



2015 Memphis Poverty Fact Sheet (Data from 2014 ACS)

Who are the Memphis Poor?

Memphis has a poverty rate of 29.8%. Child poverty is 46.9%, while poverty rates for people over age 65 are the lowest at 14.5%. Poverty rates for Blacks are 34.4%, and 45.5% of Latinos are poor, while the poverty rate among non-Hispanic Whites is 13.5%.

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, poverty rates for non-Hispanic whites are higher in Memphis and Shelby County than in 2013.

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

2013 Poverty Rate	Overall	Under 18	18-64	Over 65	Non-Hispanic White	Black	Latino	Asian
Memphis	29.8%	46.9%	25.7%	14.5%	13.5%	34.4%	45.5%	26.7%
Shelby County	22.9%	35.5%	20.0%	10.6%	8.6%	31.1%	37.6%	16.5%
Tennessee	18.3%	26.2%	17.4%	10.1%	14.0%	29.7%	34.7%	13.1%
United States	15.5%	22.7%	14.6%	9.5%	10.6%	25.8%	23.7%	12.3%

New in 2015

Poverty has caught up with non-Hispanic Whites. Poverty rates among the members of this group have increased dramatically in both Memphis and Shelby County.

Not-So-New in 2015

For the second year in a row, while poverty rates have declined for the U.S., they have increased in Memphis, Shelby County, and Tennessee.

Poverty rates in Memphis and Shelby County are higher than poverty rates for the United States and for Tennessee.

Good News for Latinos

In Memphis and Shelby County as in the United States as a whole, poverty rates among Latinos decreased. It is too early to conclude that this is a trend, however. This may indicate a positive trend, or it may just be the result of a statistical anomaly.

Figure 1 – Percent of the Population under Poverty

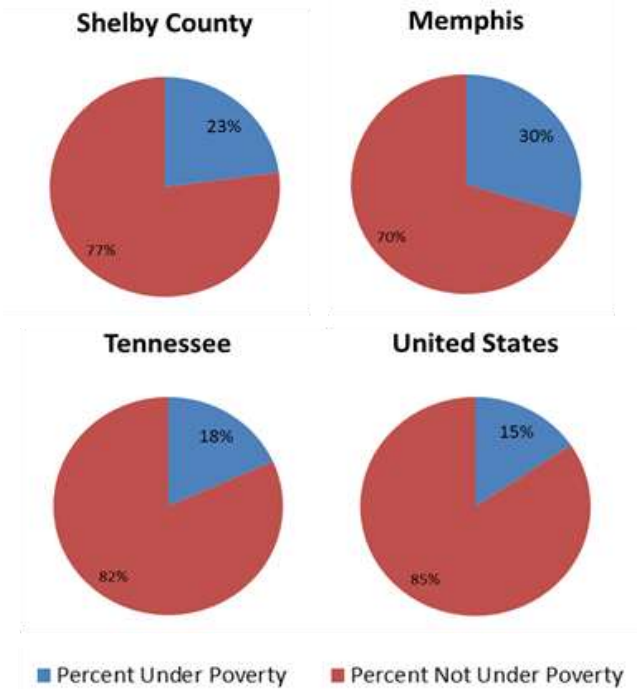


Chart by the author from data from the 2013 and 2014 ACS 1-Y Estimates (Tables C01001 and C17001), September 17, 2015.

