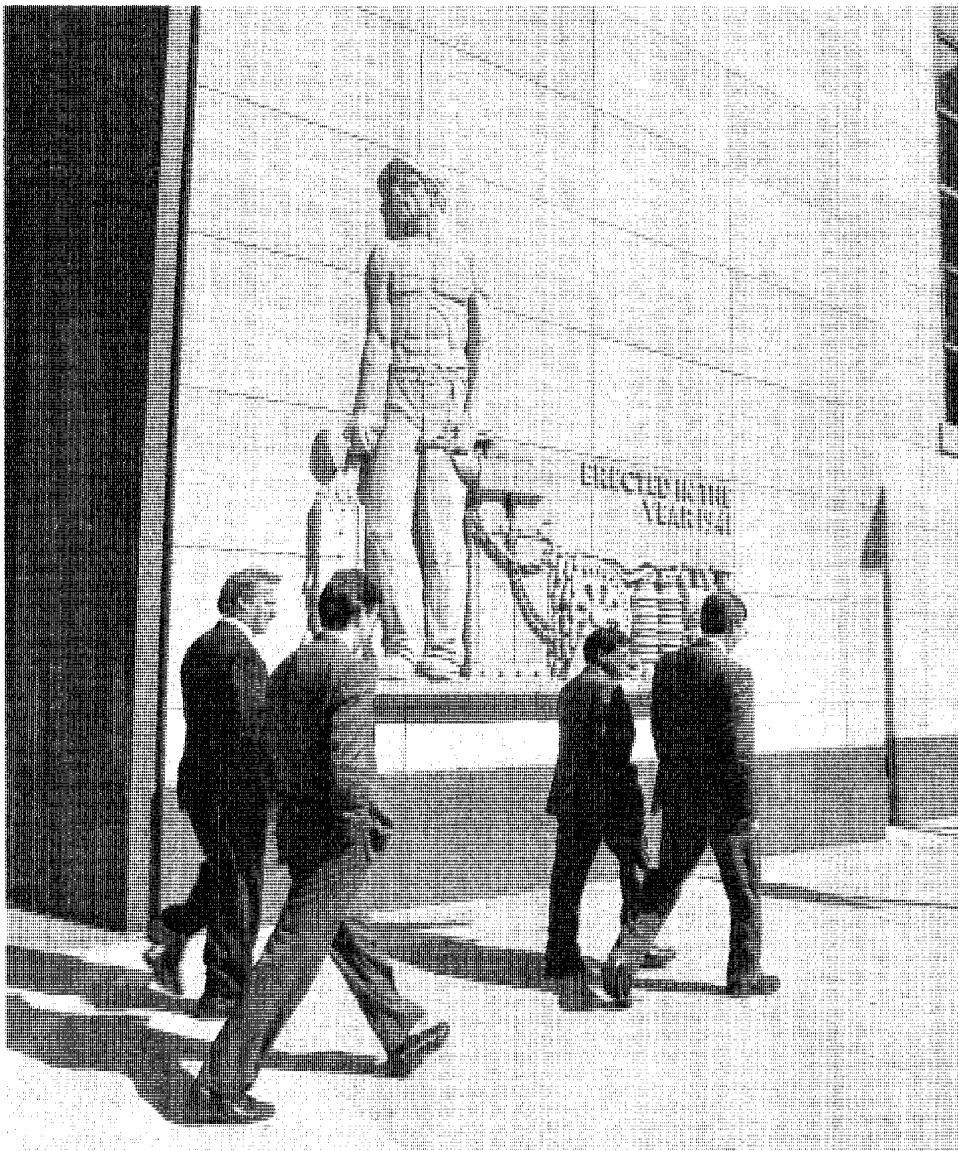


Income and Poverty in Minnesota

by William J. Craig and John Tichy



This report is based on the 1990 Census. It looks at income and poverty across the state of Minnesota in 1990, as well as changes over the preceding decade. We find that Minnesota households are doing quite well, better than the national average and better than we were in 1980. But there are problem areas where we need to focus our concern. One major problem is that, while most households are better off, there has been a large growth in the number and proportion of very poor households. Another concern is that men and women are working harder than ever to gain this growth in income, and this is taxing families as well as those individuals. Three demographic groups are doing much worse than average: single-parent families, where there is only one worker; all minority groups, but especially Blacks and Indians; and young adults, trying to get started. Geographic areas of concern include outstate Minnesota and the inner cores of Minneapolis and St. Paul.

We think this is the most complete analysis yet undertaken of income and poverty in Minnesota. We have looked at all of the standard measures. And we explored many of the factors behind these findings and the implication of changes underway in our state. Behind much of the work was a

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desire to examine myths about income and poverty. For example, we explored the myth of the decline of the middle class. We hope our findings will provide the reader with a clearer sense of where real problems and opportunities exist. Our goal is more intelligent discussion of these topics among public officials, within the private sector, and in the population at large.

Income

The state median household income in 1989 was \$30,909, 17th highest in the country.* This means that half the households earned more than \$30,909 and half earned less. Minnesota's median household income increased by 2 percent in real terms from 1979. The national median household income, however, grew by 5 percent in this same period so Minnesota fell three ranks, from 14th in 1979 to 17th in 1989. We did well, but became more "average" compared to the nation as a whole.

The aggregate income of all households in the state in 1989 was \$62 billion, an increase of 21 percent over 1979 after accounting for inflation. About two-thirds of that increase was due to an increase in the number of households in the state and one-third due to increased household incomes.

