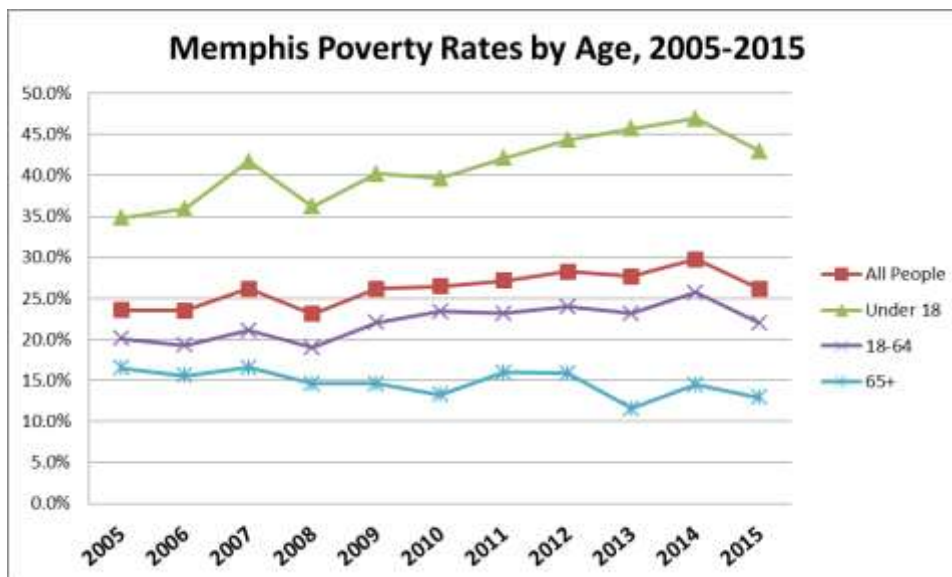


Chart by the author from data from the 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2015 and 2014 ACS 1-Y Estimates and ACS 3-Y Estimates, September 30, 2013 to September 15, 2016.

Children continue suffering the greatest rates of poverty in Memphis and in Shelby County.

Figure 7 – Trends in Poverty Rates by Age, Shelby County

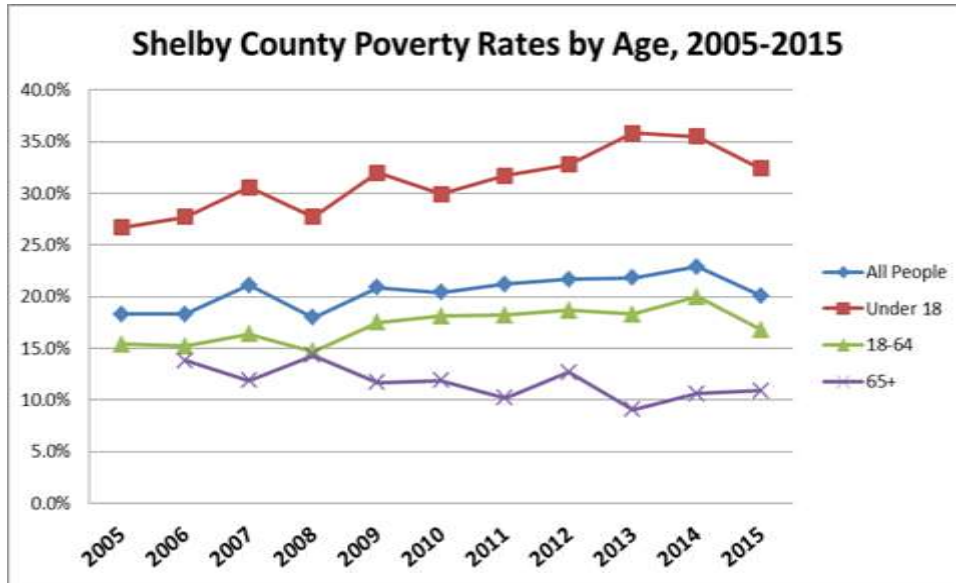


Chart by the author from data from the 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2015 and 2014 ACS 1-Y Estimates and ACS 3-Y Estimates, September 30, 2013 to September 15, 2016.

