

## ***Portrait of America; New Census Data Reveal Redistribution of Poverty - Correction Appended***

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 **Correction Appended**

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**Byline:** By FELICITY BARRINGER,

By FELICITY BARRINGER, Special to The **New** York Times

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### **Body**

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The best evidence yet of the widening economic gulf between the old and the young during the 1980's was provided today in newly released **Census** Bureau **data** that showed the elderly held their own during the decade's economic ups and downs while the nation's children increasingly slid into **poverty**.

The finding is part of a cornucopia of **new** information from the **census** showing growing differences between regions and population groups in areas as varied as the amount of schooling, type of disability, length of the commute, age of housing and ancestry of the nation's 250 million people.

The **data** also confirms the decade's place in immigration history: 8.6 million people told the **census** that they entered the country during the 1980's. That is almost as many immigrants as arrived from 1900 to 1910, the previous high-water mark of **American** immigration.

### **Redistribution of Poverty**

But the starkest picture drawn from the wealth of **new** information is the **portrait** of the **redistribution** of **poverty** among the generations. As the number of people beneath the **poverty** line grew by 4.3 million to more than 31 million between 1979 and 1989, increasing numbers of the poor were children. One in four of **new** entrants into the ranks of the poor in the 1980's was under 18 years of age; one in 25 was 65 or older.

Martha Farnsworth Riche, director of the Population Reference Bureau, a private Washington-based research organization, said the elderly fared relatively well because the Federally financed safety net was held relatively intact for them. "The indexing of Social Security payments to inflation was probably the single biggest factor that got people out of **poverty**," Ms. Riche said.

"A similar thing was not done for children. We just assume that parents raise children. Because we're all going to be elderly and we all have elderly parents, we just think that society provides for the elderly."

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The nation's adults had higher percentages of high school and college graduates, and the percentage of high school dropouts had declined from 13 percent to 11 percent. But the educational gains were not reflected in the economic statistics, which showed growing numbers of poor people.

The figures make up a snapshot of the nation's economic health just before the current recession began, but the trends reflected in the census are continuing, according to more recent data.

The Census statistics on commuting show a smaller portion of workers using car pools or public transportation. The percentage of workers who drive alone to their jobs rose to 73.2 percent from 64.4 percent a decade ago; car-pool use dropped from 19.7 percent to 13.4 percent and public transit ridership fell from 6.4 percent to 5.3 percent.

Among the most striking geographic trends was the tendency of the rest of the nation to pull away from the Appalachian and Mississippi River states of Louisiana, Mississippi, Arkansas and West Virginia, which were consistently poorer, younger and less educated than other areas.

The data also reflected the rapid pace of income decline in these regions, the Farm Belt and the Great Plains. Median income levels declined by at least 10 percent over the drought-plagued decade in Iowa, Montana, North Dakota, Wisconsin and Wyoming, as well as in Louisiana and West Virginia.

But there was marked economic buoyancy in states with large suburban populations. Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, Maryland, Virginia, New Hampshire, Massachusetts and California all ranked among the top 10 states in the nation in median income; all but New Hampshire ranked among the top 10 in the percentage of population earning more than \$150,000 annually.

These states, however, were among the first to see their economies fall into recession in 1991 and have been among the hardest-hit by the current economic doldrums.

The newly released census figures reveal a wide range of information:

\*Median income levels, adjusted for inflation, shrank during the 1980's in 24 states, from the Farm Belt to the depressed manufacturing states of Michigan, Ohio and Illinois to Texas, Arizona and New Mexico.

\*Accounting for inflation, the median household income for the nation rose 6.5 percent to \$30,056 a year, but the median amount spent on mortgage payments increased 26.9 percent, to \$737 a month or \$8,844 a year.

\*Southeastern states, where education spending has historically been low, registered the sharpest gains in high school graduates. But even with these gains, the populations of North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia remained among the least-educated. The best-educated populations were clustered in the West and Midwest, in states like Minnesota, Nebraska, Oregon, Utah, Alaska and Colorado.

\*About 10 percent of the population ages 16 to 64, or 16.1 million people, had impaired mobility or needed help with basic tasks like dressing. One-third of those 65 or older, or 10.5 million people, were limited in mobility or in their ability to care for themselves.

\*The proportion of the population speaking a language other than English at home more than doubled, from 6.6 percent to 13.8 percent, or nearly 32 million people.

\*About one housing unit in five was built during the 1980's, compared with more than one in four in the 1970's. One dwelling in every 30 in New Mexico, West Virginia and Louisiana lacked complete plumbing facilities; in Alaska, the ratio is one in eight.

### 15 Million Households

The census data released today was compiled from "long-form" questionnaires filled out by more than 15 million households, a sample size that dwarfs any other government or private research effort. As a result, while the

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numbers are somewhat dated, they also allow detailed regional and local analysis of everything from household type to commuting patterns.

