

# African American Jobless Rate Remains High

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*Persistent poverty and racial unrest expose reality behind the government numbers*

Despite the unemployment figures released on Sept. 4, indicating that the rate of joblessness has gone down to 5.1 percent, the figures among African Americans remains twice as that of whites.

Historically since the advent of the tabulation of jobless statistics, African Americans have maintained consistently disproportionate higher figures for those who are looking for work and cannot find employment. This is related to the character of national oppression which overlaps with class exploitation.

Over the course of the last four or more decades, the African American unemployment rate being double that of whites, illustrates that institutional racism is still alive and well within the economic structures of the United States. The massive closings of industrial facilities in the last four decades as well as the outlawing of affirmative action in many states, has served to restrict employment opportunities and fuel the substantially higher levels of poverty among the oppressed.

In an article published by the Atlanta Black Star written by Nekala Alexander, it says “that [the] percentage masks the unemployment disparities between white Americans and minorities across individual states. Right now the national unemployment rate for white Americans is about 4.6 percent, for Hispanics, it is 6.5, and for Blacks, 9.1.” (Aug. 8)

This same article then continues citing figures on this phenomenon, noting “On the record, Washington, D.C., hit the peak of Black unemployment with a 14.2 percent rate. New Jersey followed with 13 percent, South Carolina was at 12.8 percent, and Illinois at 11.5 percent. Tennessee holds the lowest state of Black unemployment, which is equivalent to the highest rate of white unemployment in West Virginia.”

Compounding this problem is the failure of the federal government, the U.S. Congress and the corporate community to even address this glaring crisis. Instead law-enforcement agencies across the country have intensified the repressive apparatus of the state, killing African Americans in astronomical numbers and placing many more in the clutches of the prosecutorial offices, the courts and the prisons.

## **Examining Jobless Rates within a Political Context**

Latino unemployment continues to be disproportionately high as well, but African Americans have the highest rate within the country. A study published last month by the Economic Policy Institute (EPI) reveals some very interesting statistics with very limited movement towards closing the gap between the races.

The report reveals that pre-recession and “post-recession” jobless rates for African Americans are basically the same.

Algernon Austin wrote for the EPI during the summer that “The figures show the average of the annual unemployment rates for whites and blacks from 1963 to 2012. It also shows the average of the national unemployment rate during recession years in this period. The average unemployment rate for the recession years is 6.7 percent. Over this period, whites have an average unemployment rate of 5.1 percent, significantly below the recession average.” (June 19)

This observation continues stressing that “In fact, for most of the 50 years, the white unemployment rate was below 5.1 percent, at times falling to as low as 3.1 percent. By contrast, the average unemployment rate for blacks over the past 50 years, at 11.6 percent, is considerably higher than the average rate during recessions of 6.7 percent. In only one year (1969), did the black unemployment rate dip slightly below the recession average to 6.4 percent. Thus, over the last 50 years, the black unemployment rate has been at a level typical for a recession or higher.”

This lower rate in 1969 coincided with the advent of urban rebellions and revolutionary mass organizing within the industrial, civic and educational arenas. The repressive apparatus of the U.S. during this period saw the wholesale attack on a wide range of organizations from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Black Panther Party and other community and youth formations leading to political assassinations, forced exile and domestic imprisonment.

Oftentimes economists link unemployment in the African American community with the lack of funding for schools in urban areas. Others include educational achievement with previous career experience.

Nonetheless, the upcoming generations of students are finishing colleges and universities at increased rates yet a degree is still not enough to guarantee African Americans against the systemic institutional racism still permeating the workforce. With no governmental or judicial pressure to establish guidelines and quotas in hiring practices, it is almost impossible to prove intent to discriminate in the courts.

The Center for Economic Policy Research undertook an evaluation of hiring practices in 2014 which revealed that 12.4 percent of African American college graduates ranging in age from 22 to 27 were without jobs in comparison to 5.6 percent of college graduates overall in the same age category.

EPI Director of the Program on Race, Ethnicity and Economy, Valerie Wilson, was quoted in Black Enterprise magazine saying “Even when you compare blacks and whites with the same backgrounds, blacks get less employment opportunities. When we say racial discrimination, we often have overt practices in our minds. But it’s taken on different forms. It’s not as blatant as it once was, but it still plays out in decisions and perceptions about blacks,” she emphasized. (Sept. 7)

### **Labor Participation Rate Worst in Decades**

These recent jobless figures emanating from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and other sources fail to properly account for the decreasing labor participation rate which is the

lowest in four decades. Tens of millions of people have dropped out of the official labor market in large part because of the lack of jobs and the stagnation in wages.

On the website of zero hedge.com it says “the main reason why the unemployment rate tumbled to the lowest since April 2008 is because another 261,000 Americans dropped out of the labor force, as a result pushing the total number of U.S. potential workers who are not in the labor force, to a record 94 million, an increase of 1.8 million in the past year, and a whopping 14.9 million since the start of the second great depression in December 2007 while only 4 million new jobs have been created.” (Sept. 4)

Even according to the BLS, the labor participation rate is hovering around 62 percent, meaning that nearly 40 percent of the workforce are either not seeking traditional jobs or are employed in the informal sectors of the economy. In many African American urban communities, such as Detroit, centers of employment are located miles outside of their neighborhoods.

The lack of public transportation and non-ownership and access to vehicles hampers the ability to reach areas where hiring is taking place even for low-wage employment. This absence of transportation resources coupled with institutional discrimination creates conditions that are potentially volatile socially.

In areas where rebellions and mass demonstrations have erupted over the last 13 months, with specific reference to St. Louis County, Missouri and Baltimore, Maryland, both have high rates of unemployment and poverty. Also the repressive nature of the municipal police and courts place further obstacles to obtaining employment due to the rates of traffic stops, citations and incarceration.

Until these issues are addressed on a national level, the situations prevailing in African American communities across the country will remain tense. Anti-racist movements, including Black Lives Matter, must continue their efforts to halt the arbitrary harassment, physical abuse and killing of African Americans, but at the same time the growing sensitivity to state-sanctioned violence must expand to include an economic program demanding jobs, quality education, public services and a guaranteed income.

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