There has been substantial debate over whether this country (and this state) is losing its middle class. Wages are declining, but median household income is going up. What's happening? Is it just a case of the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer? Is the increasing median income masking redistribution that signals the decline of the middle class? Our analysis says "no," at least not yet.

The proportion of households in nearly every income class below \$60,000 declined or remained constant between 1979 and 1989 (Figure 1). The portion of households in the highest class, on the other hand, increased sharply. This does not signify that the rich are getting richer. It means that lower income households are moving up the income ladder. It means that more households are better off. This pattern of improvement holds for Minnesota and for the United States. It holds whether measuring family income alone or all households. The only exception we could find was out-state Minnesota, a significant topic discussed later.

How can this be, when the feeling is so widespread that things got worse, not better for most Americans during the 1980s?

* All numbers in this article are in 1989 dollars, i.e., earlier figures have been adjusted upward to account for inflation. Income is reported for 1989 (not 1990) because that was the last full year of income preceding the April 1, 1990 census. Household income is the total income of all people living in a household. For a family, this is the total cash income of every member of the family living at home—whether the income comes from work-related earnings, interest and dividends, Social Security, or some other source. Similarly, for a non-family household (this might be a single person living alone or a group of unrelated roommates) it is the sum of every person's income. Households may be families or non-families. About two-thirds of all households are families and about three-quarters of all non-family households contain only one person.

A major reason is the increased participation of women in the labor force. Over the preceding two decades, the national proportion of women in the labor force has increased dramatically. Minnesota was in the vanguard of this trend: women's participation in the labor force grew from 43.5 percent in 1969 to 62.5 percent in 1989—a rate that was the highest in the country. Two-thirds of Minnesota families now have two or more wage earners and such families earn nearly half again as much as one-earner families.

There are other factors to explain this general improvement in household income. The large baby-boom generation is moving into its peak earning years as they become "forty somethings." The elderly, who comprise many of the single person households, had a 16 percent increase in median incomes, largely due to improved Social Security and their being the first beneficiaries of the vastly improved retirement programs that were developed after World War II. The young kept their household incomes relatively high by delaying family formation and by increased living with roommates. Other research has shown that men are working more hours in order to keep income levels up.

People are doing what they can to increase household incomes. Some of what they are doing, like the retirement programs benefiting the elderly, may continue to work in the long run. Other factors, like the baby boomers hitting their peak earning years, could last for another twenty years without intervention. But there is a real limit to the ability of men and women to work more. At some point in time this limit will combine with declining wages and the bubble will burst.

Poverty

Poverty rates increased during the 1980s and here, too, Minnesota has slipped to become more like the national average. In 1989, the state poverty rate stood at 10.2 percent, up from 9.5 percent a decade earlier. During this period we slipped from having the sixth lowest poverty rate in the country to having the twelfth lowest rate. We still stood above the national average of 13.1 percent and ahead of any of our neighboring states.

All of the growth in poverty was among the poorest of the poor, those earning less than 75 percent of the poverty level. The proportion of people earning between 75 and 99 percent of the poverty level stayed constant over the decade. So while incomes are increasing, the poor are worse off. This is not good news.

Some of this paradox can be explained by admitting that there have probably been downward shifts within the lowest income groups shown in Figure 1. Another explanation arises from the different ways the Census Bureau determines household income and individual poverty.

Household income is the sum of the incomes of all individuals in a home. The poverty level, however, is measured against individual income. If a single person earns \$6,200 per year, that person is below the poverty level and stays there whether or not he or she takes on roommates. The household income goes up with additional workers, but that person's poverty status is unchanged. Interestingly, this approach is not used for families where everyone's poverty status is determined by the combined family income. If the single person got mar-

