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## The Worst Cities For Black Americans

All are in the Midwest.

24/7 Wall St. | By Thomas C. Frohlich & Sam Stebbins

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Last year, unarmed teenager Michael Brown was fatally shot by police officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson, Missouri. The incident drew attention to racially charged police brutality, and sparked outrage nationwide. Fatal police shootings involving black citizens, however, are only one of the consequences of racial inequality.

For decades, black Americans have faced higher poverty rates, lower incomes and higher incarceration rates than white Americans. While African Americans in every U.S. city face such problems, racial inequality is much worse in some parts of the country. By examining the disparities between white and black Americans in several economic and social measures, 24/7 Wall St. identified the 10 worst cities for black Americans.

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Four of the cities with the worst racial inequality are in Illinois, two are in Iowa, and all are in the Midwest. 24/7 Wall St. interviewed Valerie Wilson, director of the program on race, ethnicity, and the [economy](#) at the Economic Policy Institute (EPI), a progressive think tank. Wilson associated the geographical clustering of these cities to the Great Migration — the relocation of millions of African Americans from the South to cities in the North and Midwest between 1916 and 1970.

Over that period, African Americans fled from the oppressive Jim Crow policies of the South, among other forms of racism, to cities such as Chicago and New York. These areas — the Midwest in particular — were undergoing a manufacturing boom at the time, and black and other Americans sought economic opportunities there. However, the industrial Midwestern economies have declined dramatically since 1970, and the region today is a part of what is commonly known as the Rust Belt.

The manufacturing industries in those areas offered relatively well-paying jobs to relatively uneducated people — many of whom were African American. As Wilson explained, “those industries have essentially dried up, and the opportunities are no longer there, but the people still are.”

These Midwestern cities have relatively small black populations. Compared to the national proportion, relatively few black people live in seven of the 10 worst cities for African Americans. Though small, these proportions still represent tens of thousands of people. Wilson explained that in cities with smaller minority populations, African Americans can actually

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suffer more at the hands of structural racism than in cities with larger black populations. The smaller group is almost always easier to exclude.

Areas with smaller black populations still have higher incarceration rates among black residents, Wilson added. This means the disproportionate incarceration, particularly among black males, “is going to affect an even larger percentage of the population there, even though the population itself isn’t as large as it is in some other places,” she explained.

Higher incarceration rates are just one of several factors that both feed further disparities and stem from a range of structural social problems. “Education, unemployment, wages, income, all of that affects your ability to build wealth,” Wilson said. “If one of those things isn’t working, it just sort of ripples into each of those other areas.”

In addition to income inequality between black and white Americans, wealth inequality helps perpetuate racial inequalities. Wealth — the value of property and financial assets — frequently passes from one generation to the next. African Americans, who have historically been prohibited from home and land ownership, are therefore at a considerable disadvantage when it comes to inherited wealth. For black families, “each generation essentially starts from zero and so as that happens across generations, that gap continues to persist,” Wilson said.

Just over 84% of African American adults have at least a high school diploma nationwide, versus the attainment rate of 92% for white Americans. The black population in only one of the 10 cities on this list has a high school attainment rate that exceeded the nationwide rate for black Americans. In no city was the black high school attainment rate higher than the white high school attainment rate. Similarly, the black unemployment rates in all of the worst cities for African Americans exceeded the white jobless rates. Only three of the 10 cities had black unemployment rates lower than the nationwide unemployment rate for black Americans of 13.2%. By contrast, the unemployment rate among white members of the workforce is 5.8%.

A good education is key to economic mobility, although it is less of a guarantee for African Americans than it is for others. “An African American with a college education definitely earns more than an African American without a college education, but they still earn less than a white person who has a college education,” Wilson said, adding that raising educational attainment rates is not enough to eliminate racial disparities.

These are the worst cities for black Americans.

