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Bureau of the Census Statistical Brief

Poverty's Revolving Door

Poor persons don't necessarily stay poor. Twenty-two percent of Americans who lived in poverty in 1991 were no longer poor in 1992 — about 5.8 million persons in all.

Who exited poverty?

If you were poor in 1991, you had a relatively good chance of escaping poverty in 1992 if you were a member of a *married-couple family* the entire 2-year period. About 3 in 10 such persons who were poor in 1991 were no longer poor the next year. The corresponding proportion for those in other types of families both years was only 14 percent. Likewise —

■ *Whites* were another group that fared well — over one-quarter (26 percent) who were poor in 1991 were not poor the next year. By comparison, 13 percent of Blacks and a similar proportion of

Hispanics exited poverty. Notably, exit rates have worsened for Blacks: 17 percent of those who were poor in 1990 escaped poverty in 1991.

■ Also doing better than the norm were *adults aged 18 to 64*. More than one-quarter (26 percent) poor in 1991 exited poverty in 1992. The respective rates for children and the elderly were only 19 and 12 percent.

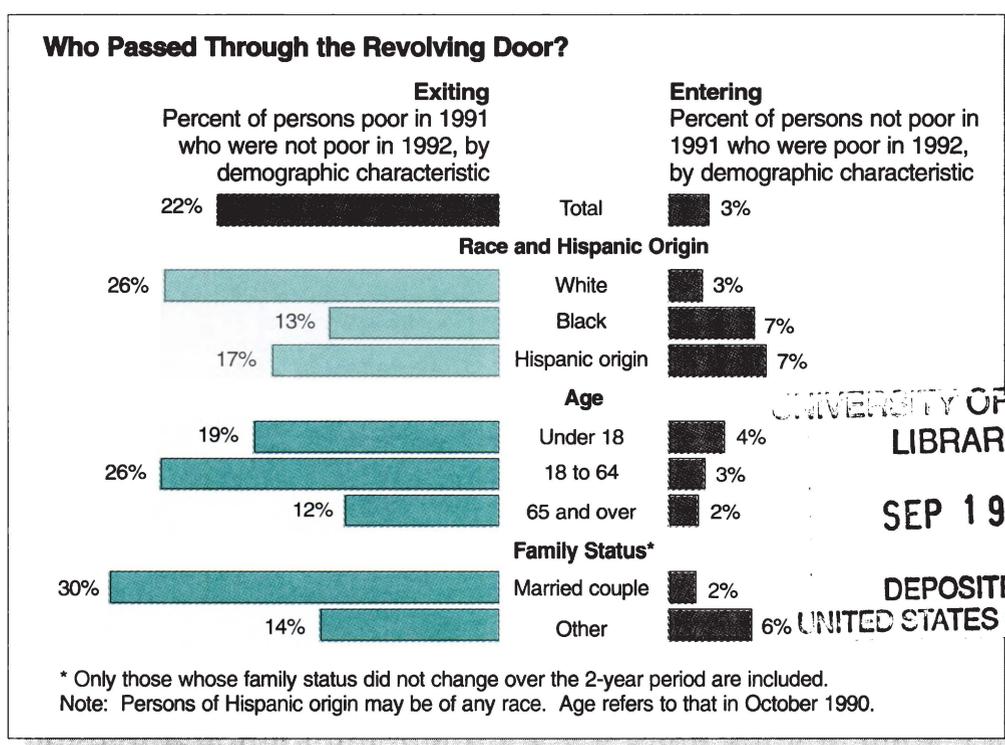
Who entered poverty?

The persons who moved out of poverty were replaced by those who moved into it, as 3 percent of those above the poverty level in 1991 (about 6.5 million) slipped

below it in 1992. Hispanics, Blacks, children, and persons in non-married couple families in both years had higher-than-average entry rates.

Who remained poor?

