

# VOLUME 1 HOUSTON POVERTY FACT SHEET 2024

The 2024 Houston Poverty Fact Sheet, Produced by Dr. Dawn McCarty, from the University of Houston-Downtown, Dr. Elena Delavega of the School of Social Work at the University of Memphis, and Dr. Gregory M. Blumenthal. Data from the 2023 American Community Survey Released in September 2024, and previous datasets.

*Houston and  
Harris County*

# 2024 Houston Poverty Fact Sheet

## (Data from 2023 and previous ACS)

### ***Who are the Houston Poor?***

Knowing the *facts* about poverty is the first step in any mitigation or eradication strategy. The following data sets, with added context have been created for both the learner and the expert. The economic and social issues that create poverty will not be solved by the same top-down model that helped to create them. Therefore, this information is free, accurately reported, and available to anyone that finds public service their professional or personal calling.

We start this presentation by asking, “How does Houston compare?”:

***Table 1 – Diverse Poverty Rates in Houston, Harris County, Texas, and the United States***

2023 Poverty Rate	Overall	Under 18	18-64	Over 65	Non-Hispanic White	Hispanic/Latino	Black	Asian
United States	12.5%	16.0%	11.5%	11.3%	9.4%	16.6%	20.8%	9.9%
Texas	13.7%	18.4%	12.1%	12.3%	8.3%	18.4%	18.3%	9.1%
Harris County	16.0%	23.0%	13.7%	13.4%	6.9%	20.6%	21.2%	10.7%
Houston City	19.5%	28.8%	16.7%	16.8%	8.1%	24.5%	24.4%	12.8%
Houston-Pasadena-The Woodlands, TX Metro Area	13.9%	19.3%	12.0%	11.9%	7.1%	18.8%	18.1%	10.0%

### ***The Poverty Rate in Houston and Harris County Compared to National Rates***

The City of Houston, the fourth largest in the nation, is contained within the larger boundaries of Harris County. In general, poverty rates for the City of Houston are higher than poverty rates in the surrounding Harris County, as well as higher in the even larger Houston Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) for every category. However, as compared to the State, the poverty rates for older adults (65+), and non-Hispanic Whites are notable higher in the State of Texas than in the Houston MSA. This makes sense when looking at the composition of the Houston MSA. According to the Greater Houston Partnership’s *Houston Metropolitan Statistical Area Profile* (<https://www.houston.org/houston-data/houston-metropolitan-statistical-area-profile>), the Houston MSA comprises over seven million people across nine counties, creating an economic powerhouse comparable at the state level.

**Map of Houston MSA Counties (Map borrowed from the Greater Houston Partnership)**



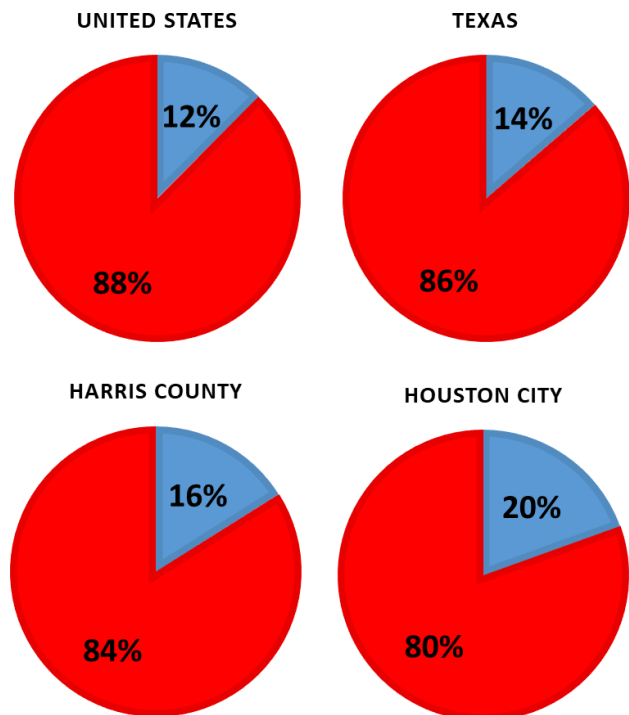
**Of Note in 2023**

**Economic Disparities:** In 2023, both Harris County and the City of Houston had a higher percent of persons living in poverty as compared to the United States.

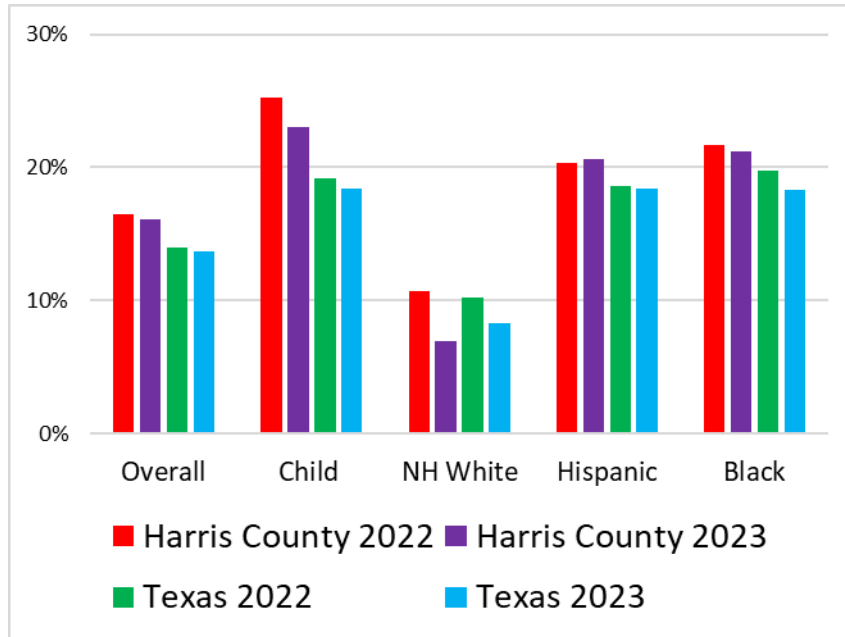
While 16% of the larger region of Harris County residents lived in poverty, the most notable disparity is found between the City of Houston with 20%

of residents living in poverty as compared to 12% nationwide. These percentages, as displayed below, are not equally distributed by race, ethnicity, or age.