#### 10. Waterloo-Cedar Falls, IA

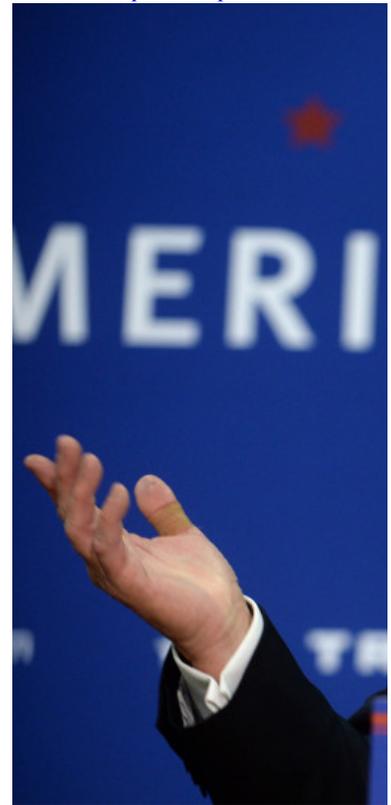
- > **Pct. residents black:** 7.0%
- > **Population:** 169,993
- > **Black median household income as pct. of white:** 54.9%
- > **Black unemployment rate:** 24.0%
- > **Unemployment rate, all people:** 4.9%

Based on a range of socioeconomic factors, Waterloo-Cedar Falls is the 10th worst urban area for black Americans. The metro area is at once relatively difficult to live in as a black person, and relatively favorable for white people. For example, the median income for black households was equal to less than 56% of income for a typical white household, which at \$54,802 was slightly lower than the national median but still higher than in most metro areas.

While the Waterloo area labor market is relatively strong overall, black residents clearly do not have the same **job** opportunities as their white peers. The unemployment rate among black residents of 24% — the sixth highest among black city-populations — is in stark contrast with the white unemployment rate of just 3.9% — one of the lowest such rates.

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### 9. Des Moines-West Des Moines, IA

- > **Pct. residents black:** 5.0%
- > **Population:** 611,549
- > **Black median household income as pct. of white:** 57.1%
- > **Black unemployment rate:** 10.6%
- > **Unemployment rate, all people:** 4.2%

The more than 30,000 Des Moines residents identifying as black make up just 5% of the population. However, as Wilson suggested, African Americans in communities with relatively small black populations may be even worse off. In the Des Moines area, racial disparities are indeed especially pervasive. Just 33% of black households are owned by their occupants, for example, versus the homeownership rate of 72.2% among white families. Also, while 38.0% of white adults have at least a bachelor's degree, 20.5% of black area adults have the equivalent education.

Despite the difficulties facing Des Moines black communities, the area's black unemployment rate of 10.6% was lower than the national black jobless rate of 13.2% — one of only three of the 10 worst cities for African Americans with a black unemployment rate not exceeding the national rate. Still, the black jobless rate was several times higher than the 4.2% jobless rate among white residents, itself one of the lowest in the country.

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### 8. Kankakee, IL

- > **Pct. residents black:** 14.9%
- > **Population:** 111,375
- > **Black median household income as pct. of white:** 48.7%
- > **Black unemployment rate:** 20.6%
- > **Unemployment rate, all people:** 8.1%

More than one in five black workers in Kankakee is unemployed. The black unemployment rate exceeds 20% in only 16 other U.S. cities, three of them among the worst cities for African Americans. Lack of job opportunities likely contribute to a higher poverty rate among black residents. At nearly 40%, the poverty rate among black residents is not only far higher than the comparable rate for white residents of 7.3%, but also one of the highest in the nation. A typical black Kankakee household earns \$31,119 annually, lower than the median annual income for black households nationwide, and less than half the median income for white Kankakee households.

The Kankakee metro area is about an hour's drive from Chicago. It is also one of four metro areas [located](#) in Illinois on this list.

### 7. Lima, OH

- > **Pct. residents black:** 12.2%
- > **Population:** 105,040
- > **Black median household income as pct. of white:** 36.5%
- > **Black unemployment rate:** 22.9%
- > **Unemployment rate, all people:** 5.7%

The typical black household in Lima makes just 36.5% of what the typical area white household earns annually, a smaller share than anywhere else in the country. Median annual income among white households is \$49,125, more than \$31,000 greater than the median income among black households of \$17,908. High poverty rates accompany the low income in Lima. While 12.4% of whites live in poverty, more than 46% of the city's black population are [living below the povertyline](#).