Clearly, a great many people move into and out of poverty. However, for a large number of people, poverty is a persistent condition. About 20.9 million persons, or 78 percent, who were poor in 1991, remained so in 1992. For many of these 20.9 million, poverty was an *especially* persistent situation. These were the "chronically poor." To be counted as chronically poor, one's monthly family income had to fall below the



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appropriate monthly poverty threshold *each of the 24 months* of 1991 and 1992. An estimated 11.8 million Americans — or 5 percent overall — fell into this category. Groups especially prone to chronic poverty included —

■ *Persons who, during the entire 2-year period, were members of families maintained by a woman without a husband present.* They were about 20 times more apt to have been chronically poor than persons who were part of a married-couple family the entire time (20 percent compared with 1 percent). The former group (combined with those in male-householder families the entire time) made up 56 percent of the chronically poor. The latter group comprised only 18 percent.

■ *Children.* They were about three times as likely as nonelderly adults to have been chronically poor (9 percent versus 3 percent). Consequently, children comprised 48 percent of the chronically poor, while nonelderly adults constituted 41 percent.

■ *Blacks and Hispanics.* Chronic poverty rates for them were 16 and 12 percent, respectively, much higher than the 3 percent for Whites. Even so, Whites still comprised a majority (55 percent) of the chronically poor. Another 40 percent were Black while 22 percent were Hispanic.

More information:

This Brief uses data collected by the Survey of Income and Program Participation. *Dynamics of Economic Well-Being: Poverty, 1991 to 1993*, Current Population Reports, Series P70-45, expands on the information in this Brief. Contact Customer Services (301-457-4100) for ordering information.

How Long Do We Stay in Poverty?

Median number of months stays in poverty lasted (among those who became poor after Oct. 1990), by selected demographic characteristic: Oct. 1990-Aug. 1993

All persons	4.3
White	4.1
Black	5.8
Hispanic	5.0
Under 18 years old	4.7
18 to 64 years old	4.0
65 years old or over	7.0
In female-householder family the entire period	6.4
In married-couple family the entire period	3.9

Note: The annual poverty status of persons is determined by summing their monthly family income over a calendar year, then comparing the total to the sum of the 12 corresponding monthly poverty thresholds, based on family size and composition in each month.

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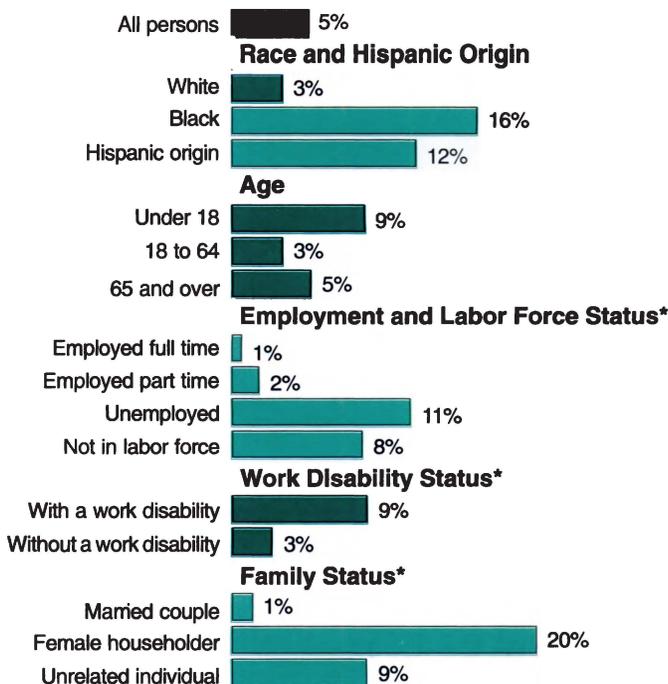
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Who Was Chronically Poor?

Percent of persons who were chronically poor (poor every month of 1991 and 1992), by selected characteristic



* Only those whose status did not change over the 2-year period are included. Note: Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race. Age refers to that in October 1990.