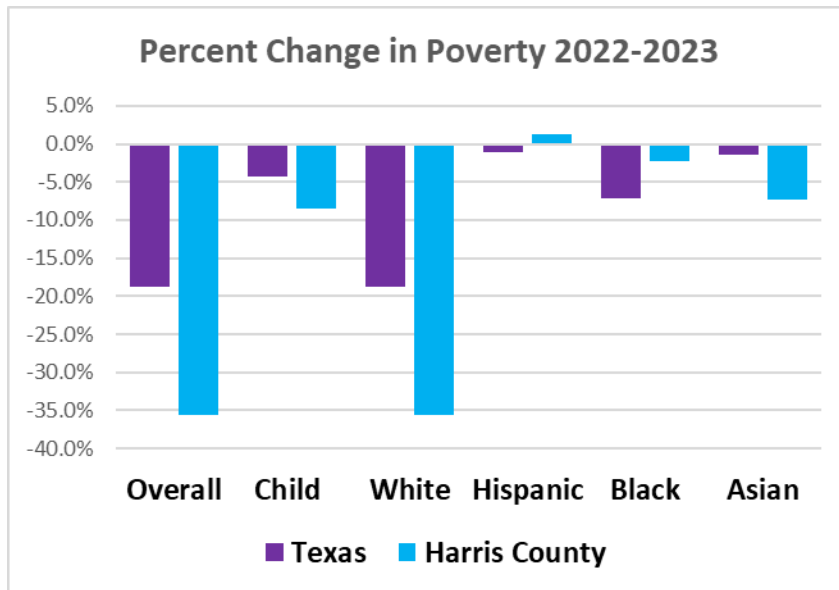
**Figure 1 – Percent of the Population in Poverty**



**Figure 2 – Change in Poverty Rates in Texas and Harris County from 2022 to 2023**



**Figure 3 – Percent Change in Poverty Rates in Texas and Harris County from 2022 to 2023**



**Figure 4 – Percent Change Table**

	White			Black			Hispanic			Asian		
	2022	2023	% Change	2022	2023	% Change	2022	2023	% Change	2022	2023	% Change
Texas	10.2%	8.3%	-18.7%	19.7%	18.3%	-7.1%	18.6%	18.4%	-1.0%	9.2%	9.1%	-1.5%
Harris County	10.7%	6.9%	-35.5%	21.7%	21.2%	-2.3%	20.3%	20.6%	1.3%	11.5%	10.7%	-7.3%
	Overall			Child			Over 65					
	2022	2023	% Change	2022	2023	% Change	2022	2023	% Change			
Texas	14.0%	13.7%	-2.3%	19.2%	18.4%	-4.3%	12.3%	12.3%	-0.3%			
Harris County	16.5%	16.0%	-2.8%	25.2%	23.0%	-8.6%	13.8%	13.4%	-2.8%			

Although there are within-group changes in poverty percents, between-group differences remain stark by age, race, and ethnicity, with non-Hispanic Whites experiencing poverty at a significantly lower level. Overall, between 2022 and 2023 in Harris County and Statewide, poverty fell: 1) significantly for children and 2) non-Hispanic Whites, 3) fell moderately for Black residents, and 4) rose slightly for the Hispanic population. Despite some gains, the between-groups disparity by age, race, and ethnicity persisted.

Texas, and in particular Houston and Harris County has been a historical global migrant destination and is home to an estimated half a million unauthorized persons. This population majority identifies as Hispanic, which may help to interpret worsening poverty for this population as they did not benefit directly from state or federal COVID 19 relief funds due to immigration status, despite their economic contributions to the region.

## DETAILED POVERTY TABLES

**Table 2– The Poverty Intersection of Race and Age: United States**

United States						
2023	Overall	Non-Hispanic White	Black	Latino or Hispanic	Asian	Native American
Population Size	327,076,658	187,103,200	39,083,010	63,927,863	19,639,711	3,241,972
Median Household Income	\$77,719	\$83,121	\$53,927	\$69,467	\$111,817	\$61,061
Overall Poverty Rate	12.5%	9.4%	20.8%	16.6%	9.9%	20.6%
Child (Under 18) Poverty Rate	16.0%	10.0%	29.3%	21.6%	10.0%	26.7%
Poverty Rate for People 18-64	11.5%	9.4%	17.9%	14.1%	9.1%	18.6%
Poverty Rate for People 65+	11.3%	9.1%	19.3%	18.2%	13.5%	18.3%

**Table 3 – The Poverty Intersection of Race and Age: Texas**

Texas					
	Overall	Non-Hispanic White	Non-Hispanic Black	Latino or Hispanic	Asian
Population Size (in thousands)	30,029,572	11,683,430	3,508,706	12,070,642	1,608,173
Median Household Income	\$72,284	\$86,229	\$55,759	\$60,504	\$107,673
Overall Poverty Rate	13.7%	8.3%	18.3%	18.4%	9.1%
Child (Under 18) Poverty Rate	18.4%	8.1%	25.7%	24.3%	9.9%
Poverty Rate for People 18-64	12.1%	8.3%	15.3%	15.4%	8.3%
Poverty Rate for People 65+	12.3%	8.4%	18.4%	19.3%	12.2%

In Texas, the median household income is lower than the US median income by \$5,435, and overall while poverty is somewhat higher in Texas, there are some notable differences. Looking specifically at children, Black children are doing better in Texas with 25.7% in poverty vs. 29.3%, while non-White Hispanic children are doing worse in Texas at 25.7% vs. 21.6% in the US. These relationships change as we move from the State of Texas to Harris County and Houston.

***in Harris County 30.3% of Black children  
and 28.2% of Hispanic children are  
living in poverty.***

Despite the reductions in poverty for most in the City of Houston and surrounding Harris County in 2023, Black children and Hispanic children still fare worse in Harris County with 30.3% of Black children and 28.2% of Hispanic children living in poverty. Asian children experience poverty at the County level at 11.3%, and non-Hispanic White children experience poverty at the much lower level of 6.8%. And while only 6.7% of the non-Hispanic White adult (18-64) population is experiencing poverty, their Black and Hispanic counterparts are more than doubled at 17.5% and 17.2% respectively. Also of note, the median household incomes for non-Hispanic White and Asian households are greater than \$95,000, outpacing substantially that of Black households at \$52,313 and Hispanic households at \$59,384.

**Tables 4 – The Poverty Intersection of Race and Age: Harris County**

Harris County, Texas					
	Overall	Non-Hispanic White	Non-Hispanic Black	Latino or Hispanic	Asian
Population Size (in thousands)	4,780,913	1,264,260	878,594	2,131,839	340,197
Median Household Income	\$68,706	\$95,441	\$52,313	\$59,384	\$95,530
Overall Poverty Rate	16.0%	6.9%	21.2%	20.6%	10.7%
Child (Under 18) Poverty Rate	23.0%	6.8%	30.3%	28.2%	11.3%
Poverty Rate for People 18-64	13.7%	6.7%	17.5%	17.2%	9.3%
Poverty Rate for People 65+	13.4%	7.5%	21.4%	17.6%	16.1%

**Table 5 – The Poverty Intersection of Race and Age: The City of Houston**

City of Houston, Texas					
	Overall	Non-Hispanic White	Non-Hispanic Black	Latino or Hispanic	Asian
Population Size (in thousands)	2,304,414	529,431	489,368	1,056,414	156,739
Median Household Income	\$60,426	\$95,589	\$46,527	\$52,135	\$82,622
Overall Poverty Rate	19.5%	8.1%	24.4%	24.5%	12.8%
Child (Under 18) Poverty Rate	28.8%	6.5%	35.1%	34.8%	13.6%
Poverty Rate for People 18-64	16.7%	8.2%	20.6%	20.3%	11.5%
Poverty Rate for People 65+	16.8%	8.7%	25.4%	20.0%	18.5%

In the City of Houston, child poverty trends upwards for all children, with the largest increases for Black children at 35.1%, and Hispanic children at 34.8%. Large disparities in median household income continue by race and ethnicity.