Socioeconomic disparities are likely driving the income gaps among Lima's black and white populations. The unemployment rate among the city's black workers is nearly 23%, more than

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triple the 7.1% rate among the city's white workers. The difference in educational attainment by race is similarly striking. While more than 90% of white residents have at least a high school diploma, less than three quarters of Lima's black population has a similar level of education.

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#### 6. Peoria, IL

- > **Pct. residents black:** 9.1%
- > **Population:** 379,520
- > **Black median household income as pct. of white:** 49.1%
- > **Black unemployment rate:** 16.5%
- > **Unemployment rate, all people:** 7.2%

Located in central Illinois, Peoria is one of the worst cities in the country for [blackAmericans](#). The poverty rate of 28.2% among the city's black population is well above the poverty rate among the city's white residents of 10.4%. Similarly, the median annual income of \$58,563 for white households is more than double the annual income of \$28,777 for a typical black household.

While black Americans are about five times more likely to be incarcerated than their white counterparts, in Illinois, they are more than eight times more likely to be incarcerated than whites. As is the case in many other U.S. cities, the incarceration rate is likely far higher in urban areas such as Peoria.

#### 5. Grand Rapids-Wyoming, MI

- > **Pct. residents black:** 6.5%
- > **Population:** 1,027,703
- > **Black median household income as pct. of white:** 44.6%
- > **Black unemployment rate:** 13.0%
- > **Unemployment rate, all people:** 5.0%

Slightly more than 1 million people live in the Grand Rapids-Wyoming metro area. The typical black household in Grand Rapids earns \$25,495 annually, less than half of the \$57,186 the typical white household earns and also about \$10,000 less than the \$35,481 the typical American black household earns in a year. High [income disparity](#) between the area's black and white residents has likely contributed to disparate poverty rates. About 38% of the black residents in Grand Rapids live in poverty, nearly four times the 10.3% poverty rate among the area's white population.

Over 2,000 black people per 100,000 residents are incarcerated in Michigan, lower than the nationwide black incarceration rate. However, black Michigan residents are still nearly six times more likely than their white peers to go to jail or prison, slightly higher than the nationwide black to white incarceration ratio.

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#### 4. Chicago-Naperville-Elgin, IL-IN-WI

- > **Pct. residents black:** 16.8%
- > **Population:** 9,553,810
- > **Black median household income as pct. of white:** 50.1%
- > **Black unemployment rate:** 18.5%
- > **Unemployment rate, all people:** 7.0%

Slightly more than 7% of white Chicago area residents live in poverty, while the [povertyrate](#) for the city's black population is nearly 30%. Similarly, while 43.7% of white adults had at least a college degree, 21.8% of black adult Chicagoans were college educated. In addition to socioeconomic racial disparities, black area residents had far higher mortality rates compared

to white residents. The Chicago metro area black population leads the nation with 1,550 deaths per 100,000 African Americans in a year, versus the mortality rate for white Chicagoans of 713 per 100,000 white people.

Chicago is one of the nation's most diverse cities. It is also one of the nation's most segregated, however, and in the city's neighborhoods there is little racial diversity. Wilson explained that outcomes worsen for anyone — black or white — living under poor socioeconomic conditions. However, she added, not only do black urban dwellers suffer more under such conditions, but also racial inequality and [segregation](#) are themselves harmful to communities.

### 3. Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington, MN-WI

- > **Pct. residents black:** 7.8%
- > **Population:** 3,495,176
- > **Black median household income as pct. of white:** 37.9%
- > **Black unemployment rate:** 12.8%
- > **Unemployment rate, all people:** 3.9%

One of the largest metropolitan areas in the country, the Minneapolis-St. Paul metro area is home to nearly 3.5 million people. It is also one of the worst cities for black Americans. The disparity between the [median household incomes](#) of white and black residents is especially stark. The typical white household earns about \$73,700 annually, one of the highest incomes in the country. The typical area black household, meanwhile, earns just under \$28,000 annually. Low wages often come with high unemployment rates. While only 3.9% of all Twin City residents are unemployed, one of the lowest figures in the country, the unemployment rate among the city's black residents is 12.8%.