Figure 1. Change in Distribution of Minnesota's Household Income

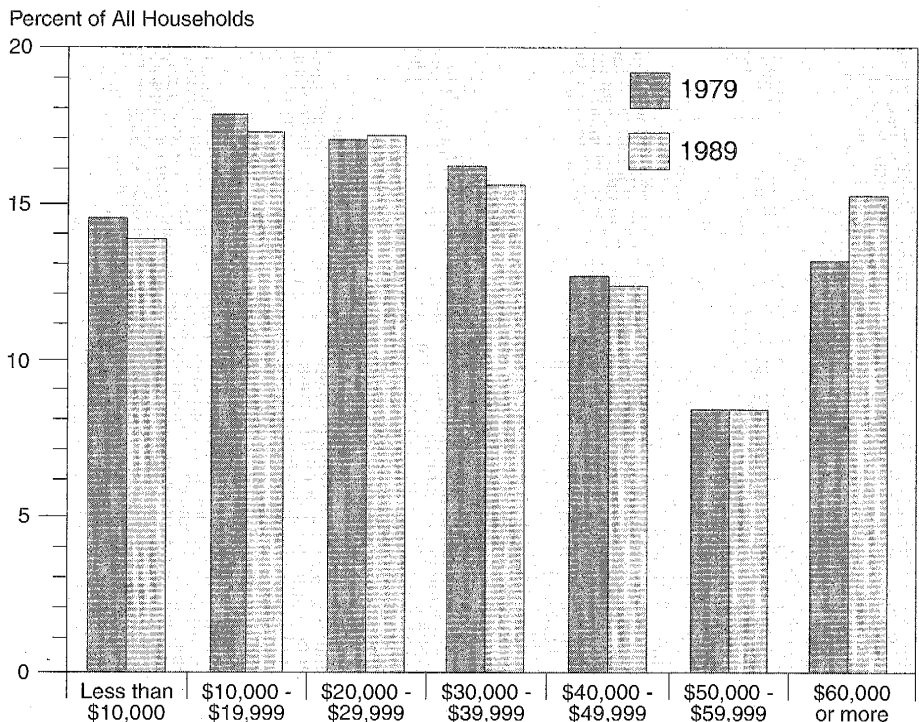
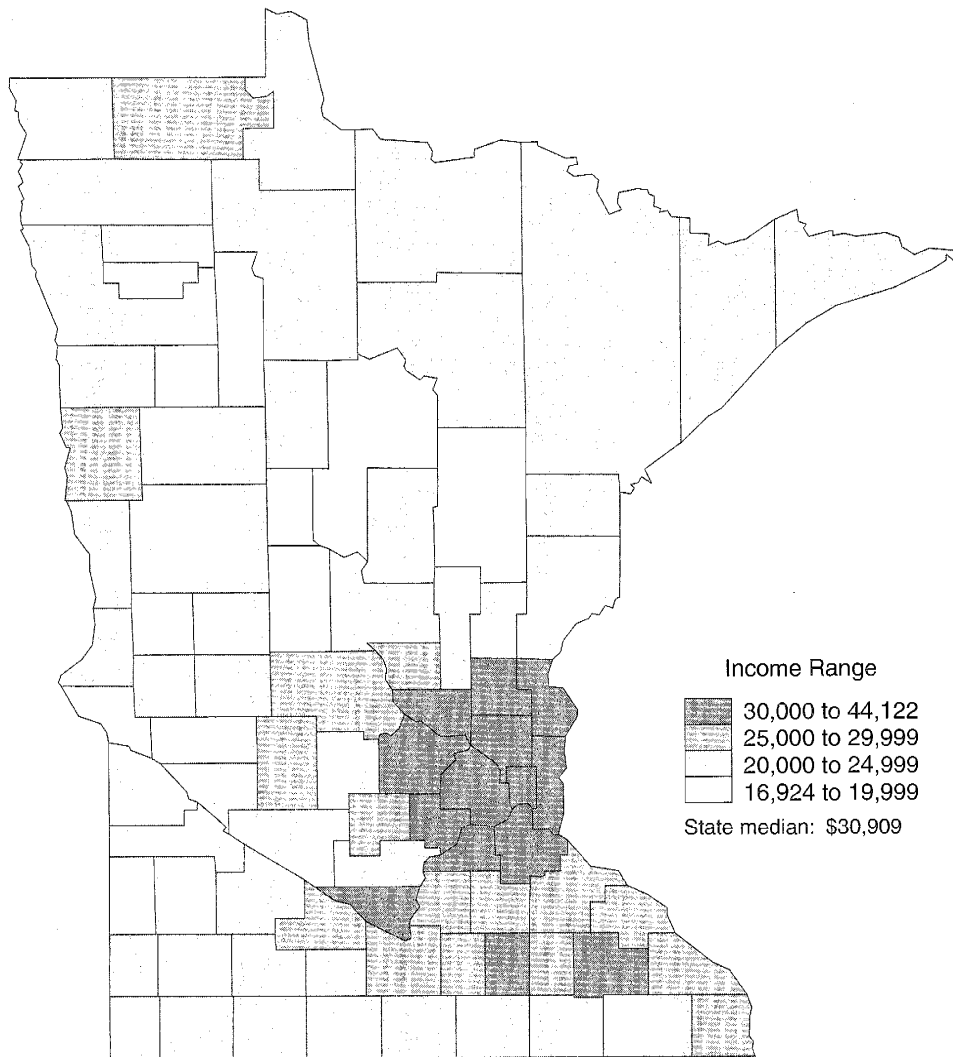


Figure 2. Median Household Income, 1989



ried to someone making the same income, their household income of \$12,400 would put their family above the poverty level. Thus, the reduced formation of families during the 1980s explains part of the increase in the census-defined poverty rate.

Some people have argued that we are being overrun by poor people migrating to the state to benefit from our welfare programs, especially by people coming from industrial cities in the Midwest rust belt. We examined this theory by looking at the 1985 residence of poor people living in the central cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul in 1990.* We found that two-thirds of the poor had been residents of the Twin Cities five years earlier, while another 12 percent had migrated from the suburbs or other parts of Minnesota. In fact, only 6 percent came from the industrial midwest (Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin). The median household income of these migrants was twice that of the resident poor. So we must reject the welfare magnet theory and admit

that most of those migrants came looking for work and are doing better than average, even if they were still poor in 1989.

Poverty rates, like income levels, are age specific. The lowest rates of poverty are for those in the forty-five to fifty-four age group, which coincides with the peak earning years. Only 5.1 percent of these people are below the poverty level. Poverty levels for preschool children are nearly three times that high (14.8 percent). The rates generally drop from that point to the peak earning years, then rise to 17.2 percent for those age seventy-five and over. Rates for the early retirement years are relatively low (8.4

percent), well below those for any age of child. The sharply higher level for those over age seventy-five is due to the earlier death of the male spouse, resulting in decreased Social Security income for the widow; the leaner retirement programs of this age cohort; and the effect of living on a fixed income during a decade of high inflation.

The highest rate of poverty at 19.5 percent, nearly four times that of the lowest group, is for eighteen to twenty-four year-olds. This group includes those living in self-imposed poverty—being a student. But it also includes many young people starting out in life and not doing particularly well.