***In the City of Houston, child poverty trends upwards for all children***

**Table 6 – The Poverty Intersection of Race and Age: Houston Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA)**

Houston MSA					
	Overall	Non-Hispanic White	Non-Hispanic Black	Latino or Hispanic	Asian
Population Size (in thousands)	7,340,118	2,401,035	1,224,158	2,847,163	594,582
Median Household Income	\$74,863	\$97,376	\$57,880	\$62,377	\$104,614
Overall Poverty Rate	13.9%	7.1%	18.1%	18.8%	10.0%
Child (Under 18) Poverty Rate	19.3%	7.1%	25.0%	25.6%	10.8%
Poverty Rate for People 18-64	12.0%	7.0%	15.1%	15.7%	8.9%
Poverty Rate for People 65+	11.9%	7.7%	18.7%	17.0%	14.3%

In comparing the City of Houston to the much larger, nine county Houston Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), poverty for Hispanic and Black children improves to Statewide levels, yet the large disparities of people living in poverty by race, ethnicity, and age remain constant.

## **COMPARING HOUSTON**

### **Poverty Rankings**

In 2023, the Houston Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) was in 6<sup>th</sup> place in overall poverty and in 4<sup>th</sup> place in child poverty among large MSAs with populations greater than 1,000,000. The City of Houston achieved the same rankings among cities with populations greater than 500,000. Among MSAs with populations greater than 500,000, the Houston MSA ranked 18<sup>th</sup> in overall poverty and 20<sup>th</sup> in child poverty in 2023. This is a very interesting development because the Houston MSA moved six spots up the rankings (worse outcome) in overall poverty but improved six spots in the rankings in child poverty (as illustrated in Table 7).

### **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 a half-million people than MSAs with more than a million people. This is because MSAs comprise a larger territory. As a result, Houston is both a city with more than 500,000 people and an MSA with a population greater than one million, but not all MSAs with more than 1,000,000 people include cities with more than half a million people.

It is important to note that geographies with smaller sizes tend to have greater poverty rates. Poverty can be as high as 100% of the population in certain small rural localities.

Rankings provide the necessary context to understand poverty rates. A lower poverty rate that is still higher than other similar populations is not necessarily a good thing; and a higher poverty rate when examined in the context of other populations may indicate that the city is performing better than others.

**Table 7 – Houston’ Rank in Poverty Rates**

Houston		2022		2023			
		Poverty Rate	Poverty Rank	Poverty Rate	Poverty Rank	Rank Change	% Change
Among Cities with Populations Greater than 500,000 (37 Cities)	Overall	20.7%	6	19.5%	6	0	-5.8%
	Under 18	34.1%	2	28.8%	4	-2	-15.6%
Among MSA with Populations Greater than 500,000 (109 MSA)	Overall	14.3%	24	13.9%	18	6	-2.8%
	Under 18	20.8%	14	19.3%	20	-6	-7.3%
Among MSA with Populations Greater than 1,000,000 (54 MSA)	Overall	14.3%	6	13.9%	6	0	-2.8%
	Under 18	20.8%	3	19.3%	4	-1	-7.3%

Understating where Houston ranks in terms of persons experiencing poverty is the clearest way to measure the overall wellbeing of the community. Simply comparing poverty rates against the national average misses the important information about where Houston stands in relationship to actual comparable communities in terms of population size. Even with the reductions in % change, in 2023 the City of Houston ranked 4<sup>th</sup> in the nation in child poverty, and 6<sup>th</sup> in overall poverty. Similarly, the larger Houston MSA ranks 6<sup>th</sup> overall and ranked 4<sup>th</sup> highest in the nation in comparison to the 54 MSAs with a population greater than 1,000,000. See complete ranking of top 10 in Tables 9 and 10.

**Table 8 – Highest Poverty Rates in Cities in the United States**

Highest Poverty Rates		2022		2023	
Rank 1		Rank 1	Poverty Rate	Rank 1	Poverty Rate
Among Cities with Populations Greater than 500,000 (36 Cities)	Overall	Detroit City, Michigan	33.8%	Detroit City, Michigan	31.9%
	Under 18	Detroit City, Michigan	49.3%	Detroit City, Michigan	44.2%
Among MSA with Populations Greater than 500,000 (108 MSA)	Overall	McAllen-Edinburg-Mission, TX Metro Area	27.6%	McAllen-Edinburg-Mission, TX Metro Area	27.2%
	Under 18	McAllen-Edinburg-Mission, TX Metro Area	38.1%	McAllen-Edinburg-Mission, TX Metro Area	38.5%
Among MSA with Populations Greater than 1,000,000 (53 MSA)	Overall - TIE	New Orleans-Metairie, LA Metro Area	15.7%	Fresno, CA Metro Area	17.9%
		Memphis, TN-MS-AR Metro Area	15.7%		
	Under 18	Memphis, TN-MS-AR Metro Area	22.4%	Memphis, TN-MS-AR Metro Area	25.8%

**Table 9 – Top Ten Large MSAs with Over 1,000,000 Population in Overall Poverty**

<b>MSA Over 1,000,000 Population (54 MSA)</b>	<b>Overall Poverty Rank</b>	<b>Percent Under Poverty, Overall</b>
Fresno, CA Metro Area	1	17.9%
Memphis, TN-MS-AR Metro Area	2	16.5%
Tulsa, OK Metro Area	3	14.4%
Buffalo-Cheektowaga, NY Metro Area	4	14.2%
Oklahoma City, OK Metro Area	5	14.1%
<b>Houston-Pasadena-The Woodlands, TX Metro Area</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>13.9%</b>
Birmingham, AL Metro Area	6	13.9%
Tucson, AZ Metro Area	8	13.7%
Detroit-Warren-Dearborn, MI Metro Area	9/10	13.6%
San Antonio-New Braunfels, TX Metro Area	9/10	13.6%

**Table 10 – Top Ten Large MSAs with Over 1,000,000 Population in Child Poverty**

<b>MSA Over 1,000,000 Population (54 MSA)</b>	<b>Child Poverty Rank</b>	<b>Percent Under Poverty, Child</b>
Memphis, TN-MS-AR Metro Area	1	25.8%
Fresno, CA Metro Area	2	24.1%
Cleveland, OH Metro Area	3	19.9%
<b>Houston-Pasadena-The Woodlands, TX Metro Area</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>19.3%</b>
Detroit-Warren-Dearborn, MI Metro Area	4	19.3%
Buffalo-Cheektowaga, NY Metro Area	6	19.0%
Tulsa, OK Metro Area	7	18.9%
Oklahoma City, OK Metro Area	8	18.7%
Birmingham, AL Metro Area	9	18.5%
Louisville/Jefferson County, KY-IN Metro Area	10	18.4%

***In 2023, the Houston Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) was in 6th place in overall poverty and in 4th place in***

