

# POOR WOMEN POOR CHILDREN

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American Poverty in the 1990s

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ARRELL R. RODGERS, Jr. Third  
Edition

**POOR  
WOMEN,  
POOR  
CHILDREN**

Third edition  
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# Acknowledgments

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In writing the third edition of this book I entertained the perfectly absurd notion on more than one occasion that the entire U.S. Congress was engaged in a conspiracy to thwart my efforts. Congress spent most of 1995 seriously debating and rewriting various versions of a major overhaul of welfare, announcing one completion date after another. As I wrote and rewrote along with them, 1995 came to an end with no agreement between Congress and the president on reform. For the most part unhampered by Congress, more than half the states adopted major welfare reform plans, while most of the other states are debating major innovations. Thus, this edition was written during a period of change in welfare policy unprecedented since the 1960s. I have endeavored throughout the book to capture this mood and the thrust and implications of the changes taking place.

As in writing the previous editions of this book, I have been blessed with an excellent base of academic literature and considerable personal assistance. Jean Tash, statistical assistant, at the Bureau of the Census was always inspired and tireless in helping me track down unpublished data and obtain assistance from other researchers within the Departments of Commerce and Health and Human Services. Gordon Fisher, at the Office of the Assistant

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Henry Trueba, senior vice president and provost, Richard Rozelle, dean of social sciences, and Kent Tedin, chair of political science, at the University of Houston combined their efforts to provide me with time off to write this book. I am most grateful for their kindness and support.

I am blessed with a wonderful partner in my wife, Lynne. This year she took time out of her own busy schedule to give birth to Michael James. With all my love, this book is dedicated to Michael and his truly wonderful mother.

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# **POOR WOMEN, POOR CHILDREN**



## Chapter 1

# The Increasing Numbers of Poor Women and Children

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*It is up to us to determine whether the years ahead  
will be for humankind a curse or a blessing.*

—Elie Wiesel

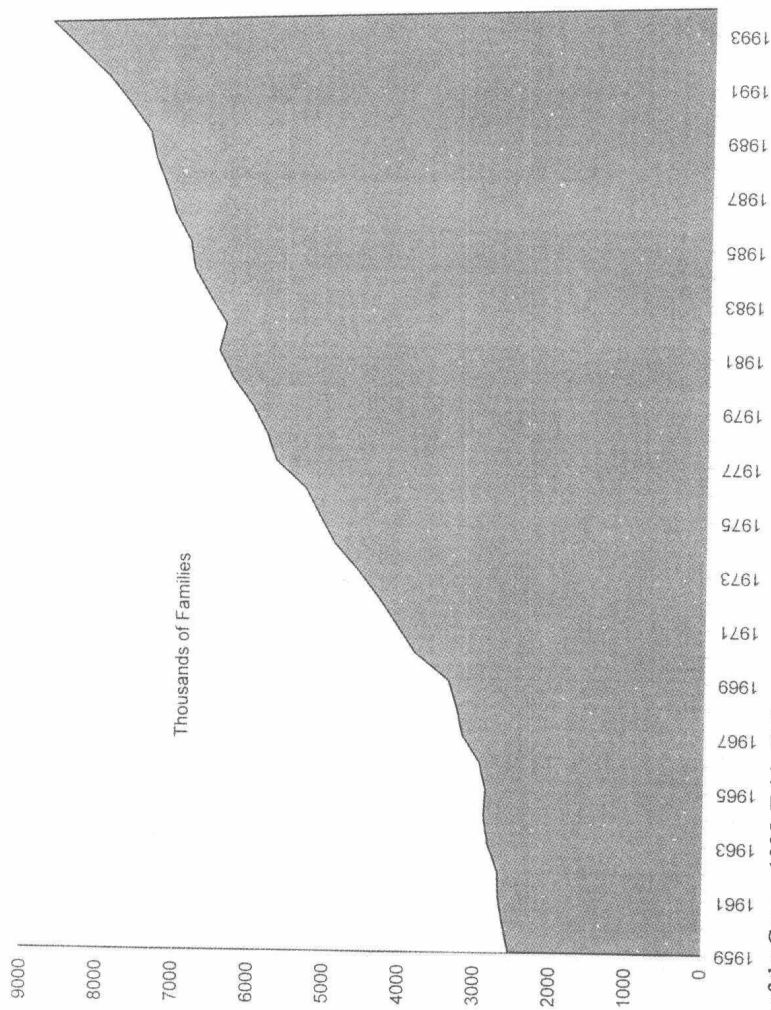
Poverty continues to be one of America's most serious social problems. Despite the fact that America may be the richest nation in the world, a substantial proportion of the American population lives in poverty. In 1993 the federal government counted 39.3 million Americans living below the poverty line, about 15 percent of the population (Bureau of the Census 1995, xvi). This is a huge number of people. Fewer than 30 million people live in all of Canada. The American poverty population is, in fact, larger than the combined total populations of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Delaware, West Virginia, Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Nevada, Alaska, and Hawaii.

Poverty has increased in recent years and has proven an extremely difficult problem to ameliorate, in significant part because one of the most vulnerable groups—mother-only families—has grown very rapidly over the last thirty years as a proportion of all families. Between 1970 and 1993 the number of mother-only families with children more than doubled, from 3.8 million to 8.7 million (Figure 1.1). During this same period, the number of two-parent families with children increased by only 1.3 percent. As a consequence of these changes, by 1993 almost one of every four American families with children was headed by a woman, compared to one in ten in 1960 (Bureau of the Census 1995, D22).