Poverty is also gender specific. Poverty rates are not much different in childhood. But in the working years, poverty rates are more than 2 percent higher for women. And this discrepancy increases in the retirement years. Then, female poverty rates are double those of men, because so many are becoming widows and losing income in the process.

Statewide Differences

The Twin Cities are doing better than counties in outstate Minnesota on measures of both income and poverty (Table 1). The median household income in the Twin Cities is nearly half again as large as in outstate Minnesota. And the range is spreading as Twin Cities incomes rise while outstate incomes fall. Other studies have shown that the cost of living outstate is roughly equal to the cost in the Twin Cities, so this represents a real deficit in purchasing power. At the same time, not surprisingly, outstate poverty rates are considerably larger than those of the Twin Cities area. While outstate Minnesota has only 47 percent of the state's population, it contains 58 percent of those living below the poverty level.

The 1989 county-by-county income pattern shows that all of the Twin Cities' counties are in the highest income class (Figure 2). In fact, Washington County, on the Twin Cities eastern edge, has the highest median income in the state (\$44,122), almost 50 percent higher than the figure for the state as a whole. The seven metropolitan counties are joined in this highest class by four adjacent counties (Wright, Sherburne, Isanti, and Chisago), and by Olmsted County (with the city of Rochester), Steele County (with Owatonna), and Nicollet County (next to Mankato).

Nearly all the counties in the next income class down are in the southeastern quad-

Table 1. Income and Poverty in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area and in Outstate Minnesota, 1989

	Twin Cities	Outstate
Median Household Income (MHI)	\$36,785	\$25,248
Change in MHI, 1979-1989	3.5%	-2.9%
Poverty rates	8.2%	12.5%
Change in poverty rates, 1979-1989	+1.5	+0.4

* Our thanks to Elvin Wyly, who actually prepared this analysis for us.

rant of the state, close to the state's population center and to national markets. The two exceptions are Clay County, on the western edge of the state, which is part of the Fargo-Moorhead metropolitan area, and Roseau County on the Canadian border. Roseau County contains several exceptional manufacturing companies, including Marvin Windows.

Our third category, though covering a range of only \$5,000, contains nearly half of the counties in the state. And, at the lowest end of the spectrum, is a mix of counties having no urban center, a weak agricultural base, or containing Indian reservations. The lowest income is found in Mahnomon County, which is entirely within the White Earth Reservation. Here the median household income is only \$16,924, just over half the median for the state and just over one-third of the income in Washington County.

Perhaps the really bad news is that income grew in most of the highest income areas during the decade and dropped in many of the low income counties. Median household income grew in Washington County and most of the metropolitan counties. The biggest percent increases were in the counties on the Canadian border which are sending workers to Marvin Windows and other successful manufacturing companies in the area. Lake of the Woods County's median income grew by 22 percent during the decade (to \$24,383), the maximum increase statewide.

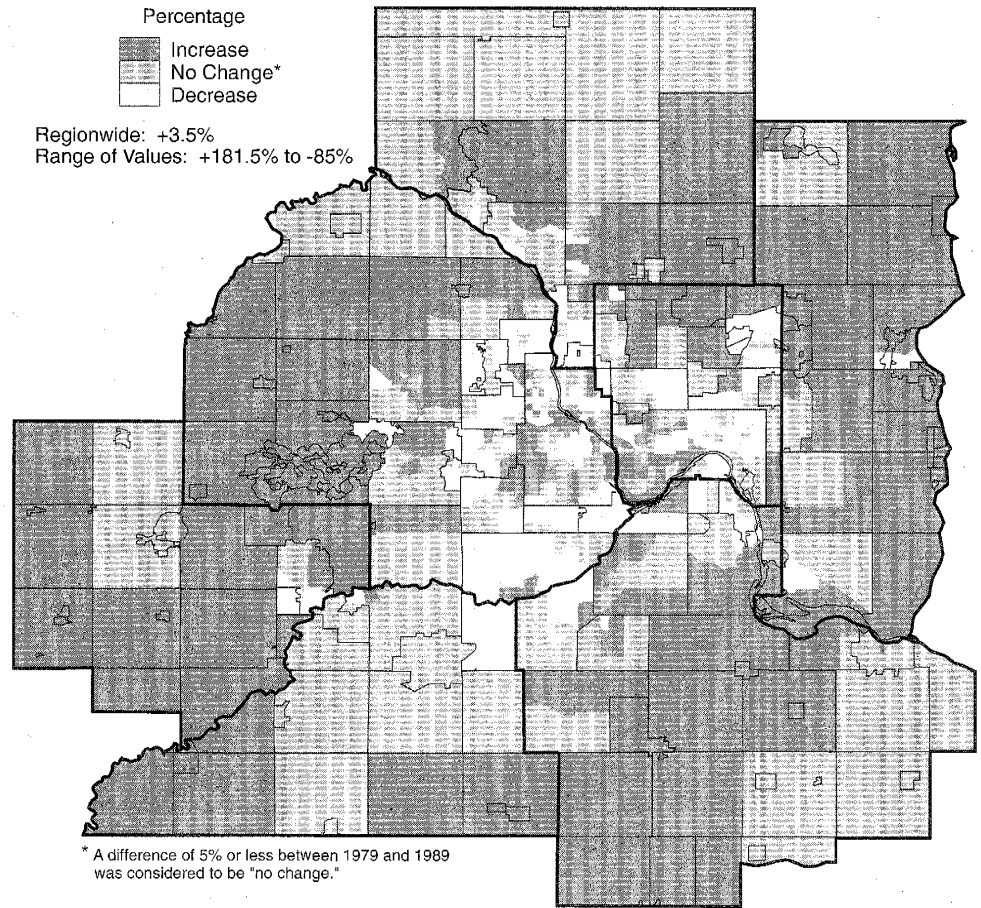
Income decreased in Mahnomon County and across all of the Arrowhead region, the northeastern quadrant of the state, where the economy is adjusting to changes in the taconite industry. Incomes also decreased in many agricultural counties, except those with very low incomes in 1979 where an increase during the 1980s still left them at quite low income levels.