## *child poverty among large MSAs with populations greater than 1,000,000.*

**Table 11 – Top Ten MSAs with Over 500,000 Population in Overall Poverty**

<b>MSA Over 500,000 Population (109 MSA)</b>	<b>Overall Poverty Rank</b>	<b>Percent Under Poverty, Overall</b>
McAllen-Edinburg-Mission, TX Metro Area	1	27.2%
Bakersfield-Delano, CA Metro Area	2	19.2%
El Paso, TX Metro Area	3	18.5%
New Orleans-Metairie, LA Metro Area	3	18.5%
Fresno, CA Metro Area	5	17.9%
Scranton--Wilkes-Barre, PA Metro Area	6	17.1%
Baton Rouge, LA Metro Area	6	17.1%
Memphis, TN-MS-AR Metro Area	8	16.5%
Jackson, MS Metro Area	9	15.8%
Toledo, OH Metro Area	10	15.6%

**Table 12 – Top Ten MSAs with Over 500,000 Population in Child Poverty**

<b>MSA Over 500,000 Population (109 MSA)</b>	<b>Child Poverty Rank</b>	<b>Percent Under Poverty, Child</b>
McAllen-Edinburg-Mission, TX Metro Area	1	38.5%
Memphis, TN-MS-AR Metro Area	2	25.8%
Bakersfield-Delano, CA Metro Area	3	25.6%
New Orleans-Metairie, LA Metro Area	4	25.3%
Scranton--Wilkes-Barre, PA Metro Area	5	24.6%
El Paso, TX Metro Area	6	24.2%
Fresno, CA Metro Area	7	24.1%
Winston-Salem, NC Metro Area	8	23.8%
Albuquerque, NM Metro Area	9	21.4%
Jackson, MS Metro Area	10	21.0%
Greensboro-High Point, NC Metro Area	10	21.0%

**Table 13 – Top Ten Large Cities in Overall Poverty**

Cities over 500,000 People (37 Cities)	Overall Poverty Rank	Percent Under Poverty, Overall
Detroit city, Michigan	1	31.9%
Memphis city, Tennessee	2	22.6%
Milwaukee city, Wisconsin	3	22.1%
Philadelphia city, Pennsylvania	4	20.3%
Baltimore city, Maryland	5	20.2%
Houston city, Texas	6	19.5%
Fresno city, California	6	19.5%
Tucson city, Arizona	8	18.6%
Columbus city, Ohio	9	18.3%
New York city, New York	10	18.2%

Similar to the larger Houston MSA, the City of Houston also ranks high in both child and overall poverty. The overall percent of persons experiencing poverty of 19.5 % places the City of Houston as the 6<sup>th</sup> highest in the US. As displayed below in Table 14, the higher child poverty percentage of 28.8 moves the City of Houston up to the 4<sup>th</sup> highest in the US.

**Table 14 – Top Ten Large Cities in Child Poverty**

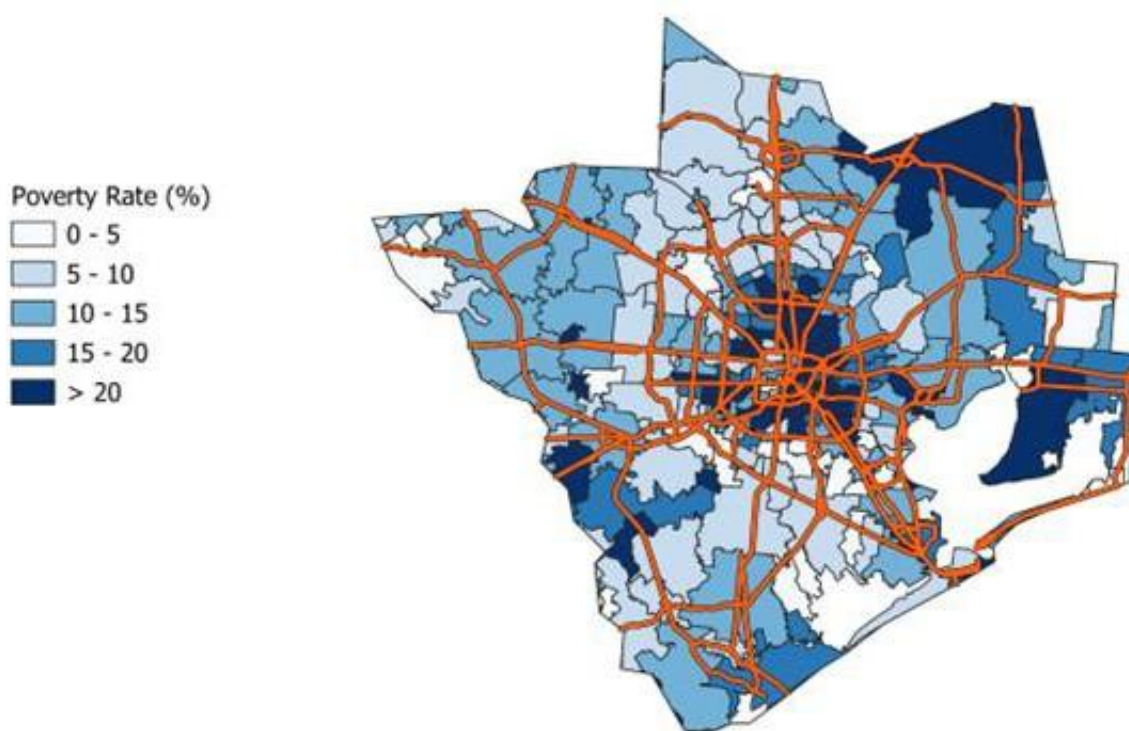
Cities over 500,000 People (37 Cities)	Child Poverty Rank	Percent Under Poverty, Child
Detroit city, Michigan	1	44.2%
Memphis city, Tennessee	2	36.3%
Milwaukee city, Wisconsin	3	32.3%
Houston city, Texas	4	28.8%
Fresno city, California	5	27.7%
Baltimore city, Maryland	6	27.2%
Louisville/Jefferson County metro government (balance), Kentucky	7	26.6%
Columbus city, Ohio	8	26.0%
Tucson city, Arizona	9	25.7%
Philadelphia city, Pennsylvania	10	25.0%

## HOUSTON POVERTY AND RACE MAPS

The map in Figure 4 illustrates the poverty distribution in the Houston MSA.