Figure 2 – Poverty Rates in 2013 and 2014 in Memphis and Shelby County

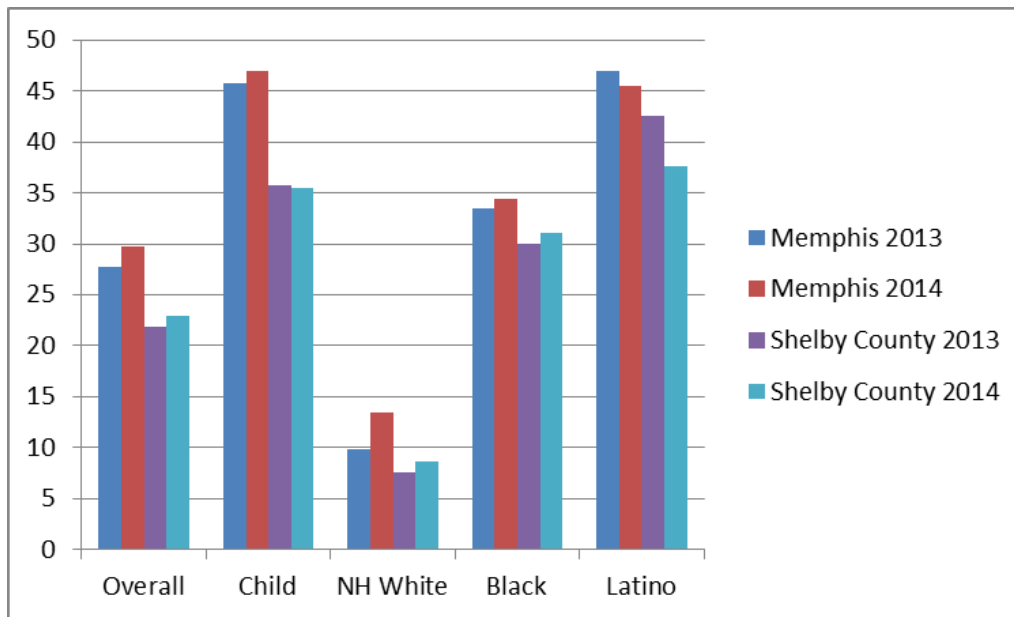


Chart by the author from data from the 2013 and 2014 ACS 1-Y Estimates (Tables C01001 and C17001), September 17, 2015.

Figure 3 – Percent Change in Poverty Rates

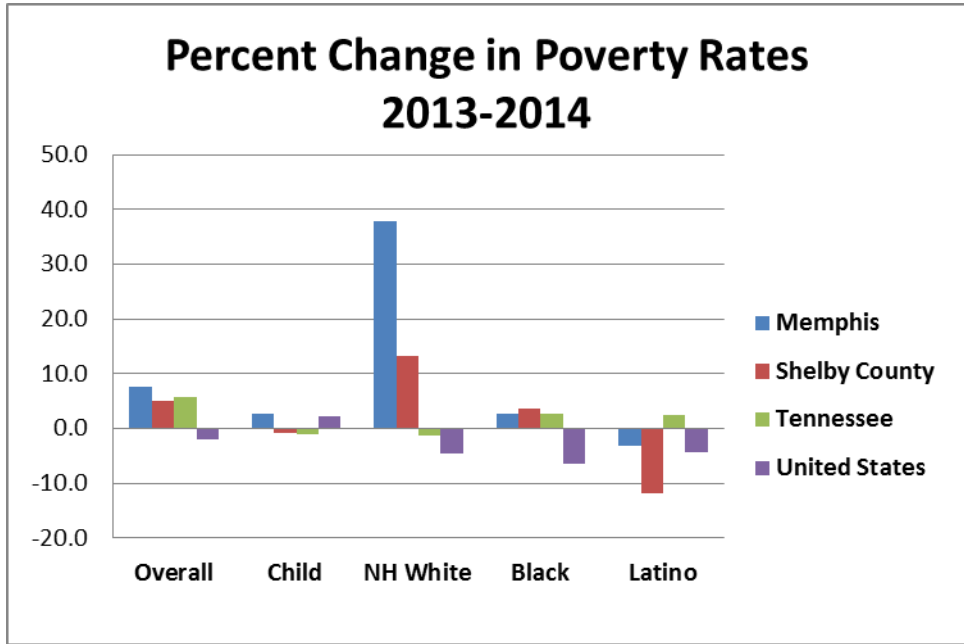


Chart by the author from data from the 2013 and 2014 ACS 1-Y Estimates (Tables C01001 and C17001), September 17, 2015.