Statewide poverty rates mirror this same pattern, with the lowest rates in the southeastern quadrant of the state and the highest rates in the counties containing Indian reservations. Twin Cities' poverty rates are lower than rates for outstate Minnesota at all levels, but they are increasing faster than rates in outstate Minnesota (Table 2). The single fastest growing segment of the state's poverty population was the very poor living in the Twin Cities. The number of very poor in the Twin Cities has grown by nearly 49,000 people in the last decade, an increase of almost 60 percent over the number of very poor ten years earlier.

The Twin Cities Metropolitan Area

We offer no new insights on the distribution of income within the Twin Cities metropolitan area. The lowest income levels are found in the central cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul. The highest incomes are in the second and third tier suburbs—especially those to the east and west. In fact, one of the reasons that Washington County does so well on the statewide map is that it con-

Figure 3. Change in Median Household Income in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area, 1979-1989



tains many high income areas and practically no low income areas.

We studied the Twin Cities by looking at census tracts. These areas allow us to discriminate income and poverty below the city or even neighborhood level. There are 126 tracts in Minneapolis and 82 in St. Paul, for example. While the metropolitan area maps

presented here use the tracts as the unit of analysis, we continue to show the more readily recognized municipal boundaries to assist in orienting the reader. The highest median household income was in the tract containing the affluent suburb of North Oaks. Its median of \$113,354 was three times the metropolitan median. The lowest median household incomes were in the central cities. They were only \$6,000 to \$7,000, about one-sixth of the metropolitan median.

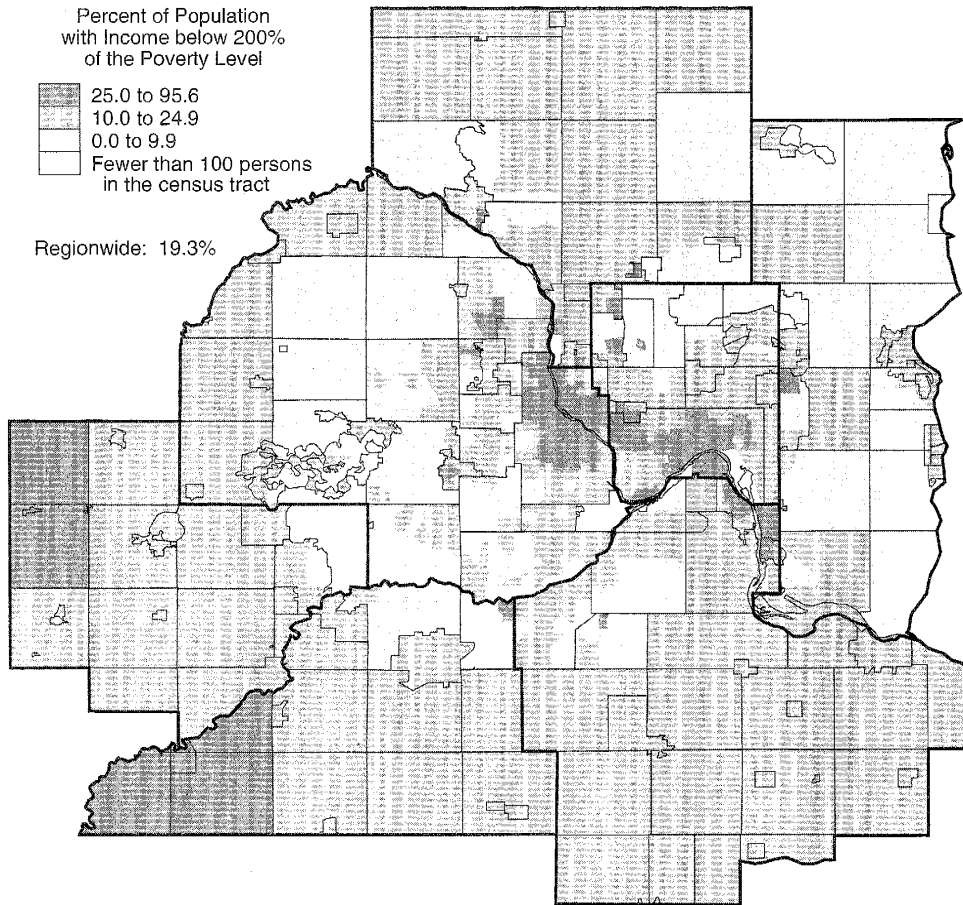
Tract level incomes increased during the 1980s in the second and third tier suburbs (Figure 3), but they increased in other areas as well. The distant townships on the edges of the metropolitan area have benefited from the arrival of exurban families. Most encouraging is the increase in many parts of the central cities. To be sure, some of these areas, like the lakes district of Minneapolis and Summit Avenue in St. Paul, were never in bad shape, but they have retained that strength and improved on it. More heartening is the improvement in some parts of the lower income areas of these central cities: in Minneapolis, in downtown and in scattered tracts north of downtown; and in St. Paul, in downtown, on West Seventh Street, and in the Midway area. Some of this improvement is on a very low base and the result is that they are still low income areas, but they are going in the right direction.