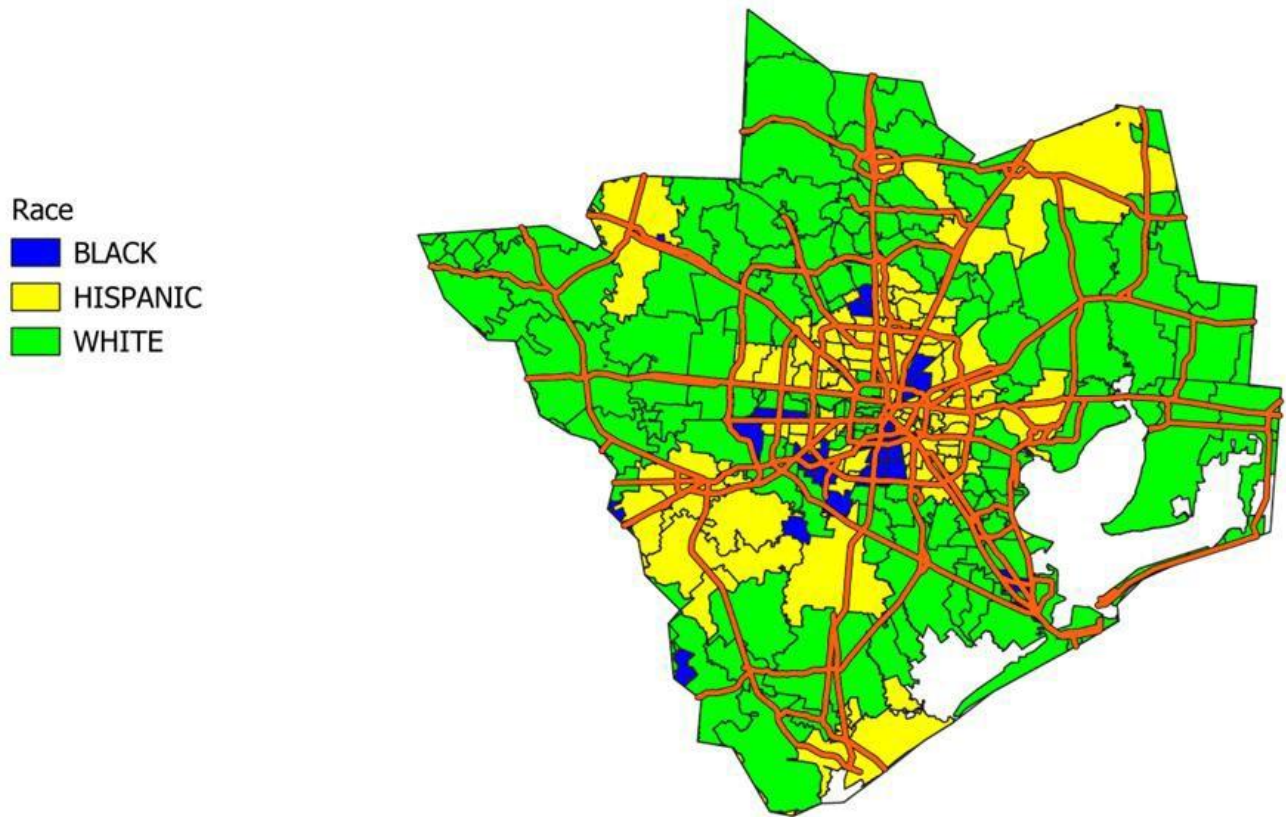
The maps in figures 5 and 6 illustrate the racial composition of the Houston MSA. Note that when a “majority” is used as the determining factor in the race of the population, the Houston MSA appears segregated, but the majority race in figure 5 could represent 35% of the population is one race, 33% of another, 30% of another, and 2% of another. Thus, the map in Figure 5 does not reflect the reality of the Houston MSA. When the map is colored by selecting areas where the population is at least 67% (2/3) of one specific race, the colors disappear, indicating the diversity in the Houston MSA.

**Figure 4 – Mapping Poverty in the Houston MSA**



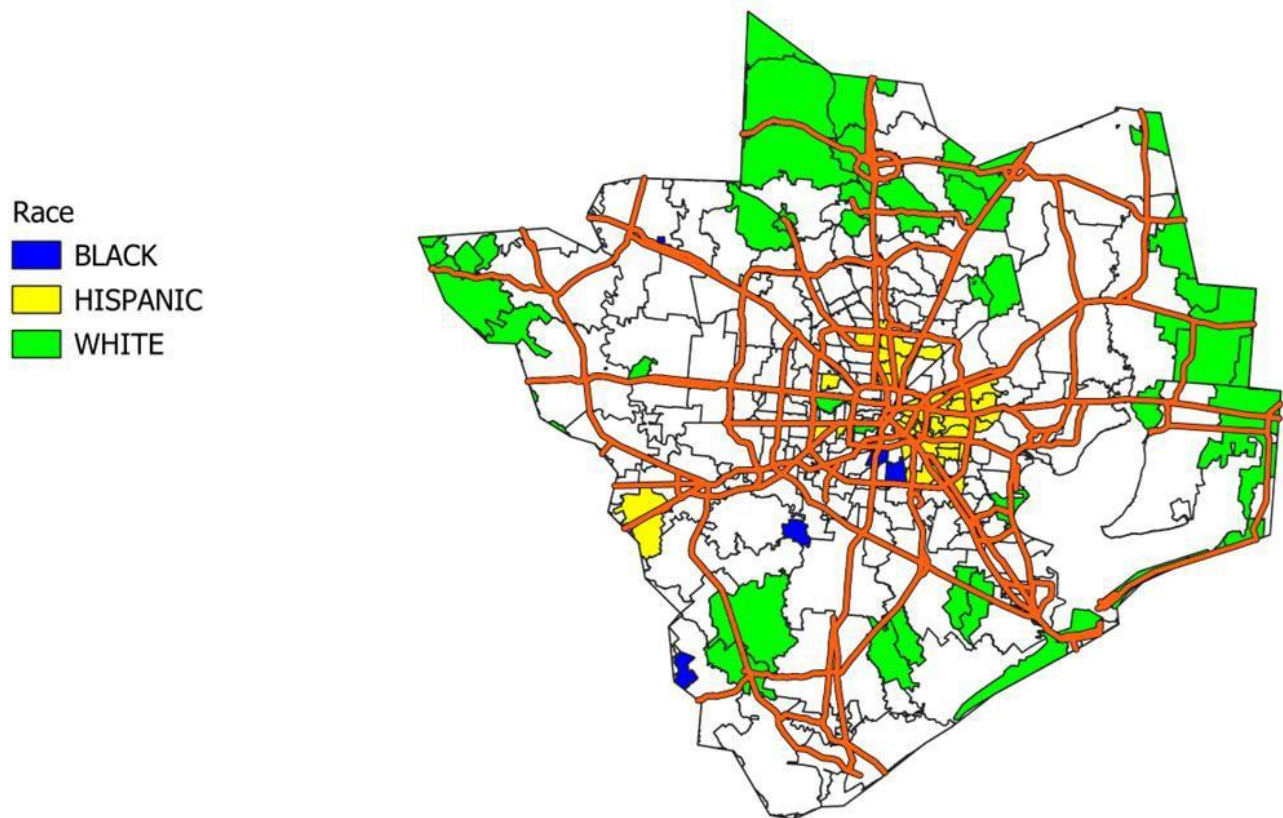
*One strength of Houston is its enormous level of diversity.*

**Figure 5 –Racial Composition of Zip Codes in the Houston MSA – Majority Race**



***The Houston MSA is quite diverse and integrated. Very few ZIP Codes have a strong majority of one race or another.***

**Figure 6— Racial Composition of Zip Codes in the Houston MSA – Zip Codes Where One Race is 67% of More of Population**



### ***The Diversity of Houston***

One strength of Houston is its enormous level of diversity. When considering the “majority” population, the Houston MSA shows Zip Codes that are White, Black, or Hispanics. However, when looking at Zip Codes where at least 2/3 (67%) of the population is of one specific race or another, the picture is very different. Very few Zip Codes in the Houston MSA have a strong majority of one race or another. While there are exceptions, the majority of the MSA is quite mixed and diverse.

