

In the United States, 38.1 million people identify as African-American or black—12.4 percent of the U.S. population.¹ African-Americans continue to suffer disproportionately from hunger, poverty, unemployment, and income and education disparities when compared with the U.S. population as a whole.

Poverty

The ongoing effects of the economic recession led to higher poverty rates in 2009 (the last full year for which data are available). African-American poverty and food insecurity rates are closely linked.

- **One in four²** African-Americans lives below the federal poverty line, compared to about one in eight Americans overall. In 2009, the poverty line for a family of two adults and two children was \$21,756.
- Poverty among African-American children is especially alarming—putting a generation at risk. **More than a third (35.7 percent) of all African-American children lives in poverty, compared to one in five children living in poverty in the country as a whole.³**



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- In each of the 10 states with the highest poverty rates in the country, the African-American poverty rate was significantly higher than the overall state poverty rate. In some states, the African-American poverty rate was double the general poverty rate.
- More than one in four African-Americans in the nation’s capital live below the poverty line.
- Eight of the 10 largest metropolitan areas in the United States also have the highest numbers of African-Americans living in poverty—including the metro areas of New York-Northern New Jersey, Chicago, Atlanta, Philadelphia, Miami-Fort Lauderdale, Houston, Dallas-Fort Worth, and Washington, D.C.

Hunger

A principal cause of hunger in the United States is the inability to afford sufficient food. The U.S. government defines households that struggle to put food on the table at some point during the year as “food insecure.”

- **One in four⁴** African-American households struggles to put food on the table, compared to about one in seven of all U.S. households.

Top 10 Highest Poverty Rates, 2009 data			
Rank	State	Poverty	African-American Poverty
1	Mississippi	21.9%	36.0%
2	Arkansas	18.8%	36.4%
3	Kentucky	18.6%	32.0%
4	District of Columbia	18.4%	26.8%
5	New Mexico	18.0%	25.5%
6	West Virginia	17.7%	31.2%
7	Alabama	17.5%	30.8%
8	Louisiana	17.3%	30.1%
9	Texas	17.2%	23.1%
10	South Carolina	17.1%	28.6%
10	Tennessee	17.1%	29.5%

- African-American children experience hunger at higher rates than adults. **Almost 35 percent of African-American children live in families that struggle to put food on the table.**

The 2009 food insecurity rates were high for one of the world’s wealthiest nations. They did not rise steeply above their 2008 levels, however, due largely to safety net programs. The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC); the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (or SNAP, formerly the Food Stamp Program); and school breakfasts and lunches helped prevent more people from going hungry.

Food Insecurity, 2009 data ⁵		
	General Population	African-Americans
Households	14.7% 17.4 million	24.9% 3.6 million
Individuals	16.6% 50.2 million	27.0% 9.9 million
Children under 18	23.2% 17.2 million	34.6% 3.8 million

Nutrition Assistance Programs

African-Americans have a higher likelihood of participating in nutrition assistance programs. Because eligibility for federal nutrition programs is income-based, participation in these programs is an indicator of both nutritional and economic need.

- African-Americans make up 12.4 percent of the population⁶ but 19.6 percent of participants in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).⁷
- African-Americans are 22.5 percent of the participants in SNAP,⁸ the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly the Food Stamp Program).
- **90 percent of African-American children will receive SNAP benefits at some point before age 20, compared to 49 percent of all U.S. children.**⁹

Unemployment

The foundation of economic security is employment.

- The significant job losses since the U.S. recession began in December 2007 have been felt disproportionately among African-Americans.
- Even before the recession, African-Americans had a much higher unemployment rate than the population as a whole. The African-American unemployment

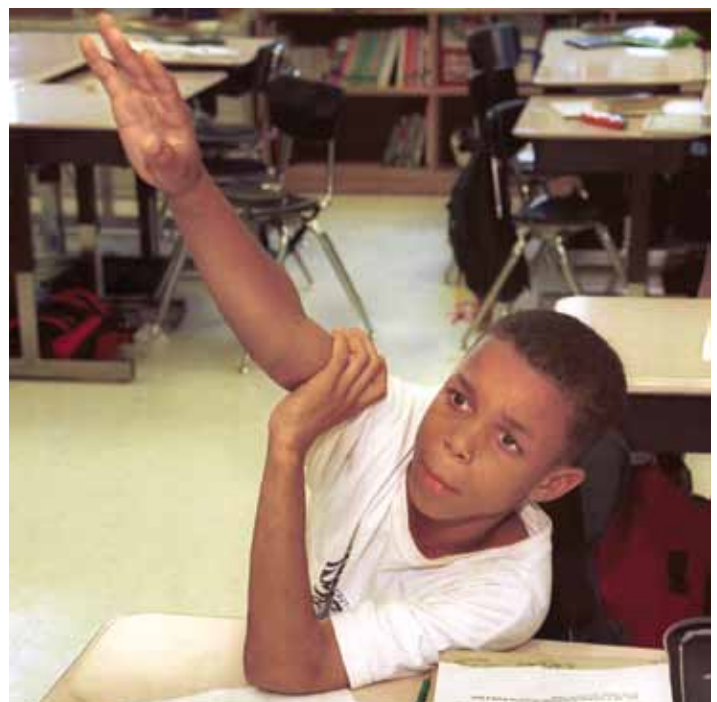
rate was 8.4 percent in November 2007,¹⁰ while the overall unemployment rate did not reach that level until March 2009¹¹—well over a year into the recession. **Thus, African-American families were experiencing “recession-like” conditions even while the wider U.S. economy was strong.**

	Income	
	General Population	African-Americans
Median Income, 2009 ¹²	\$49,777	\$32,584
Median Weekly Earnings, 2009 ¹³	\$739	\$601
Men	\$819	\$621
Women	\$657	\$582

Income and Education

Income levels determine whether and how a family will be able to provide for its needs. Employment and income levels are strongly linked to education.