About 20% of the area's black residents have at least a bachelor's degree, roughly in line with the corresponding national rate. Still, more than 35% of the area's black population lives in poverty, a significantly higher rate than the 27% of black Americans living below the [poverty line](#).

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### 2. Rockford, IL

- > **Pct. residents black:** 11.1%
- > **Population:** 342,411
- > **Black median household income as pct. of white:** 44.2%
- > **Black unemployment rate:** 28.9%
- > **Unemployment rate, all people:** 8.3%

Located less than 100 miles northwest of Chicago, Rockford is home to about 342,400 people. Rockford is struggling economically. The area's unemployment rate of 8.3% is more than 2 percentage points higher than the national unemployment rate of 6.2%. While [pooreconomic](#) conditions affect everyone, the city's black population has been hit the hardest.

Of the 201 metro areas examined, the median income of \$22,651 among black households in Rockford is lower than in all but 10 other cities and significantly lower than the \$51,264 median income among white households. Even more astounding, 28.9% of the city's black working population is unemployed, a larger share than in any other city in the country. The [poverty](#) rate among the city's black residents is 43.1%, over four times the city's white poverty rate.

### 1. Milwaukee-Waukesha-West Allis, WI

- > **Pct. residents black:** 16.7%
- > **Population:** 1,572,245
- > **Black median household income as pct. of white:** 41.6%
- > **Black unemployment rate:** 17.2%
- > **Unemployment rate, all people:** 6.0%

Like in other parts of the Midwest, large numbers of African Americans travelled to the Milwaukee area in the 1960s to take advantage of the booming manufacturing industry. Soon after a black community formed, however, the city's industrial base all but collapsed, contributing to racial disparities in the region. An estimated 16.7% of the Milwaukee-Waukesha-West Allis metro area identify as black, higher than the nationwide proportion. In Milwaukee proper, however, roughly 40% of the population identifies as black.

A recent report from researchers at UCLA found that African American high school students were more likely to be suspended in Wisconsin than in any other state. The plight of students in the Milwaukee area — the worst city for black Americans — is perhaps even worse. The difference between white and black high school attainment in the area, at 94.9% and 80.7% the respective adult populations, is 14.2 percentage points, nearly double the national average disparity. White area households are relatively wealthy compared to [thenation](#), with a median income of \$61,675. Black area households, on the other hand, are relatively poor, with a median income of just \$25,646. This was one of the nation's largest income disparities.

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#### METHODOLOGY:

To determine the 10 worst cities for black Americans, 24/7 Wall St. created an index of nine measures to assess race-based gaps in access to resources and opportunities in each metropolitan area, rather than measure the availability of resources and opportunities in the city. Creating the index in this way ensured that states were ranked based on differences between black and white Americans and not levels of socioeconomic development. For each measure, we constructed an index from the gaps between black and white Americans. The index was standardized using interdecile normalization so outliers in the data did not skew results. We excluded metro areas where black residents comprised less than 5% of the population.

To construct the index, we used 2014 data from the U.S. Census Bureau on [medianhousehold income](#), educational attainment rates, homeownership rates, the percentage of people without health insurance, and unemployment rates. Data on incarceration rates came from The Sentencing Project and are for the most recent available year. Because states, rather than metro areas, are responsible for the prison population, incarceration rates are for the state where the metro area is located. If a metro area spanned more than one state, we used the state in which the metro area's principal city is located. From the Centers for [Disease Control](#) and Prevention, we used age-adjusted mortality rates by race for each county in the U.S. from 2009-2013 to calculate mortality rates at the metro level using a variation on the indirect standardization method. Incarceration and mortality rates are per 100,000 residents.

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