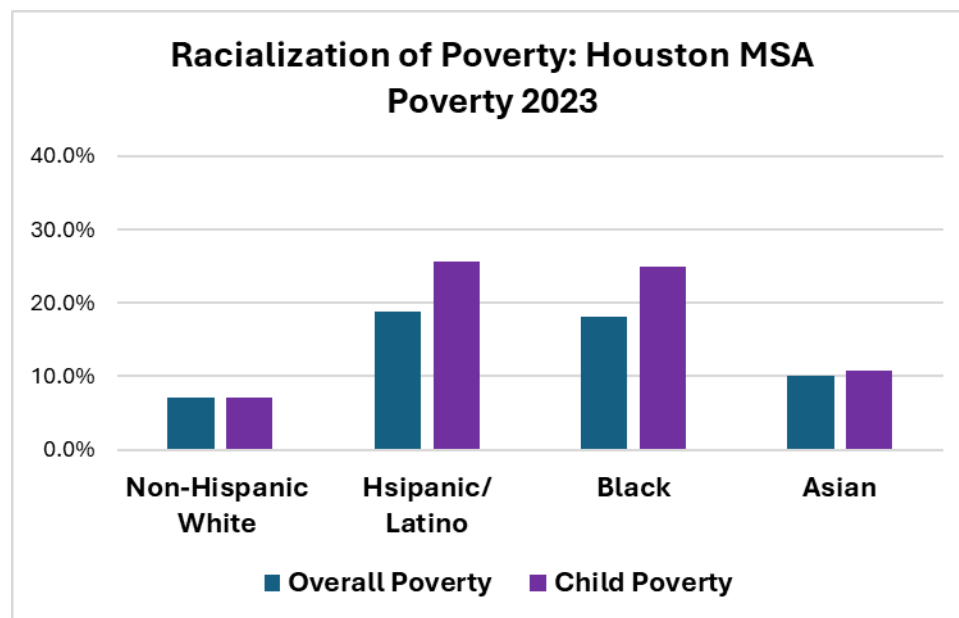
## ***THE RACIALIZATION OF POVERTY***

### ***The Relationship between Poverty and Race***

Notwithstanding the fact that Houston is an incredibly diverse community and that most Houston Zip Codes are very diverse and integrated, racial disparities still exist. This data supports the efficacy of race, ethnicity, and age as social determinates for poverty in the City of Houston, Harris County, and the larger Houston Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). The following table helps us to look even closer at how these social determinates impact individual zip codes across the City of Houston. Zip codes with high

poverty rankings are highlighted. Notably, child poverty exceeds 50% in 5 Houston Zip Codes, distributed across the city.

**Figure 7 – Comparison of Poverty Rates by Race in the Houston MSA**



## HOUSTON ZIP CODES

**Table 15 – Houston Race and Poverty by Zip Code**

ZIP CODE	Population	Percent White	Percent Black	Percent Hispanic/Latino	Overall Poverty	Poverty Rank	Child Poverty	Child Poverty Rank
77002	18800	33.8%	33.2%	23.3%	17.9%	60	17.0%	81
77003	10169	29.6%	22.7%	39.2%	21.3%	41	38.5%	27
77004	35506	26.3%	48.6%	12.8%	27.3%	20	47.1%	10
77005	28470	68.3%	2.5%	10.0%	4.3%	128	3.0%	124
77006	24006	61.7%	6.9%	16.1%	8.8%	103	0.9%	127
77007	42881	57.5%	6.6%	19.0%	5.8%	122	5.1%	120
77008	38496	64.0%	3.2%	24.3%	6.4%	119	6.9%	113
77009	36872	32.0%	6.2%	55.7%	11.6%	84	10.9%	100
77010	837	92.1%	0.0%	7.9%	0.0%	132	0.0%	132

ZIP CODE	Population	Percent White	Percent Black	Percent Hispanic/Latino	Overall Poverty	Poverty Rank	Child Poverty	Child Poverty Rank
77011	16685	5.4%	3.3%	90.1%	22.6%	34	38.0%	28
77012	17950	2.3%	4.4%	92.8%	22.3%	35	25.7%	58
77013	18512	6.7%	19.5%	72.0%	27.1%	21	39.2%	25
77014	37573	3.9%	41.9%	41.5%	24.9%	25	36.8%	32
77015	59314	7.0%	14.4%	76.0%	18.4%	58	26.9%	56
77016	29376	0.6%	54.6%	43.0%	22.3%	36	28.8%	50
77017	32574	7.0%	5.4%	83.9%	24.5%	26	40.3%	22
77018	28892	53.3%	7.4%	32.3%	8.2%	106	8.1%	111
77019	22839	60.9%	8.8%	15.7%	10.3%	92	27.2%	54
77020	25715	4.2%	21.6%	72.3%	27.9%	17	44.4%	16
77021	25500	10.9%	63.4%	21.3%	28.2%	16	41.8%	19
77022	26903	5.7%	16.9%	75.1%	27.0%	22	38.8%	26
77023	25680	16.3%	3.3%	78.4%	19.3%	51	27.1%	55
77024	37269	66.7%	3.1%	11.8%	6.1%	121	5.3%	118
77025	29295	44.7%	13.8%	19.4%	11.1%	86	8.0%	112
77026	20732	3.4%	52.2%	41.8%	32.2%	11	41.5%	20
77027	19478	58.7%	9.5%	15.1%	8.0%	109	5.4%	117
77028	18669	1.4%	59.5%	38.3%	33.7%	5	47.9%	8
77029	16008	6.9%	21.8%	70.7%	18.6%	55	22.4%	69
77030	12546	52.7%	7.3%	9.9%	9.1%	101	0.0%	129
77031	17351	13.7%	16.6%	61.9%	24.5%	27	45.9%	12
77032	13743	7.8%	33.0%	53.0%	31.7%	12	41.5%	21
77033	28255	1.0%	55.2%	42.0%	33.1%	6	50.5%	7
77034	37273	9.9%	9.7%	74.3%	21.1%	44	37.1%	31
77035	34254	22.1%	30.2%	42.5%	21.3%	42	29.9%	48
77036	72278	6.7%	11.2%	69.2%	27.4%	19	45.3%	13
77037	17585	6.6%	1.6%	91.3%	32.6%	8	56.8%	2
77038	32142	2.8%	21.9%	68.7%	23.3%	31	31.1%	44
77039	27907	5.7%	8.7%	83.2%	27.5%	18	42.0%	18
77040	49762	22.6%	15.9%	51.5%	18.9%	53	25.9%	57
77041	31912	25.9%	6.4%	49.2%	8.3%	105	11.5%	98
77042	40747	30.0%	29.5%	29.2%	19.5%	49	30.6%	46
77043	25900	40.2%	6.8%	42.4%	14.8%	69	22.7%	68
77044	54313	18.4%	31.5%	45.9%	12.3%	78	16.8%	82