Tables 2-4 – Poverty Rates by Age, Race, and Location

Memphis, TN-MS-AR Metro Area							
All Ages	Under 18	18-64	65+	Non-Hispanic White	Black	Latino	Asian
20.3%	30.8%	17.9%	10.7%	9.2%	29.9%	34.9%	16.7%

The Intersection of Age and Race	Memphis City				Shelby County			
	All Ages	Under 18	18-64	65+	All Ages	Under 18	18-64	65+
All Races	29.8%	46.9%	25.7%	14.5%	22.9%	35.5%	20.0%	10.6%
non-Hispanic White	13.5%	12.9%	16.1%	4.8%	8.6%	7.7%	10.3%	3.7%
Black	34.4%	52.9%	28.3%	21.3%	31.1%	47.8%	25.5%	19.3%
Latino	45.5%	64.8%	34.2%	N/A	37.6%	51.8%	29.0%	N/A

The Intersection of Age and Race	Tennessee				United States			
	All Ages	Under 18	18-64	65+	All Ages	Under 18	18-64	65+
All Races	18.3%	26.2%	17.4%	10.1%	15.5%	22.7%	14.6%	9.5%
non-Hispanic White	14.0%	17.5%	14.3%	8.7%	10.6%	12.8%	10.9%	7.1%
Black	29.7%	44.8%	25.2%	18.1%	25.8%	37.6%	22.4%	17.1%
Latino	34.7%	46.1%	28.2%	9.9%	23.7%	31.6%	19.9%	19.1%

Poverty Rankings

In 2014, Memphis retained the unfortunate top spot in both overall and child (under 18) poverty rates among Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSA) with populations greater than 1,000,000, a rather unsavory achievement. When including MSA with populations greater than 500,000, Memphis has shown an increase in overall poverty rates, moving from fourth place to third. Worse still, even as child poverty rates continue to decline at the national level, the child poverty rate in Memphis has increased. Memphis appears to have lost ground in every case, getting closer to the first spot in every demographic category (cities over 500,000, MSA over 500,000, and MSA over 1,000,000).

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.

Table 5 – Memphis’ Rank in Poverty Rates

Memphis		2013		2014			
		Poverty Rate	Poverty Rank	Poverty Rate	Poverty Rank	Rank Change	% Change
Among Cities with Populations Greater than 500,000 (34 Cities)	Overall	27.7%	4 th	29.8%	3 rd	1	7.6%
	Under 18	45.7%	3 rd	46.9%	2 nd	1	2.6%
Among MSA with Populations Greater than 500,000 (104 MSA)	Overall	19.8%	10 th	20.3%	6 th	4	2.5%
	Under 18	30.6%	7 th	30.8%	5 th	2	0.7%
Among MSA with Populations Greater than 1,000,000 (52 MSA)	Overall	19.8%	1 st	20.3%	1 st	----	2.5%
	Under 18	30.6%	1 st	30.8%	1 st	----	0.7%

Table 6 – Highest Poverty Rates in Cities and MSA in the United States

Highest Poverty Rates Rank 1		2013		2014			
		Rank 1	Poverty Rate	Rank 1	Poverty Rate	Rank Change	% Change
Among Cities with Populations Greater than 500,000 (34 Cities)	Overall	Detroit city, Michigan	40.7%	Detroit city, Michigan	39.3%	----	-3.4%
	Under 18	Detroit City, Michigan	58.6%	Detroit City, Michigan	57.1%	----	-2.6%
Among MSA with Populations Greater than 500,000 (104 MSA)	Overall	McAllen-Edinburg-Mission, TX Metro Area	34.3%	McAllen-Edinburg-Mission, TX Metro Area	34%	----	-0.7%
	Under 18	McAllen-Edinburg-Mission, TX Metro Area	44.9%	McAllen-Edinburg-Mission, TX Metro Area	46.5%	----	3.6%
Among MSA with Populations Greater than 1,000,000 (52 MSA)	Overall	Memphis, TN-MS-AR Metro Area	19.8%	Memphis, TN-MS-AR Metro Area	20.3%	----	2.5%
	Under 18	Memphis, TN-MS-AR Metro Area	30.6%	Memphis, TN-MS-AR Metro Area	30.8%	----	0.7%