As Table 1.1 (p. 6) shows, in 1960 only 8 percent of all children under eighteen lived in a family headed by a single woman. In 1993 the percentage was almost one in four, 23.3 percent, including some 17 percent of white children, 28 percent of Hispanic children, and a majority, 54 percent, of all black children (Figure 1.2 [p. 7]). The number of children in single-parent families has increased dramatically. In 1993 some 17.9 million children lived with only one parent, 87 percent of those—over 15 million—with their mother. In 1960 a third of that number, about 5 million children, lived in mother-only families (Table 1.1). Of the current generation of all American children, more than half will spend some of their childhood in a household headed by a single mother (Sweet and Bumpass 1987; Bumpass and Raley 1993). A significant percentage will spend their entire childhood in a mother-only family.

Single mothers and their dependent children are extremely vulnerable economically, educationally, and socially. These families suffer extremely high rates of poverty. In 1993 over 46 percent of all families with children headed by a single woman lived in poverty. By contrast, only 9 percent of all married-couple families with dependent children had incomes below the poverty level (U.S. House 1994, 1161; Bureau of the Census 1995, D22). Eleven percent of the mother-only families were poor despite the fact that the mother worked full-time year-round.

**Figure 1.1. Mother-Only Families with Children, 1959–1993**



*Source:* Bureau of the Census 1995, Table D-6.

Table 1.1

## Living Arrangements of Children Under 18, 1960 and 1993

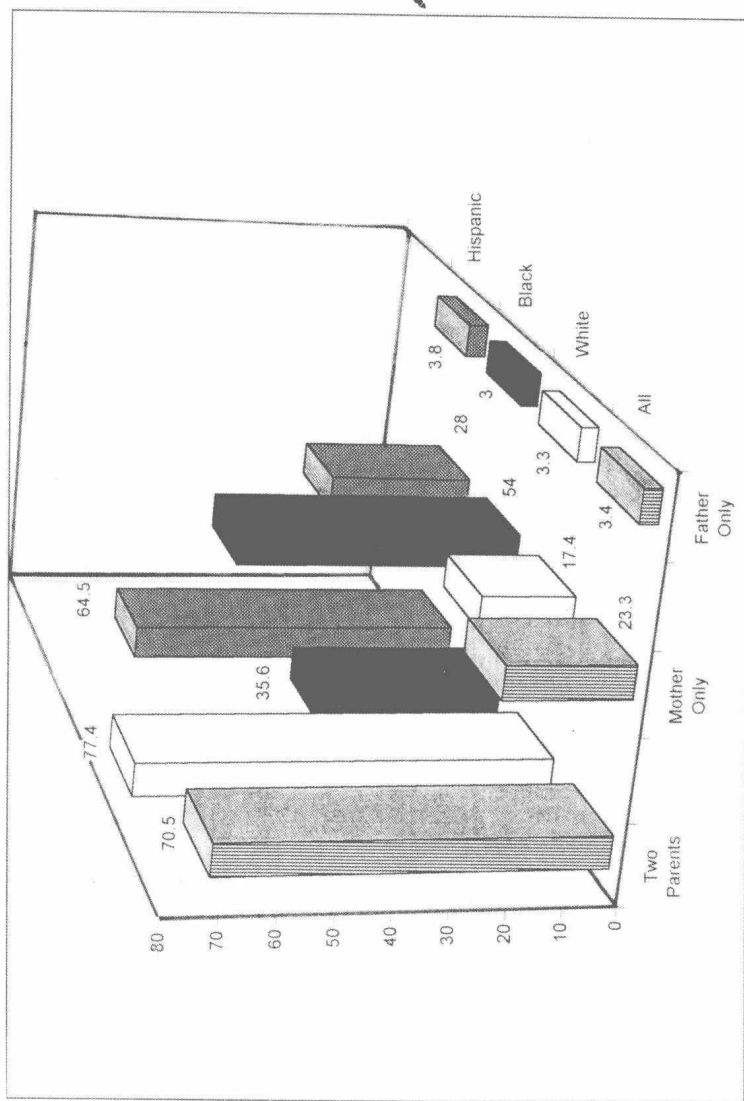
	All races		White		Black		Hispanic	
	1960	1993	1960	1993	1960	1993	1980	1993
Total number of children								
living with	63,727	66,893	55,077	53,075	8,650	10,660	5,459	7,776
Two parents	55,877 (87.7)	47,181 (70.5)	50,082 (90.9)	40,996 (77.2)	5,795 (67.0)	3,796 (35.6)	4,116 (75.4)	5,017 (64.5)
One parent	5,829 (9.1)	17,872 (26.7)	3,932 (7.1)	11,110 (20.9)	1,897 (20.9)	6,079 (57.0)	1,152 (21.1)	2,472 (31.8)
Mother only	5,105 (8.0)	15,586 (23.3)	3,381 (6.1)	9,256 (17.4)	1,723 (19.9)	5,757 (54.0)	1,069 (19.6)	2,176 (28.0)
Father only	724 (1.1)	2,286 (3.4)	551 (1.0)	1,854 (3.3)	173 (2.0)	322 (3.0)	83 (1.5)	296 (3.8)
Other relative or nonrelative	2,021 (3.2)	1,841 (2.8)	1,062 (1.9)	969 (1.9)	959 (11.1)	784 (8.4)	191 (3.5)	286 (3.6)

Source: U.S. House 1994 (*Green Book*): 1113-1116.

Note: Numbers may not sum due to rounding.



Figure 1.2. Living Arrangements of Children, 1993



Source: U.S. House 1994 (*Green Book*): 1113-1116.