Table 2. Percent of Persons at Various Levels of Poverty

	1979	1989	Change in Percent
Twin Cities Area			
very poor*	4.2	5.9	+1.7
other poor	2.5	2.3	-0.1
total poor	6.7	8.2	+1.5
Outstate			
very poor*	7.8	8.0	+0.2
other poor	4.3	4.5	+0.2
total poor	12.1	12.5	+0.4
Minnesota			
very poor*	6.0	6.9	+0.9
other poor	3.4	3.4	0.0
total poor	9.5	10.2	+0.7

* Very poor are those with incomes below 75 percent of the poverty level.

Figure 4. The Marginally Poor in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area, 1989



The worst off tracts in the core poverty areas saw the largest decreases in income. Some saw their median household income decrease by a third or more—on an already low base. The first ring suburbs also experienced a significant deterioration in income levels. Some of this deterioration is due to the aging of their populations, as they reduce incomes in their retirement years. For many of these areas, such as Edina and Bloomington, their incomes remain quite high. For other suburbs this decline is real and must be faced by city officials.

Few places are far from poverty in the metropolitan area. Every municipality in the seven-county area has some poor people. In fact we could find only one residential tract (out of nearly 600) that was without a single poor person. This tract is in Bloomington, overlooking the Minnesota River. Most of the Twin Cities' poor, however, are concentrated in the two central cities. The central cities have high rates of poverty and things are getting worse.

The growth of jobs in the last decade is, mostly, far removed from these areas. And it is these two factors—the location of poor people and the location of jobs—that are driving the discussion over affordable housing in the metropolitan area today. Sociologists argue that concentrated poverty isolates those living in it. Policy analysts

point out that the geographic mismatch between job locations and residential locations of people who need jobs works to the disadvantage of both the employer and the potential employee. Both are arguing for more low income housing in the suburbs.

Figure 4 provides a spatial look at those near poverty. Here we raise the watermark and pay attention to the marginally poor, those whose incomes are up to double the poverty level, still only \$25,000 for a family of four. Only the second and third ring suburbs appear to be relatively immune, having more than 90 percent of their people safely above the poverty line. By this measure, suburban well-being drops after passing the well-off areas, and falls at the fringes of the metropolitan area to match the higher poverty levels of outstate Minnesota. These are the same areas that are seeing rapid increases in income levels. The higher income levels of new exurban families mask the near-poverty of many rural residents, but this map brings our attention back to the fact of poverty on the edges of the metro area.

Variations by Household Type

Single-parent and non-family households fare much worse than other types of households. Single-parent families make up only

8 percent of the state's households, but three times that percentage of the state's households living below the poverty level. Non-family households comprise one-third of the state's households, but over half of its poor households. The poverty rates for these households are 35.9 percent and 17.8 percent respectively. Compare those rates to 4.0 percent for married-couple families. Of course one of the big differences is that married-couple families can provide two workers.

This bad news about income disparity is made worse by the fact that single-parent families and non-family households are the fastest growing household types in Minnesota. Married-couple families grew more slowly in the Twin Cities, and actually declined in real numbers in outstate Minnesota.

Regardless of the type of households, poverty rates are much higher in outstate Minnesota than in the Twin Cities area (Table 3). This has disastrous impacts for children. In both the Twin Cities and outstate, children in single-parent families have a disproportionate chance of being poor. In the Twin Cities, practically the only way for a child to be poor is to live with one parent—70 percent of poor children live in such families.

In outstate Minnesota, child poverty is more evenly distributed. Nearly half (46 percent) of children living with one parent are poor. Married-couple poverty rates are a relatively modest 5.8 percent, but the proportion of two-parent households is so much higher outstate that the children in poor two-parent families comprise 46 percent of all the poor children outstate.

Table 3. Poverty Rates for Different Household Types, 1989

	Twin Cities	Outstate
Married-couple family	2.1%	5.8%
Single-parent family	32.8	40.4
Other family	4.1	6.3
Non-family household	12.1	25.2

Differences Among the Races

The gap in income and poverty among the races is a cause for much anxiety and tension. The 1990 Census showed that the differences among races remain profound. Whites earn far more than any other group and have a much lower rate of poverty. We documented these differences and explored some of their causes.

We restrict our discussion about the differences to the Twin Cities area, since that is where most of the minority populations live. The seven-county metropolitan area contains 97 percent of the state's Black population, 53 percent of the Indians, 89

percent of the Asians, and 77 percent of the Hispanics.*

Income levels for all minority groups are much lower than for Whites (Table 4). For Blacks and Indians, the median household incomes are half of what they are for Whites. Hispanics and Asians do much better, but still are a quarter to a third less than Whites. We want to point out that these well-known discrepancies should give no support to the idea that all minorities are poor. Indeed, even among the poorest groups, 40 percent have middle class incomes or better (\$25,000 or more a year). In fact, nearly one in every eight Black and Indian households has an income of over \$50,000 annually. There are, however, a large portion of all minority populations below the poverty level. While White poverty rates are under 6 percent, minority rates are three to seven times higher.

