



# Hunger and Poverty in the African-American Community

## What's the Problem?

African-Americans are more likely to be food-insecure and live in poverty than other Americans. Being food-insecure, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, means that a person or household does not have regular, reliable access to the foods needed for good health.

This condition is a direct result of poverty, racial discrimination, and gender discrimination. While the United States has a high poverty rate (14.8 percent), according to the U.S. Census, African-Americans have a poverty rate of more than 26 percent. This rate is even higher in African-American female-headed households (42.6 percent).

## African-Americans are more likely to lack access to food.

- Only 8 percent of African-Americans live in areas with a supermarket, compared to 31 percent of whites.<sup>1</sup>
- Almost 94 percent of the nation's majority African-American counties are food-insecure.<sup>2</sup>

### FOOD INSECURITY

	General Population	African-Americans
All households	14%	26.10%
Households with children	19.2%	32.4%
Female-headed household with children	35.3%	N/A

Source: Food Security in the United States, 2014. U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service.

Since poverty rates are much higher and income levels are much lower in African-American female-headed households compared to general populations, we expect that food-insecurity levels are also much higher among African-American female-headed households. This would suggest that hunger and poverty levels could be reduced with safety-net programs and policies that do not penalize married couples, support female-headed households with children, and target men who might have children but are unable to secure employment.

## WHAT FACTORS CONTRIBUTE TO HUNGER AND POVERTY IN THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY?

- Lack of access to healthy and affordable food
- Unemployment and low wages
- Less access to quality and affordable education
- Higher healthcare costs
- Less access to credit
- Higher debt levels
- Higher levels of incarceration



Joseph Molteni/Bread for the World

The median income of African-American households is nearly \$20,000 less than the median income of other households.

**\$35,398**  
African-American households

**\$53,657**  
other households

As a result, African-Americans are more than

**FOUR TIMES**

as likely as whites to face what the USDA calls "very low food security."

## CONTRIBUTING FACTORS:

### Lower Employment and Income

African-Americans are more likely to be unemployed, and to hold low-wage jobs with few or no benefits.

- 10.4 percent of African-Americans are unemployed, not counting part-time workers seeking full-time work.

#### INCOME

	General Population	African-Americans
Median income	\$53,657	\$35,398
Men	\$39,181	\$38,060*
Women	\$26,673	\$23,165*
Female-headed households	\$36,151	\$26,169*
Returning citizens	\$18,272*	\$13,924*

Source: Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2014. U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau, September 2015.

\*Data based on 2013 estimates from the U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau.

### Poorer Education

Education can predict a person's earnings. Lower-resourced schools are located disproportionately in African-American communities.

- About 40 percent of African-American students (3.2 million children) attend high-poverty schools—six times the rate of whites.
- African-American college students have the highest level of student debt<sup>3</sup> (\$29,344 on average) of any racial group.

### Poorer Health

Lack of nutritious food causes serious medical conditions, including obesity and diabetes. Health care expenses lead to higher debt levels and worsen financial stress.

- 55 percent of African-Americans have out-of-pocket medical costs<sup>4</sup> on credit cards because they cannot pay in full.
- 34 percent of African-Americans did not see a doctor when ill for financial reasons.

### Poor Credit

African-Americans are more likely to have poor credit histories than whites with similar incomes. Poor credit can prevent people from securing:

- A job, place to live, or reliable car. Many employers, landlords, and companies consider credit scores when hiring and accepting applicants.

### Higher Levels of Debt

African-Americans have lower incomes and higher debt levels. In addition, predatory lenders that charge higher interest rates concentrate in low-income communities, which increases the probability of falling into debt.

- African-Americans spend more than half their incomes repaying debts.<sup>5</sup>
- Due to higher interest rates on loans, African-Americans were 80 percent more likely to lose their homes before and after the Great Recession.

### Mass Incarceration

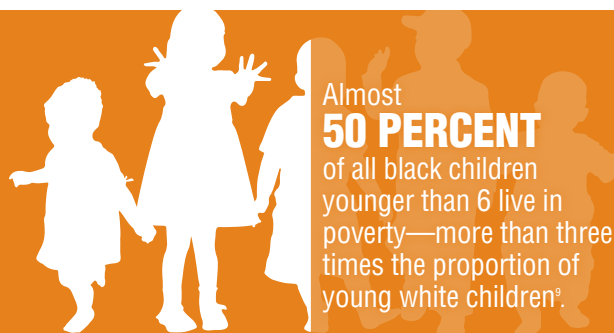
African-Americans are more likely than others charged with similar offenses to be incarcerated. Soaring incarceration rates deplete community resources such as court fees and lost work hours.

- African-Americans are seven times as likely<sup>6</sup> to be incarcerated as whites.
- The family of someone in prison owes on average more than \$13,000 in court costs alone.

While African-Americans make up only 13 percent of the U.S. population, they represent **22 percent** of those who are experiencing poverty and hunger, according to the U.S. Census. With advocacy for the right policies, we can reduce these numbers and move toward ending hunger in this community.

**22%**

Almost **50 PERCENT** of all black children younger than 6 live in poverty—more than three times the proportion of young white children<sup>9</sup>.



#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Access to Affordable and Nutritious Food: Report to Congress, June 2009. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. [www.ers.usda.gov/media/242675/ap036\\_1\\_.pdf](http://www.ers.usda.gov/media/242675/ap036_1_.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Map the Meal 2015: Highlights of Findings for Overall and Child Food Insecurity. Feeding America. [www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/our-research/map-the-meal-gap/2013/map-the-meal-gap-2013-exec-summ.pdf](http://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/our-research/map-the-meal-gap/2013/map-the-meal-gap-2013-exec-summ.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> The Debt Divide: The Racial and Class Bias Behind the "New Normal" of Student Borrowing. Demos. [http://www.demos.org/sites/default/files/publications/](http://www.demos.org/sites/default/files/publications/Mark-Debt%20divide%20Final%20(SF).pdf)

[Mark-Debt%20divide%20Final%20\(SF\).pdf](http://www.demos.org/sites/default/files/publications/FACTSHEET_TheColorofDebt_Demos.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> The Color of Debt: Credit Card by Race and Ethnicity Demos Fact Sheet. Demos. [www.demos.org/sites/default/files/publications/FACTSHEET\\_TheColorofDebt\\_Demos.pdf](http://www.demos.org/sites/default/files/publications/FACTSHEET_TheColorofDebt_Demos.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Who Pays? The True Cost of Incarceration on Families. September 2015. <http://ellabakercenter.org/sites/default/files/downloads/who-pays.pdf>