Figure 8 – Trends in Poverty Rates by Race, Memphis

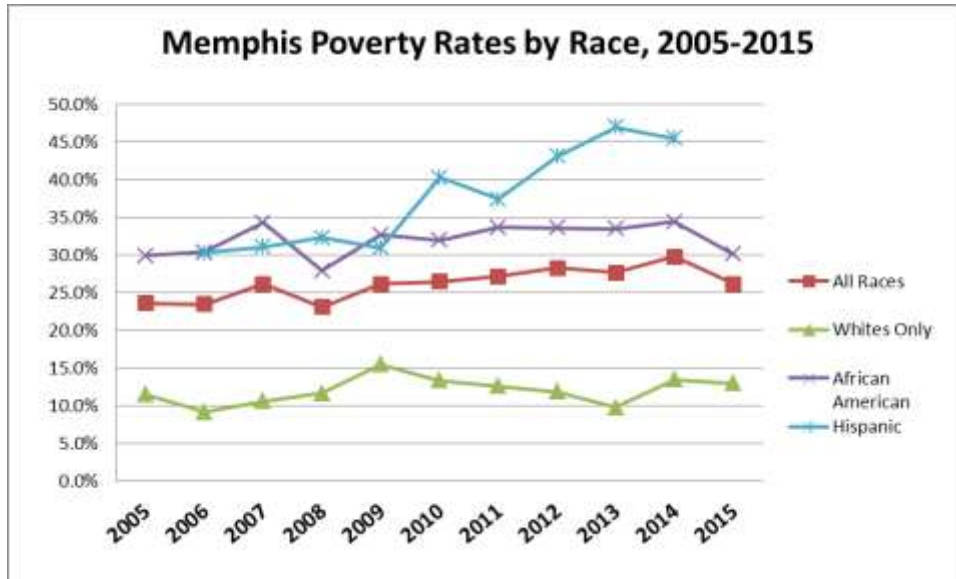


Chart by the author from data from the 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2015 and 2014 ACS 1-Y Estimates and ACS 3-Y Estimates, September 30, 2013 to September 15, 2016.

Figure 9 – Trends in Poverty Rates by Race, Shelby County

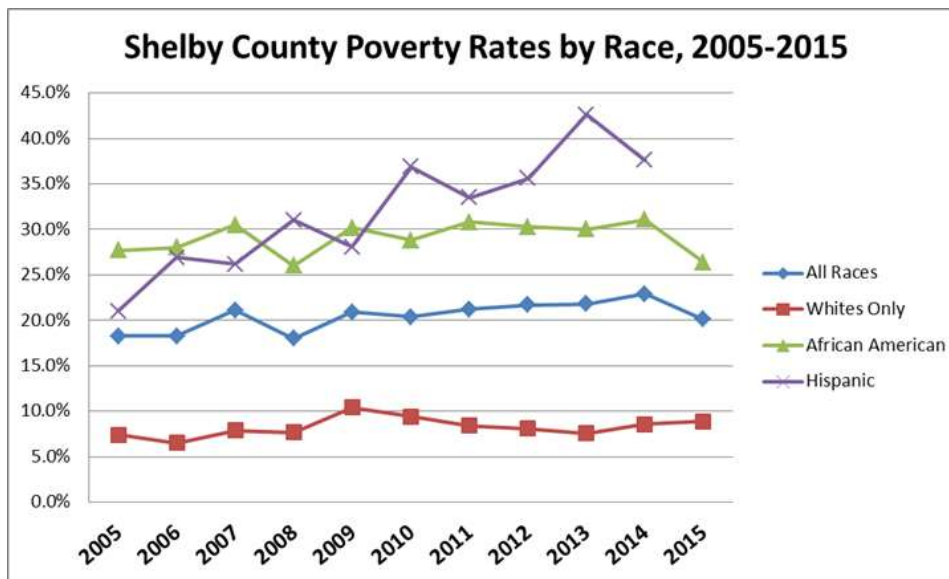


Chart by the author from data from the 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2015 and 2014 ACS 1-Y Estimates and ACS 3-Y Estimates, September 30, 2013 to September 15, 2016.

It is too early to tell whether we are moving toward racial equality, but if current trends continue, it may indeed be happening in Memphis.

The Department of Social Work in the School of Urban Affairs and Public Policy at the University of Memphis is dedicated to understanding poverty and its causes through research and engaged scholarship. Our purpose is to identify the most effective ways to eliminate poverty and promote social and economic development for our region.

The mission of the Benjamin L. Hooks Institute for Social Change is to promote civil rights and social change, primarily through teaching, research, innovative campaigns, and community engagement

If you would like more information on Memphis poverty, please contact Dr. Elena Delavega at mdlavega@memphis.edu

Sources:

Data obtained from the US Bureau of the Census, September 15, 2016

All Data except Latino (Hispanic): 2013, 2014, & 2015 ACS 1-Y Estimates (Table S1701: Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months. Other Tables: DP03, C01001); 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2009, 2011, & 2012 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates (US Bureau of the Census)

Latino (Hispanic) Data: 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, & 2011 American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates (US Bureau of the Census).