Are things getting better or worse for minorities? This is a tough question to answer. The 1980 Census reported *family* income by race and ethnicity while the 1990 Census reported *household* income, so we cannot make a direct comparison. But we can study how each group did compared to Whites on these measures. The median family income for Blacks in 1980 was only 48 percent of what it was for Whites, while Blacks' 1990 median household income was 51 percent of Whites. Using the same approach, we found that Indians improved from 43 percent to 49 percent, Hispanics improved from 73 percent to 77 percent, and Asians fell from 70 percent to 62 percent.

Poverty measures can be compared directly across census years and by these measures every minority group lost ground, while Whites stayed constant. Perhaps these different pictures, gains in income but losses in poverty, reflect the same paradoxes found when we compared income and poverty for the whole population. Perhaps they reflect a schism in each of the minority populations, a growing spread between those who are doing well and those who are mired in poverty.

Why is there such a large discrepancy between White and non-White incomes? One factor may be that non-Whites are much younger than Whites and therefore have not reached their earning potential. Indeed, the median age of the White population is 32 years compared to only 22 years for the non-White population. Some argue

* The census identifies race and ethnicity separately. One census question asked people to identify their racial background. The choices were White, Black, Indian, Asian, and other, but not Hispanic. A separate question on ethnicity asked people whether they had Hispanic ethnicity. Hispanics can be of any race (Tony Oliva, the Minnesota Twins Hall of Famer, is a Black Hispanic), but most choose White. So in the tables and figure that follow, the reader needs to remember that Hispanic rates present a different cut at the population and therefore we present them following the number for the total population. When we use the term *non-White* we mean all races except *White*. We use the term *minority* to refer to the non-White racial groups including Hispanics. We have used shorthand terms, like *Black*, to refer to each of the minority groups both because these terms most closely match the terms used in the census itself and because shorter phrases lend themselves better to presentation in tables and graphs.

Table 4. Income and Poverty Levels for the Twin Cities Area's Racial and Ethnic Groups, 1989

	Median Household Income	Percent of Households with Incomes \$25,000 or More	Poverty Rate
White	\$38,000	70.3	5.8%
Black	19,300	39.7	37.1
Indian	18,700	39.5	40.6
Asian	23,700	47.8	32.3
TOTAL	36,800	68.5	8.2
Hispanic	29,500	56.5	19.4

that as minority populations age and incomes rise, their overall income will catch up with White incomes.

We addressed this hypothesis by looking at age-specific income (Figure 5). Incomes rise for all races and for Hispanics with increasing age, to a peak in the 45-54 age group. But at no age do minorities' incomes approach those of Whites, except for those age 75 or more. In fact, even in their peak years no minority group's median income surpasses the income level of any White age cohort except for White fledglings (still in college or just starting to work) and White retirees. The relative youth of the minority population may account for some

of the difference in income, but the issue is deeper than this.

Another explanation for the relatively poor economic position of minorities is the disproportionate number of single-parent households. We have already shown that single-parent families are among the poorest of all households. For Black and Indian households, where single-parent families comprise about a third of all households, this could be a large part of the problem (Table 5). This is definitely not the answer for Asians, where the great majority of households are married couples, but where many are new migrants who have neither the skills nor the language to get good jobs. We performed a hypothetical analysis to see what the poverty of minority families would be if they had the same household composition mix as Whites. The analysis reduced Black, Indian, and Hispanic poverty rates for families by a substantial amount, but they remained two-and-a-half to four times as high as for White families. So household composition is only a partial answer as well.

Low minority incomes, then, can be partially explained by age difference and partially by household composition, but there are many other factors which we did not attempt to analyze. These include low graduation rates; many children, who strain household budgets; high unemployment rates; geographic isolation, which makes it difficult to get to jobs; the psychological frame that develops from living in multi-

Figure 5. Median Household Income in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area by Race/Ethnicity and Age of Householder, 1989