ZIP CODE	Population	Percent White	Percent Black	Percent Hispanic/ Latino	Overall Poverty	Poverty Rank	Child Poverty	Child Poverty Rank
77045	32478	4.7%	41.8%	50.0%	21.3%	43	27.6%	53
77046	1254	58.5%	15.9%	16.3%	6.5%	117	0.0%	131
77047	33569	5.3%	64.3%	24.7%	9.0%	102	13.9%	92
77048	19741	1.7%	70.0%	23.5%	28.8%	15	42.0%	17
77049	41035	9.0%	16.0%	69.4%	15.7%	66	23.7%	65
77050	5949	0.8%	23.3%	75.6%	50.4%	1	65.6%	1
77051	16974	3.2%	78.0%	16.6%	38.0%	2	55.3%	3
77054	26708	21.1%	42.3%	11.9%	21.7%	37	33.3%	37
77055	43362	32.4%	5.5%	53.1%	21.5%	39	32.2%	40
77056	21941	56.1%	9.0%	17.7%	8.2%	107	6.5%	114
77057	45023	39.1%	9.9%	38.2%	18.0%	59	31.8%	42
77058	17956	55.1%	5.1%	22.9%	11.8%	83	18.6%	77
77059	18370	60.5%	4.1%	13.9%	4.9%	127	4.5%	121
77060	46266	6.2%	17.9%	72.0%	34.4%	4	46.3%	11
77061	25169	7.4%	22.6%	62.8%	18.6%	56	23.6%	66
77062	24561	52.2%	8.7%	22.1%	9.8%	93	14.9%	88
77063	39554	28.4%	25.1%	29.8%	18.5%	57	32.5%	39
77064	49240	22.2%	17.6%	42.4%	12.1%	81	21.3%	71
77065	38994	32.7%	23.2%	33.3%	8.0%	110	10.1%	103
77066	39234	13.9%	21.5%	48.1%	16.0%	63	25.5%	60
77067	32405	3.8%	30.5%	57.2%	23.6%	28	33.6%	35
77068	11451	26.1%	28.6%	35.1%	8.8%	104	12.2%	97
77069	20633	43.8%	26.5%	20.0%	18.9%	54	35.3%	34
77070	58409	36.0%	19.2%	32.0%	13.3%	76	22.4%	70
77071	26990	13.2%	48.9%	27.8%	14.8%	70	17.4%	80
77072	61688	5.2%	22.2%	48.0%	21.5%	40	31.3%	43
77073	41866	11.1%	29.8%	55.6%	13.6%	74	21.1%	73
77074	38624	14.4%	13.3%	61.2%	25.3%	24	44.9%	14
77075	41271	6.1%	11.4%	74.2%	12.2%	79	15.5%	84
77076	33529	6.1%	5.3%	87.7%	29.9%	13	39.2%	24
77077	62933	35.2%	26.8%	21.1%	11.0%	87	12.8%	96
77078	14241	5.3%	45.5%	48.5%	29.7%	14	44.4%	15
77079	35097	54.9%	11.2%	19.1%	9.8%	94	13.6%	93
77080	47661	19.7%	3.2%	71.5%	23.3%	32	37.8%	29

ZIP CODE	Population	Percent White	Percent Black	Percent Hispanic/Latino	Overall Poverty	Poverty Rank	Child Poverty	Child Poverty Rank
77081	52360	8.8%	11.9%	72.4%	32.6%	9	52.4%	5
77082	53401	19.5%	38.8%	27.2%	21.1%	45	32.1%	41
77083	75004	7.9%	30.1%	37.9%	15.1%	68	24.3%	62
77084	108557	22.1%	16.2%	46.5%	10.9%	89	17.5%	79
77085	16550	5.1%	28.9%	62.4%	12.2%	80	9.2%	104
77086	29705	6.4%	19.1%	63.8%	15.9%	64	19.3%	75
77087	35960	4.2%	14.1%	80.1%	23.4%	30	37.7%	30
77088	54007	6.1%	38.9%	49.7%	19.2%	52	28.2%	52
77089	56988	18.4%	15.5%	46.7%	11.0%	88	15.5%	85
77090	40764	14.3%	47.5%	28.6%	17.5%	61	21.1%	72
77091	30357	7.3%	40.4%	50.7%	32.6%	10	47.1%	9
77092	36320	24.9%	10.6%	60.6%	20.8%	46	30.8%	45
77093	48215	5.0%	11.0%	82.8%	36.1%	3	51.8%	6
77094	10623	52.1%	5.8%	12.9%	7.3%	113	14.7%	90
77095	69644	38.6%	15.0%	28.3%	5.1%	126	6.4%	116
77096	33001	44.6%	18.0%	25.8%	14.4%	71	19.9%	74
77098	15553	63.0%	4.8%	15.1%	6.5%	118	0.7%	128
77099	49541	8.3%	32.0%	45.2%	26.1%	23	39.7%	23
77336	11835	70.6%	4.4%	20.4%	15.7%	67	23.9%	64
77338	47997	16.1%	35.3%	40.2%	15.9%	65	23.1%	67
77339	43810	61.8%	5.0%	23.2%	10.5%	91	16.7%	83
77345	26791	78.6%	3.2%	12.7%	2.5%	130	1.6%	125
77346	70704	46.2%	19.6%	27.1%	5.2%	125	5.3%	119
77373	64828	32.6%	21.4%	40.0%	9.5%	97	13.0%	95
77375	67965	49.6%	11.0%	30.4%	9.3%	100	10.9%	101
77377	38188	61.7%	5.0%	20.9%	5.3%	124	3.5%	123
77379	83247	51.9%	9.9%	23.6%	8.0%	111	8.5%	108
77388	52127	48.5%	15.7%	25.7%	9.5%	98	11.4%	99
77389	43674	53.8%	7.8%	29.1%	7.8%	112	8.2%	110
77396	60253	18.5%	28.1%	48.3%	12.0%	82	15.4%	86
77401	17233	63.4%	1.4%	10.8%	2.2%	131	1.1%	126
77429	90790	53.8%	9.1%	23.5%	3.8%	129	3.9%	122
77433	107887	40.1%	16.5%	27.1%	6.8%	115	8.6%	107
77447	19196	46.7%	10.6%	38.4%	9.7%	95	13.4%	94