What the Rankings Mean

The cities and MSA that ranked first in overall and child (under 18) poverty rates retained their dubious first places. However, poverty rates in general did not increase or decrease. The exception was the child (under 18) poverty rate in the Memphis MSA (among MSA with populations over 1,000,000), which increased 3% from 2012 to 2013, a disheartening fact given the direction of other poverty rates.

Memphis Has the Highest Poverty Rates, But Not for Everyone

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 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 even as they have increased in Tennessee.

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

Memphis non-Hispanic Whites Only	2014			
	Overall Poverty Rate	Overall Poverty Rank	non-Hispanic White Poverty Rate	non-Hispanic White Poverty Rank
Among Cities with Populations Greater than 500,000 (34 Cities)	29.8%	3rd	13.9%	10th
Among MSA with Populations Greater than 500,000 (104 MSA)	20.3%	6th	9.2%	63th
Among MSA with Populations Greater than 1,000,000 (52 MSA)	20.3%	1st	9.2%	25nd

It is very interesting to note that while Memphis ranks first among large metro areas (population greater than 1,000,000), when the poverty 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.

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

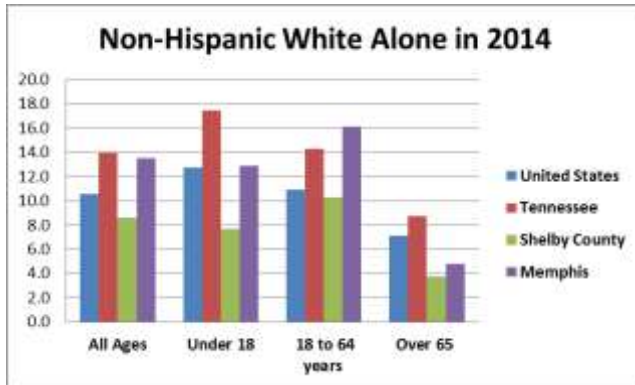


Chart by the author from data from the 2012 ACS 1-Y Estimates, September 30, 2013.

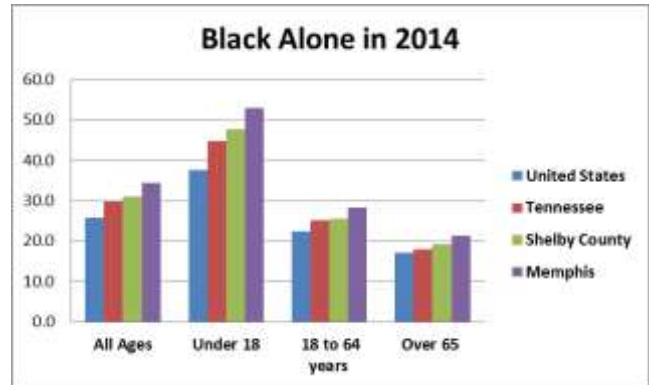


Chart by the author from data from the 2012 ACS 1-Y Estimates, September 30, 2013.

Trends in Poverty Rates

The poverty rates for non-Hispanic Whites are better in Memphis and Shelby County than for the same group in Tennessee or the United States, while the rates for Blacks are worse. It is also interesting to note that for non-Hispanic Whites, the worst poverty rates are at the state level. A caveat for 2014 is that poverty rates for non-Hispanic Whites in Memphis are much higher than in 2013, although it is 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. Given 2014 figures, the hopeful decrease in poverty among senior Americans appears to have reversed itself.

The Widening 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 ACS 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 is not expected.