One of the most striking facets revealed in the new data was the divergence in economic trends, which was often hidden within larger aggregates. For instance, California ranked fourth in the country in the proportion of households with annual incomes in excess of \$150,000.

Yet while the state's median income grew by 17 percent in constant dollars -- more than twice as fast as the national average -- the number of California children in poverty increased by 40 percent. These high childhood poverty increases were explained partly, though not completely, by the 20 percent increase in the number of Californians under the age of 18.

California also ranked well below the national average in the proportion of working mothers, although it compared favorably with the rest of the country on the proportion of female-headed households in poverty. Half of such households in California were poor; the national rate was 57.4 percent.

Another cross-current was revealed in the data on 16- to 19-year-old high school dropouts. This group declined as a proportion of all older teen-agers, going to 6.6 percent in 1989 from 7.8 percent in 1979. But while in general they were concentrated in the inner cities and poor rural areas, the dropouts seemed to be where the unskilled work was.

In 1990, teen-age dropouts without work were concentrated in traditional bastions of rural poverty like Mississippi, aging industrial states like New York, or states like North Carolina and Oregon, whose economies were rapidly shifting from resource-based industries, like timber and tobacco, to service- and technology-based industries.

But the greatest number of dropouts, including both the employed and the idle, could be found in Nevada, Arizona, and Florida, all among the top five in new home construction, an industry that provides lucrative if short-term employment for the unskilled and semiskilled.

Among the states that had the fewest people moving in, three -- Michigan, Pennsylvania and New York -- had major cities where poverty became more concentrated over the decade, and where the shift in poverty from the old to the young was most evident.

The number of working mothers was measured in the census for the first time in 1990, and the figures revealed some regional disparities. Though nearly 60 percent of mothers of preschool children worked, the percentage of working mothers of school-age children was 75 percent. But these totals were much lower in the Middle Atlantic States, particularly in New York, where 52 percent of mothers with preschool children worked, along with 71 percent of those with school-age children.

The proportion of working mothers was also below the national average in California, and it was well above the national average in Hawaii, New Hampshire, Minnesota and the Dakotas.

Though the proportion of blacks, Asians and Hispanic people in the country climbed over the past decade, all three were outnumbered by whites claiming English ancestry (32.6 million), German (57.9 million) and Irish (38.7 million). Other European ancestries most frequently claimed were Italian and Polish.

About 30 million black residents were counted in the 1990 census, along with 7.3 million Asians or Pacific Islanders, and 1.9 million Americans Indians, Eskimos or Aleuts. There were also 22.3 million Hispanic people, who can be of any race, among the total resident population of 248.7 million people.

Though the census long-form data is collected to meet the requirements of various Federal laws, like statutes on highway and mass-transit subsidies and national welfare programs based on poverty rates, statisticians are beginning to discuss alternative means of collecting this data. Several witnesses at a Congressional hearing on census strategies suggested that smaller samples be taken at more frequent intervals to keep the data up to date.

## Correction

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Because of a computer processing error, an article and a chart last Friday about the 1990 **Census** misstated percentages of 16- to 19-year-olds who have dropped out of school and are not working. The five states with the lowest percentages are North Dakota, 2.81; Minnesota, 3.52; Nebraska, 3.67; Wisconsin, 3.74, and Iowa, 3.77. The states with the highest percentages are Kentucky, 9.16; Louisiana, 9.11; Arizona, 8.53, and West Virginia, 8.36. The District of Columbia had the highest percentage, 10.55.

**Correction-Date:** June 5, 1992, Friday

## Graphic

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Maps: "Shifts in Residence and Language Differences" shows percentage of people who live in the state where they now live, and shows percentage of people in each state who speak no English. (pg. A11)

Charts: "Education" shows the percentage of people 25 years old and older who are high school graduates in the top and bottom five states, shows the percentage point increase in high school graduates, 1980 to 1990, in the top and bottom five states, and shows the percentage of 16 to 19 year olds who have dropped out and are not working in the top and bottom five states; "Disability" shows the percentage of non-institutionalized people age 16 to 64 with limited mobility in the top and bottom five states; "Telephone Access" shows those without phones in their house or apartment in the top and bottom five states (pg. A14); "Income" shows the median household income, 1990 **Census**, in the top and bottom five states, and shows the change in median household income, 1980 **Census** to 1990 **Census**, in the top and bottom five states; "**Poverty**" shows people in **poverty** in 1990 in the top and bottom five states, shows percentage point change in **poverty**, 1980 **Census** to 1990 **Census**, in the top and bottom five states, and shows female-headed families, with related children under 5 years old, in **poverty**, in the top and bottom five states. (pg. A15)

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