ZIP CODE	Population	Percent White	Percent Black	Percent Hispanic/Latino	Overall Poverty	Poverty Rank	Child Poverty	Child Poverty Rank
77449	122098	20.6%	20.0%	49.8%	10.7%	90	14.6%	91
77450	72651	54.4%	6.6%	21.8%	7.3%	114	9.0%	106
77484	13661	54.6%	14.5%	25.2%	12.5%	77	17.8%	78
77493	55317	37.5%	14.2%	34.9%	9.7%	96	10.8%	102
77502	36374	12.0%	3.3%	83.8%	23.5%	29	36.8%	33
77503	23248	19.9%	2.9%	73.5%	16.5%	62	24.2%	63
77504	25401	26.7%	5.4%	64.5%	20.3%	47	33.5%	36
77505	23179	45.6%	1.6%	46.6%	9.5%	99	15.0%	87
77506	37561	8.2%	1.1%	90.3%	21.7%	38	33.3%	38
77507	561	62.0%	17.8%	19.4%	8.2%	108	0.0%	130
77520	36488	27.8%	9.5%	59.0%	20.2%	48	29.9%	49
77521	66215	28.9%	16.9%	50.0%	13.9%	72	19.2%	76
77530	31304	15.1%	8.0%	73.5%	19.4%	50	30.2%	47
77532	31384	54.7%	10.4%	29.4%	6.2%	120	8.4%	109
77536	33111	53.5%	2.2%	40.0%	6.6%	116	9.1%	105
77547	9336	4.2%	4.1%	91.2%	32.7%	7	52.6%	4
77562	9793	47.9%	5.5%	41.8%	13.8%	73	25.1%	61
77571	37346	49.0%	7.2%	39.0%	11.6%	85	14.8%	89
77586	23802	68.8%	4.2%	18.8%	5.8%	123	6.5%	115
77587	16185	4.9%	1.1%	92.3%	23.0%	33	28.7%	51
77598	26635	39.2%	13.8%	36.1%	13.5%	75	25.6%	59

*The impact of poverty on education, on health, and on social outcomes is relevant to the entire community, regardless of ZIP code.*

## Measuring Poverty

We still largely use the poverty measure developed by Molly Orshansky in 1963 and 1964. Before that time, poverty was not measured – Census tables do not report poverty before 1970. It was difficult to qualify people for benefits if there was no way to know if they were in poverty, so Orshansky, who was working for the Social Security Administration, tried to find a measure that was logical and straightforward. She considered that all people spend money on food. She knew of the existence of Department of Agriculture food cost tables and estimated that people spent a third of their budget on food. In essence, the measure took the monthly cost of the most basic diet for a family of four, multiplied by three, and multiplied that by 12 to arrive at the annual poverty threshold. The Johnson Administration really liked the measure for the “War on Poverty”. The official measure was adopted in 1969.

There are significant problems with this measure. It is difficult to scale up or down for different family sizes. In addition, the economy is vastly different today than in 1969, with families now spending only about one seventh of their budgets on food. More importantly, this measure was never meant to indicate whether families are doing well financially, but rather, the level below which people starve.

### Failing to Measure Correctly

In recent years, the measure has become even more inadequate. In December 2022, the Department of Agriculture raised their estimate of the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan to \$971.20 per month for a family of four (two adults and two children). Multiplied by 12, this estimate is \$11,654.40 per year for a family of four, and thus the poverty threshold should be \$34,963.20. However, this is not the level at which we are measuring poverty. The 2023 Federal Poverty Threshold is \$30,000. This number is clearly not three times the cost of the most basic food plan for a family of four, but thousands of dollars below it. Families considered to be in poverty are actually starving. Additionally, there are families not considered to be in poverty who are unable to meet their basic needs.

What this means is that we are no longer measuring what we thought we were measuring. The declines in poverty rates may simply be a function of the inadequacy of the poverty measure and the failure of the government to remain true to the formula as it has been stated. Poverty is therefore likely to be much higher than we assume, and poverty trends are probably much worse than they appear. The way we measure poverty has been rendered invalid. By increasing the poverty threshold only by adjusting for inflation with the Consumer Price Index (CPI), the federal government is ignoring the reality of food prices, rents, and energy prices for families at the bottom of the economic spectrum.

*A community cannot reach its full potential if there are people who are excluded through the scourge of poverty. Houston is an important and prosperous community, but it hides within itself the reality of very high poverty and exclusion rates, particularly for children.*

*#SharedRiskforSharedProsperity*

## About the Authors

*The Department of Social Work at the University of Houston-Downtown prepares future Social Workers as change agents committed to inclusion, equity, and justice through innovation, collaboration, and service.*

*The School of Social Work 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.*

**Dawn McCarty**, PhD, MSW, is Professor, founding faculty member, and Director of the University of Houston- Downtown Bachelor of Social Work Program. Currently, her work and research are focused on the conditions and experiences of migrant persons arriving and resettling in Houston, and on the development of an innovative practice and teaching perspective focused on *Solidarity* and modeling equality. In addition to her work as Professor and Director, Dawn lives part-time in community as a Catholic Worker at Casa Juan Diego where she serves Houston's asylum seeking, refugee, and new arrival communities. Her book, *Solidarity Social Work Practice: Serving New Immigrant Populations* (2019) published by Kendall Hunt is based on ten years of direct social work practice, and four years of qualitative data collection to document the lives of migrant persons from around the world.

**Elena Delavega**, PhD, MSW is Professor of Social Work at the University of Memphis, where she teaches and researches poverty and social welfare policy. Dr. Delavega has created a body of work consisting of over 38 peer-reviewed publications; over 100 reports, newspaper/magazine articles, book chapters, fact sheets, and translations; close to 200 presentations, including international presentations, keynote addresses, and a TEDx Talk focused on the Blame Index, which she developed in 2017 and is the focus of her future interests. She has produced the Memphis Poverty Factsheet, updated yearly, since 2012. She has also given close to 200 media interviews locally, nationally, and worldwide. She served as Associate Director of the Benjamin L. Hooks Institute for Social Change at the University of Memphis from 2015 to 2019 and continues as research collaborator. She has edited Volumes II to IX of the Hooks Policy Papers. In 2018, she collaborated with the National Civil Rights Museum to produce the report on the state of Black Shelby County, Memphis Poverty Report: Memphis Since MLK, in conjunction with the commemorative activities surrounding the 50th anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination.

**Gregory Miles Blumenthal**, PhD, obtained his B.A. in Chemistry from Vanderbilt University and his doctorate in Pharmacology from Duke University. He has produced a body of work of enormous depth and breadth, encompassing research in toxicology, risk analysis, secure financial web applications, and other data science projects for such agencies as NIH, EPA, the VA, and NASA (from whom he received an award in 2014). His presentation developing objective criteria for PBPK models was expanded into the 2006 US EPA criteria for application of PBPK models to risk assessment. His specific contributions to the realm of statistical analysis continue to influence scientific analysis to this day. The August 2018 US FDA Guidance for acceptance of PBPK models in support of drug evaluations was based upon this US EPA document. Dr. Blumenthal's strongest area of expertise is data science and data analysis, to which he has dedicated his life, but he is also strongly committed to the Memphis community, both as an evaluation consultant for local nonprofit organizations and as a political strategist for local candidates.

*If you would like more information about the Houston Poverty Fact Sheet, please contact Dr. Elena Delavega at [mdlavega@memphis.edu](mailto:mdlavega@memphis.edu)*

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Sources:

Population, poverty, and median income data obtained from the US Bureau of the Census, September 12, 2024.

For tables:(except ZIP codes): 2023 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates (US Bureau of the Census) S1701, B17001B, B17001C, B17001D, B17001H, B17001I, S1903, DP05.

All data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census 2022 ACS: 1-Year Estimates Released September 2023. Tables S0101, S1701, S1901, DP05, B17001 (B, C, D, H, I).