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

Figure 6 – Trends in Poverty Rates by Age, Memphis

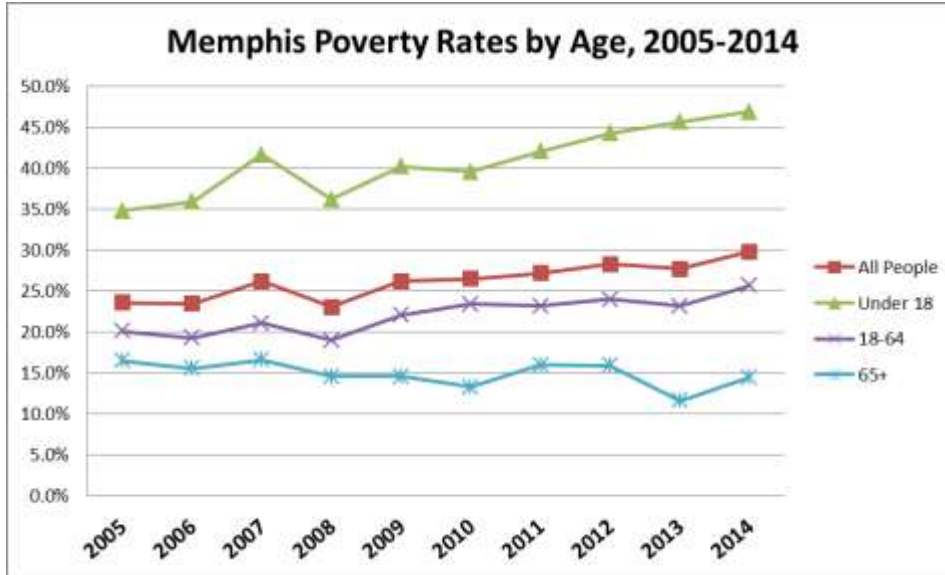


Chart by the author from data from the 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, and 2014 ACS 1-Y Estimates and ACS 3-Y Estimates, September 30, 2013 to September 17, 2015.

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

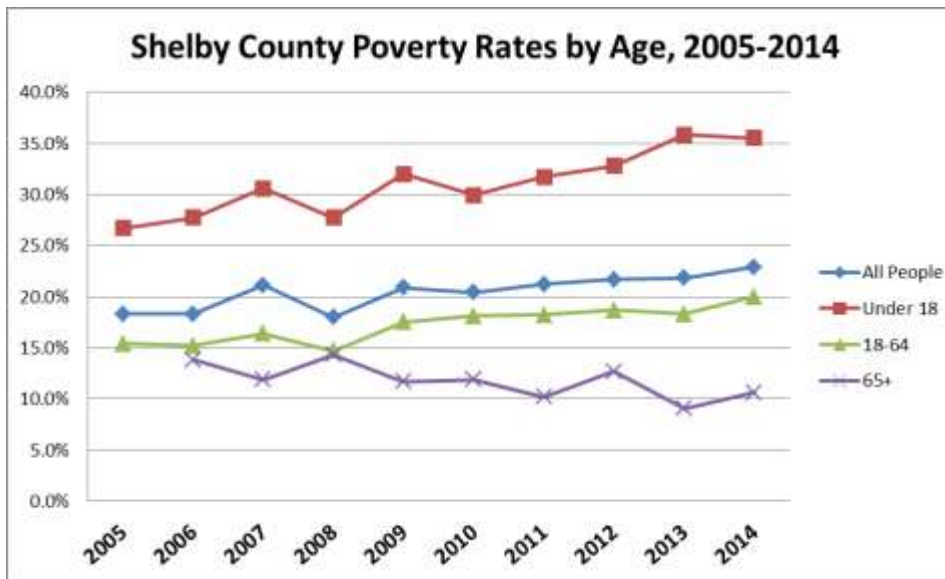


Chart by the author from data from the 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, and 2014 ACS 1-Y Estimates and ACS 3-Y Estimates, September 30, 2013 to September 17, 2015.