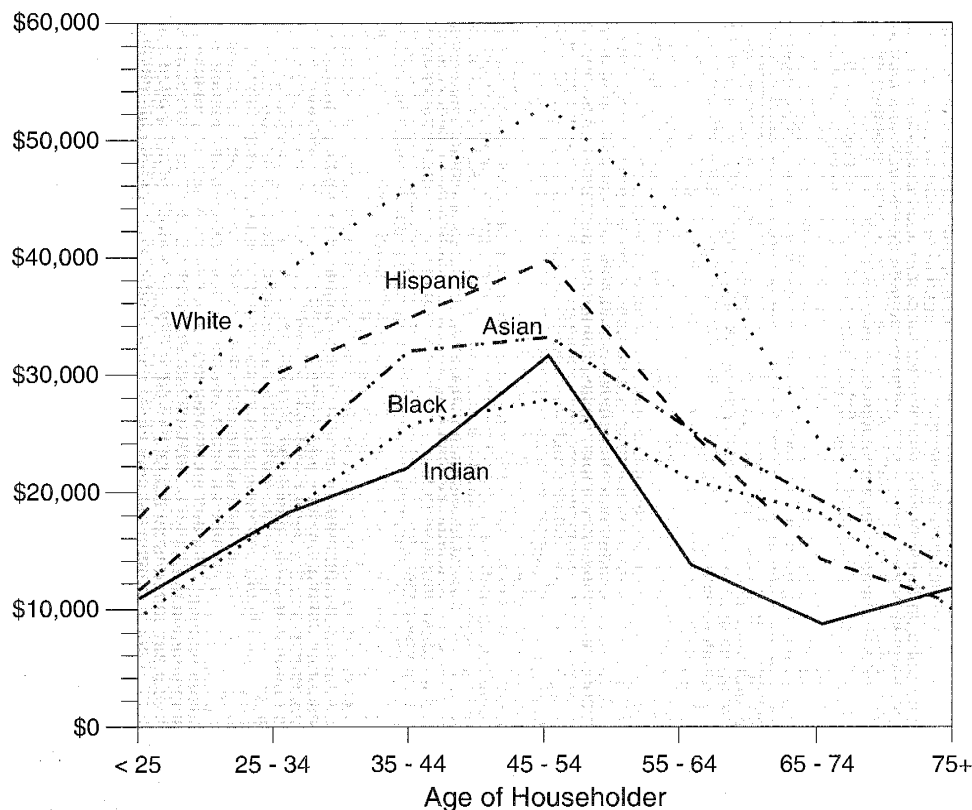


Table 5. Poverty Among Single-Parent Families of Different Races and Ethnicity, Twin Cities Area, 1989

	Single Parent as a Percent of all Families	Single Parent Poverty Rate
White	6.1	24.6%
Black	29.6	63.4
Indian	33.8	64.0
Asian	10.0	59.9
TOTAL	7.2	32.8
Hispanic	15.8	46.6

generational and concentrated poverty; and last, but not least, the debilitating effects of persistent racism.

Conclusion

We had hoped to test some myths in this paper and we think our investigation proved a few of them wrong. We looked at the "disappearing" middle class and found it alive and well. If anything, the middle class is better off than it was in 1980. Low income households are moving up the income ladder, too. Some would argue that this improvement in income has come at a high price, with women and men spending more and more time in the workplace, and less with their families. We respond that people have looked at their options and have chosen work and higher incomes. No one is forcing them to work.

Many people think Minnesota is well above national norms for income and poverty. This is true, but becoming less so. In 1990, Minnesota ranked 17th best among the states in median household income and 12th lowest in terms of poverty. Both ranks had dropped significantly during the 1980s: three slots for income and six slots for poverty. We are being pulled back toward the national average.

Being a single parent is often seen as the sure path to poverty, but in fact, two-thirds of these families live above the poverty level. In outstate Minnesota, where income levels are lower and poverty rates higher, nearly half the poor children live in two-parent families. So there are multiple paths to poverty and being a single parent is no guarantee of poverty.

And then there are myths about minority income and poverty. To be sure income is lower and poverty rates are higher for these populations, but in every minority group at least 40 percent of the population is middle class or higher. And most groups seem to be catching up with White income levels, though slowly. Arguments that disproportionately youthful populations and higher percentages of single-parent families work against minority income levels are true, but fall far short of explaining all the disparity in income levels.

In most of this article we have ignored the policy implications of our findings. The

increases in the number of very poor people, both in the Twin Cities and outstate, is the most disturbing finding of our study and the one that calls loudest for policy intervention. The rift between the haves and the have-nots appears to be widening and this can lead to an explosive situation. It is beyond the scope of this article to suggest answers, but if something is not done, the good life we are working so hard to attain will be threatened by social violence.

Will Craig is CURA's assistant director. He has a Ph.D. in geography and a deep interest in the use of data for better policy making. John Tichy is a doctoral student in geography at the University of Minnesota. This article presents a sampling from their full report, *Income and Poverty*, the first in a series of reports on *What the 1990 Census Says About Minnesota* that is being published by CURA this year. Readers interested in more detail can order a copy of the full report free-of-charge by phoning 612/625-1551.

Accepting the Circle of Life:

Lessons from the Anishinabe about Caring for Elders

by Pauline Boss, Lori Kaplan, and Michele Gordon

Families have different belief systems and when one of their elders becomes seriously ill their beliefs play a large part in determining how they view the situation of caregiving for that elder. Some families, high on mastery and self-determination, will see the disease as failure and a catastrophe; others will see an elder returning to childhood in old age as part of the natural course of life. How the situation is viewed, research has shown, has a substantial impact on how well the caregivers do and subsequently how well the elder does. If caregivers don't take care of themselves, there will be two patients instead of one.

In our Euro-American culture in the United States a high value is placed on individuality and independence, on being in charge of one's own destiny. We tend to designate one person in the family as caregiver, placing an enormous burden on that

caregiver. When an elder is stricken with a dementia of the alzheimer's type, the elder will be seen as psychologically absent though physically present. This often creates feelings of helplessness and depression in the caregiver, who has been left virtually alone with the situation. Caregiver depression, research has shown, depends on the meaning attributed to the uncertainty surrounding the illness rather than on the degree of burden or the seriousness of the illness itself.

While these links have been found in studies of white, middle class families, another research question remains: Will caregivers who value harmony with nature more than independence and mastery of nature, be as highly stressed when caring for a family member with dementia? To explore this question, we conducted a preliminary study with Native American family caregivers in northern Minnesota. The Anishinabe (Ojibwe) are a people that explicitly value harmony with nature.

The Research Design

Through Native American contacts at the University of Minnesota-Duluth, we were put in touch with a trained social worker and family therapist who is also a member of the Anishinabe tribe. The third author joined our project as a collaborator, interviewer, and coauthor. At our first meeting she brought a gift of tobacco which was later scattered around the trunk of a giant oak tree on the University campus. At first, it was as if we women were in separate worlds and shy about crossing over. For those of us in the Euro-American culture there was much to be learned.

