

# New Report Reveals Increasing Hunger Rates Among African Americans

Despite claims of economic recovery oppressed peoples fall deeper into poverty

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*A Bread for the World (BFTW) analysis just released points out that the food deficits among African Americans are reaching crisis proportions.*

In this report based on United States Government and Pew Research Center data, the social conditions related to the ability to purchase food and other essential services is decreasing.

The oppressed nation of over 42 million African Americans has the highest disproportionate rates of poverty, unemployment and mass incarceration. This is taking place even though the Great Recession officially ended over four years ago.

*“As African-Americans, we still suffer from some of the highest rates of hunger and poverty in the country despite the growth of our country’s economy since 2008,” says Eric Mitchell, who is the director of government relations at Bread for the World. “The lack of jobs that pay fair wages is preventing people of color from moving out of poverty and the recession.” (PR newswire, Feb. 20)*

This report suggests that a decline in official unemployment rates during 2014 was responsible for what they claim is a reduction in hunger. Nonetheless, African Americans continue to experience jobless rates twice as high as the national average.

*“A good job—one with decent wages that can support a worker and his or her dependents—must include flexibility for employees to lift and sustain themselves out of poverty and provide for their families. This economic inequality manifests itself in disproportionately higher rates of hunger and poverty among communities of color, which affects children in particular.” (BFTW, Feb. 2015 Fact Sheet)*

## Impact of Poverty and Hunger on Children

The grim employment and income disparities in the U.S. have a tremendous impact on the well-being of children. These social dynamics are reflected in the food deficits among minors.

This same agency that issued the scathing report earlier in February, warned two years ago that children were being severely affected by increasing poverty rates. There is a high positive correlation between household poverty and the lack of food for children.

BFTW noted in 2013 that “Hunger closely mirrors the poverty figures: 14.9 percent of households in the United States (50.1 million Americans, or one in six) are food insecure—meaning that the people in the household are unsure of how they will provide for their next meal at some point during the year. Households with children are more likely to experience food insecurity. Around the country, nearly one in four children—16.7 million—lives in a food insecure family. More than a quarter of all children under age five lived in poverty in 2011.” (BFTW news release, March 11, 2013)

In data released in 2013 by the U.S. Department of Agriculture it reveals that over 25 percent of African American households are experiencing what is called “food insecurity.” At the same time those households which have children are reported to have even higher rates of food deficits at nearly 30 percent. This is compared to an overall figure within the U.S. of 20.6 percent.

Among African Americans in general some 27.6 percent are considered to be living under the poverty line. Within this context, nearly 39 percent of those under 18 and 42.7 percent of small children below five years of age live in poverty.

These figures suggest that the situation is getting worse as the newer generation grows into maturity. The prospect for a healthy and productive life seems to be fading with every passing year.

There are 20 states across the country where the African American child poverty rates are the most acute. BFTW says from the 2013 report that

“Those states and the rate of African-American child poverty are: Iowa 55.7; Ohio 50.5; Michigan 50.0; Mississippi 49.6; Wisconsin 49.1; Indiana 48.7; Louisiana 48.3; Kansas 46.2; Alabama 45.8; Minnesota 45.8; Kentucky 45.7; Arkansas 45.4; Illinois 44.8; Oklahoma 44.8; South Carolina 44.4; Tennessee 43.6; Washington, D.C. 43.2; Missouri 41.7; Florida 41.2; and Pennsylvania 40.8.”

This same report continues noting

“In Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, Indiana, Kansas, Minnesota, Oklahoma, and Pennsylvania, African-American child poverty rates are double the overall child poverty rates. In Iowa, the poverty rate for African-American children is more than triple the overall child poverty rate.”

### **Mass Incarceration as a Factor in Food Insecurity**

Since African Americans are incarcerated at nearly 600 percent higher rates than whites, they face tremendous hurdles in providing adequate income and food for their families. African Americans and Latinos make up 58 percent of the prison population.

Studies reveal that almost 70 percent of parents who get locked up were employed at the time of their incarceration. These factors place a serious dent in household income. More than 50 percent of the fathers who are in prison were the main source of financial support for their children. (BFTW, Feb. 2015 Fact Sheet)

In addition since 1980, the rate of growth of imprisonment of women has increased an astonishing 646 percent, as compared to men at 419 percent. Approximately one percent of all African American women are imprisoned.

After imprisonment it becomes almost impossible for many former inmates to find meaningful employment, housing and food assistance. These problems are worsened by the huge cuts in the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), popularly known as food stamps, which have eliminated millions from eligibility as well as reducing benefits to millions more.

### **Food Is a Right**

Such a crisis in existence in the largest capitalist economy in the world cries out for a political response. Civil Rights, Human Rights and Left organizations must launch a national campaign demanding food and housing for the millions of dispossessed and hungry African Americans, Latinos and the working poor in general.

During 1982-83 in Detroit, under the initiative of the All People's Congress (APC), a "Food is a Right Campaign" was launched utilizing mass actions and legal challenges to the crisis then in existence under the Reagan administration. It was revealed during this period that warehouses were storing and wasting millions of tons of government surplus food.

The first African American mayor of Detroit, Coleman A. Young, picked up on the call for a declaration of a food emergency and immediately demanded action from the government. When he was told by the ruling class that he could not declare such an emergency he ignored them and raised the struggle to the point where the problem had to be addressed.

The Food is a Right Campaign was successful in opening up those warehouses leading to the mass distribution of surplus food for well over a decade. Such an organizing project would be well in order for 2015.

With the filing of bankruptcy by retail outlets such as Radio Shack and the downsizing of workers in other low-wage employment industries, coupled with the cuts in retiree pension benefits and SNAP allocations, the crisis of food deficits and hunger will become more pronounced as millions of these workers lose their jobs and suffer income reductions. The capitalist system in the U.S. puts profits before people and until a movement challenges this fact, working and oppressed peoples will continue to bear the brunt of the dictates of Wall Street which are backed up by their surrogates within local, state and federal governmental structures.

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