Children continue suffering the greatest rates of poverty

Figure 8 – Trends in Poverty Rates by Race, Memphis

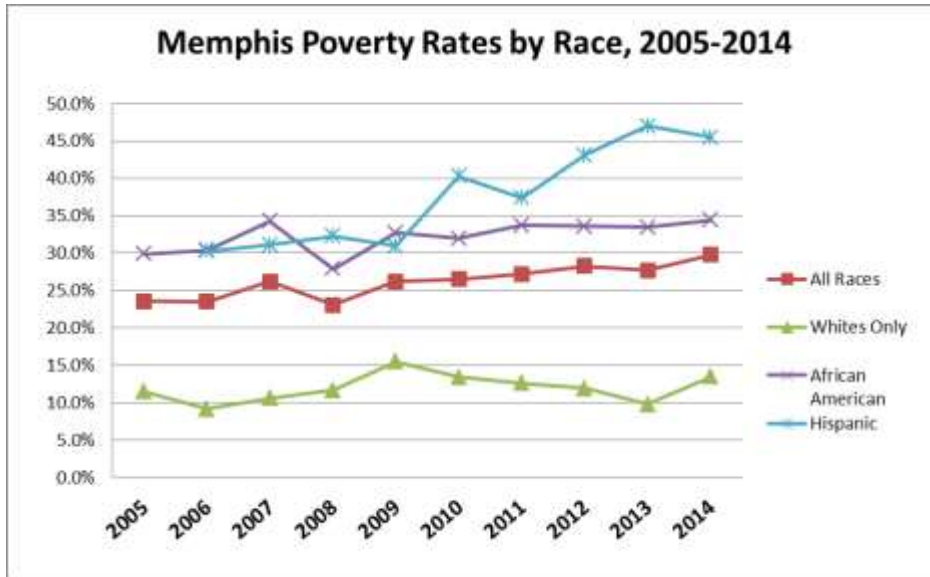


Chart by the author from data from the 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, and 2014 ACS 1-Y Estimates and ACS 3-Y Estimates, September 30, 2013 to September 17, 2015.

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

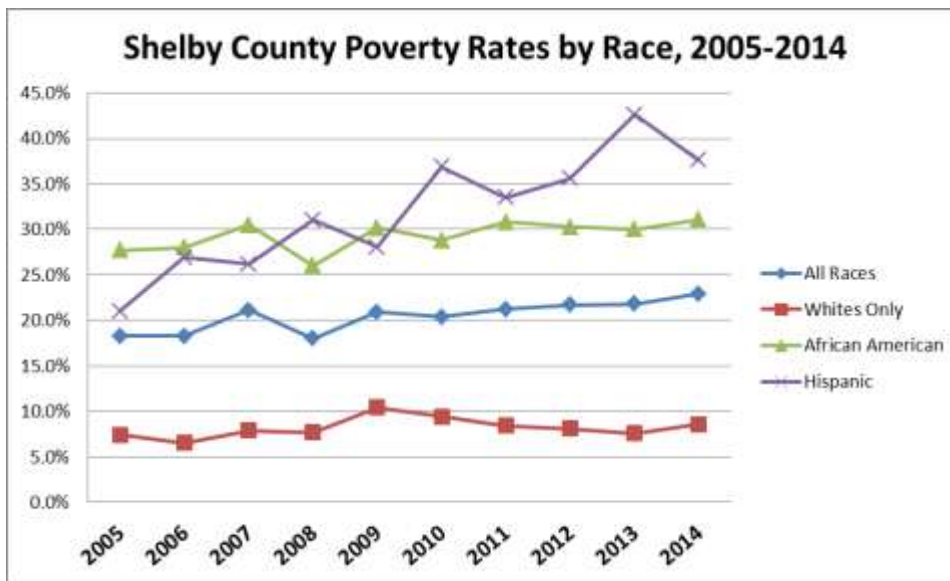


Chart by the author from data from the 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, and 2014 ACS 1-Y Estimates and ACS 3-Y Estimates, September 30, 2013 to September 17, 2015.

It is too early to tell whether we are moving toward racial equality.

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. 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 17, 2015

All Data except Latino (Hispanic): 2013 and 2014 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).