

Blacks' income remains the lowest of any group

Opinion

by David A. Love | September 18, 2013 at 8:51 AM



The U.S. Census just released the latest numbers on [poverty in America](#). And it is not a pretty picture for the nation, especially for African-Americans and other historically marginalized groups.

According to the latest stats, 46.5 million people are in poverty in the wealthiest nation on Earth. That's 15 percent of the population, or more than 1 in 7. Childhood poverty stands at a whopping 21.8 percent.

But for blacks, it is even worse. African-Americans suffer from a poverty rate of 27.2 percent—the highest of any group—compared to 25.6 percent of Latinos, 11.7 percent for Asians and 9.7 percent for whites. All of these poverty figures are much too high, but for blacks and Latinos in particular, poverty is far, far too high. And it seems like a permanent fixture on the American landscape that presidents and other politicians will not or cannot tackle.

Conservatives will no doubt point to these statistics as a scathing indictment on [President Obama](#), as the U.S. tries to get through the aftermath of the Great Recession and into turnaround mode.

Meanwhile, some [liberals](#) and progressives may point the finger at the president for not doing enough to stem the tide of poverty and inequality in this country, or blame Republicans for putting salt in the wound by pushing for cuts to [food stamps](#), social welfare and other crucial government spending.

Colorado State Senator Vicki Marble recently joked that black poverty is higher because [black people eat too much chicken and barbecue](#). The patently offensive and insensitive nature of her statement tells you all you need to know about America's approach to tackling poverty. The nation doesn't care much about it, which perhaps is why the U.S. has the [most economic inequality](#) in the developed world.

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For African-Americans, fighting poverty is like trying to win a race when you started from way behind. Employment discrimination still remains a reality for blacks, with a greater chance of being turned down for the job, and lower pay when the job finally comes. For the past 50 years, [black unemployment](#) has remained twice the white rate, and at recession levels even when there's no recession.

Sadly, the wealth gap between blacks and whites grew even wider during the Great Recession.

Further, black workers are more likely to end up in [low-paying service jobs](#) than whites, and less likely to receive an inheritance. I suppose all those centuries of free labor didn't help any, either.

African-Americans have other obstacles as well. Home ownership is a substantial part of the racial wealth gap, according to research conducted by [Brandeis University](#)>. And blacks are hardest hit when they lose their jobs and their homes during economic downturns. The meltdown of the mortgage market in recent years was the most vivid example, with a devastating loss of wealth, particularly among black and Latino homeowners.

In addition, with an unjust war on [drugs](#) precipitating the prison boom and the [mass incarceration of black men](#), black families are unable to grow. Black parents are unable to care for their families, save money and build wealth behind bars.

Meanwhile, African-Americans are more likely to live and grow up in [concentrated poverty](#) than whites. Segregated, poverty-afflicted communities have under-resourced schools. Further, blacks graduate from college at lower rates and are saddled with more debt. Even further, as a [Pew study](#) found, many middle-class blacks [fare worse economically than their parents](#), an indication that people who grow up in poverty are more likely to flounder in their adult life.

So in the end, blacks are more vulnerable to poverty. As a nation, we need to focus on policies that combat economic segregation, create jobs with a living wage, and help build wealth. Further, the U.S. must end its addiction to prisons as a profit center, as it breaks apart families and destroys communities. Too often, government policies have focused on consumption and benefiting those who are already rich, rather than promoting savings and investment for ordinary working people. It is no wonder the American middle class has all but disappeared.

In reality, this issue of inequality and the racial wealth gap should be an apolitical issue. Whether you love or loathe President Obama, the poverty epidemic drags all of us down

And Americans should care about the problem even if—or because— people of color are disproportionately affected. If we don't take poverty seriously and act immediately to end it, more Americans will slip through the cracks – and so will America.

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