



# Hunger and Poverty in the African American Community

## What's the Problem?

While hunger and poverty declined among African Americans in 2017 (most recent available data), food insecurity has still not dropped enough this past year to match the one percent increase African Americans saw in 2016. Consequently, an additional 56,000<sup>i</sup> African Americans are still food insecure compared to 2015 numbers. While this is lower than the 187,000 additional African Americans who fell into hunger in 2016, targeted policies that prioritize racial and gender equity need to be implemented to reduce hunger at faster rates.

The higher rates of poverty and hunger among African Americans are direct results of systemic inequity through racial and gender discrimination. While the United States has an overall poverty rate of 12.3 percent, according to the U.S. Census, within the African American community, the poverty rate is 21.2 percent. This rate is even higher in African American female-headed households at 30.3 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>ii</sup>
- Almost 94 percent of the nation's majority African American counties are food-insecure.<sup>iii</sup>

security levels are also much higher among African American female-headed households. This would suggest that strengthened support systems and dedicated efforts to dismantle racial and gender discrimination would reverse this reality, and help economically empower African American individuals and families.

## INEQUITY CONTRIBUTES TO HUNGER AND POVERTY IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

- 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



## FOOD INSECURITY

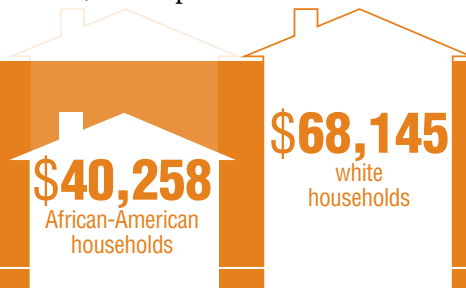
	General Population	African Americans
All households	11.8%	21.8%
Households with children	15.7%	26.1%
Female-headed household with children	30.3%	N/A*

\*The percentages of food-insecure African Americans are believed to be higher than the corresponding food-insecurity levels in the general population, however, data from USDA is not publicly available.

Source: Food Security in the United States, 2017. 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 the general population, we expect that food-in-

African Americans were the ONLY racial group that saw a DECREASE in household income...Consequently, racial inequity has widened to a \$30,000 difference in median household income.



As a result, African Americans are **TWO TIMES** as likely as whites to face what the USDA calls "very low food insecurity."

## ADDITIONAL INEQUITIES CONTRIBUTING TO HUNGER AND POVERTY

### Lower Employment and Income

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

- 6.3 percent of African Americans are unemployed, not including part-time workers seeking full-time work or those returning from incarceration.
- Unemployment among African American returning citizens is 2 times higher than white returning citizens (44 percent of African American women are unemployed compared to 23 percent of white women and 35 percent of African American men are unemployed compared to 18 percent of white men).<sup>iv</sup>

#### INCOME

	General Population	African Americans
Household income (families)	\$61,372	\$40,258
Men	\$51,220*	\$37,440*
Women	\$42,380*	\$33,488*
Returning citizens	\$30,984**	\$23,753**

Source: Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2017. U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau, September 2018.

\*Calculated based on estimates from the Bureau of Labor Statistics Table 3. 2018 Median Weekly Earnings by Age, Race, and Sex and U.S. Census data

\*\*Collateral Consequences. The Pew Charitable Trusts. Estimations based on 40 percent reduction in earnings. [www.pewtrusts.org/-/media/legacy/uploadedfiles/pcs\\_assets/2010/collateralcosts1.pdf](http://www.pewtrusts.org/-/media/legacy/uploadedfiles/pcs_assets/2010/collateralcosts1.pdf)

### Poorer Education

Education can predict a person's earnings. As a result of housing segregation, lower-resourced, 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 (\$29,344 on average) of any racial group.

### Poorer Health<sup>vi</sup>

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

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

### Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> Bread estimations based on the .7 percent decrease in hunger in 2017, compared with the rising hunger among African Americans 2016 and total U.S. households. Census Quick Facts. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045216>

<sup>ii</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>iii</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>iv</sup> Out of Prison & Out of Work: Unemployment among formerly incarcerated people. Prison Policy Initiative. July 2018. <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/outofwork.html>

### Poor Credit

African Americans are more likely to have poor credit histories than whites with similar income due to inequitable policies and practices. Poor credit can prevent people from securing:

- A job, place to live, or reliable car since many low-wage employers, housing units, 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>vii</sup>
- Due to higher interest rates on loans, African Americans were 80 percent<sup>viii</sup> more likely to lose their homes during the Great Recession.

### Mass Incarceration<sup>ix</sup>

African Americans are more likely than others charged with similar offenses to be incarcerated. Soaring incarceration rates deplete community resources and money.

- African Americans are seven times as likely to be incarcerated as whites who commit the same offenses.
- The family of someone in prison owes on average more than \$13,000 in court costs alone.

### African American Leaders Fight Hunger

African American leaders on the local, state, national, and international levels continue to do their part to fight hunger and poverty in their communities. To learn more visit [bread.org/rise](http://bread.org/rise) to see the contributions of African Americans throughout this century.

### Learn About Racial Equity

To learn more about how systemic racial inequity has created the racial hunger and income gaps for African Americans, visit the [Racial Wealth Gap Learning Simulation](http://bread.org/simulation) at [bread.org/simulation](http://bread.org/simulation).

<sup>v</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/MarkDebt%20divide%20Final%20\(SF\).pdf](http://www.demos.org/sites/default/files/publications/MarkDebt%20divide%20Final%20(SF).pdf)

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

<sup>vii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>viii</sup> “Them That’s Got Shall Get.” American Prospect. October 2015. <http://prospect.org/article/staggering-loss-black-wealth-due-subprime-scandal-continues-unabated>

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