- African-Americans have much lower median incomes than the U.S. population as a whole.
- In the long run, earning an income sufficient to support a family enables people to build up assets, providing more protection against unexpected setbacks such as illness or job loss and greater long-term economic security.
- African-Americans are less likely to own their home than the overall U.S. population. In 2009, 46.2 percent of African-Americans owned a home, compared to 67.4 percent of the total population.¹⁴



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- African-Americans have higher high school dropout rates and lower rates of college graduation.
- Compared to someone with a bachelor's degree, an adult with a high school diploma is twice as likely to be unemployed; an adult without a high school diploma is three times as likely to be unemployed.¹⁵
- Educational attainment has a significant impact on income. In 2009, the median income among people older than 25 who were college graduates was \$47,510, while high school graduates had a median income of \$26,140 and those without high school diplomas earned \$18,432.¹⁶

For Further Information:

- Bread for the World Institute's book-length report, *Hunger 2010: A Just and Sustainable Recovery*, offers analysis on how to reduce income inequality through housing, asset building, healthcare, and education policy.
www.hungerreport.org/2010/report/chapters/two
- The Hunger Report also explains why greening the U.S. economy is good for the manufacturing and construction sectors, which together account for roughly half of all the jobs lost since the recession began.
www.hungerreport.org/2010/report/chapters/one
- The report profiles the Harlem Children's Zone, one of the most innovative programs in the country, with a goal of raising academic achievement and keeping students in school in high-poverty African-American communities.
www.hungerreport.org/2010/stories/report/harlem-childrens-zone
- The following stories from *A Just and Sustainable Recovery* describe how subprime lending and the housing crash affected African Americans:
www.hungerreport.org/2010/stories/report/in-south-florida-mortgages-to-build-american-dreams
www.hungerreport.org/2010/report/chapters/two/housing/the-subprime-bomb-explodes

Endnotes

¹ American Community Survey Demographic and Housing Estimates: 2008. U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau. http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/ADPTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=01000US&-qr_name=ACS_2008_1YR_G00_DP5&-ds_name=ACS_2008_1YR_G00_-&-lang=en&-redoLog=false&-format=

² Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2008. U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau, September 2009. (Table 4). <http://www.census.gov/prod/2010pubs/p60-238.pdf>

³ Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2010. U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau, September 2010. (Table 4 and Table B2). <http://www.census.gov/prod/2010pubs/p60-238.pdf>

⁴ Household Food Security in the United States, 2008. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, November 2009. (Table 2). <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/ERR83/ERR83.pdf>

⁵ Household Food Security in the United States, 2008. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, November 2009. (Table 2, Table 5, and Table 6). <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/ERR83/ERR83>.

⁶ American Community Survey Demographic and Housing Estimates: 2008. U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau. http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/ADPTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=01000US&-qr_name=ACS_2008_1YR_G00_DP5&-ds_name=ACS_2008_1YR_G00_-&-lang=en&-redoLog=false&-format=

⁷ WIC Participant and Program Characteristics 2008. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Analysis, Nutrition and Evaluation, January 2010. (Executive Summary) <http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/menu/Published/WIC/FILES/pc2008.pdf>

⁸ Characteristics of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Households: Fiscal Year 2009. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Analysis, Nutrition and Evaluation, October 2010. (Table A-23 Gender and SNAP Benefits of Participants by Selected Demographic Characteristics). <http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/MENU/Published/snap/FILES/Participation/2009Characteristics.pdf>

⁹ Estimating the Risk of Food Stamp Use and Impoverishment During Childhood. Rank & Hirschl. Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine, 2009. 163(11): 994-999. (Table 2). <http://www.medical-legalpartnership.org/sites/default/files/page/Estimating%20the%20Risk%20of%20Food%20Stamp%20Use%20and%20Impoverishment.pdf>

¹⁰ The Employment Situation. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (Household Data, Table A-2, seasonally adjusted). November 2007 data. <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/empisit.pdf>

¹¹ In March 2009, the national unemployment rate reached 8.6%. Seasonally Adjusted Unemployment Rate, Historical Data. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

¹² Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2009. U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau, September 2010. (Table 1). <http://www.census.gov/prod/2010pubs/p60-236.pdf>

¹³ Highlights of Women's Earnings in 2009. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, June 2010. (Table 1). <http://www.bls.gov/cps/cpswom2009.pdf>

¹⁴ Housing Vacancies and Homeownership (CPS/HVS). U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau. 2009 Annual Statistics (Table 22) <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/housing/hvs/hvs.html>

¹⁵ The Employment Situation. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (Household Data, Table A-4, seasonally adjusted). January 2011 data. <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/empisit.pdf>

¹⁶ B20004. Median Earnings in the past 12 Months (in 2009 inflation-adjusted dollars) by Sex by Educational Attainment for the Population 25 years and over – Universe: Population 25 Years and Over with Earnings. http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DTTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=01000US&-ds_name=ACS_2009_3YR_G00_-&-mt_name=ACS_2009_3YR_G2000_B20004



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