

Fast Facts

Racial Disparities in West Virginia

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Summary & Key Findings

African Americans in West Virginia face persistent disparities across a wide range of economic, labor, social, and health measures. What follows is a data analysis comparing various dimensions of well-being among African American families and their white counterparts.

Some of the findings are startling:

- The infant mortality rate for black babies in West Virginia (15.1%) is over two times greater than that of white babies and worse than the rates in numerous foreign nations: Saudi Arabia, Argentina, Russia, Ukraine, Costa Rica, and Bosnia.¹
- In West Virginia, almost 60 percent of African American children under five years old, or more than twice the percentage of white children under five, are living below the federal poverty line.
- African Americans in the state are incarcerated at nearly three times the rate of white West Virginians.
- The percentage of African Americans who rent is more than double the rate of white renters, and whites lead in rates of home ownership by more than nearly 30 percent.

Economic Data

(2008 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars)		White	Black/African American
Median Household Income			
	2005 – 2007	\$37,896	\$23,337
	2006 – 2008	\$38,411	\$24,145
Median Family Income			
	2005 – 2007	\$47,900	\$31,316
	2006 – 2008	\$48,479	\$31,175

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. 2005-2007, 2006-2008, American Community Survey. Analysis by Pete Wilmoth.

Per Capita Income (2008 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars)		White	Black/African American
	2005 – 2007	\$21,101	\$14,885
	2006 – 2008	\$21,272	\$14,915

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. 2005-2007, 2006-2008, American Community Survey. Analysis by Pete Wilmoth.

Median Wages (2008 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars)		White		Black/African American	
	2005 – 2007	\$11.87		\$8.42	
	2006 – 2008	\$11.97		\$8.68	
		White Male	Black/African American Male	White Female	Black/African American Female

2005 – 2007	\$19.72	\$14.86	\$13.24	\$11.51
2006 – 2008	\$19.74	\$13.25	\$13.19	\$11.73

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. 2005-2007, 2006-2008, American Community Survey. Analysis by Pete Wilmoth.
 Note: The universe for overall wages by race is the population 16 years and over with earnings in the past 12 months. The universe for wages by race and gender is the same but for full-time workers only.

Percentage Living Below Federal Poverty Line		White	Black/African American
Total			
	2005 – 2007	17.1%	30.6%
	2006 – 2008	16.6%	28.5%
Children Under 5			
	2005 – 2007	27.2%	58.8%
	2006 – 2008	28.1%	57.5%
Working Age (18 – 64)			
	2005 – 2007	16.4%	27.8%
	2006 – 2008	16.1%	26.7%
Senior (65 & Up)			
	2005 – 2007	10.4%	20.6%
	2006 – 2008	10.1%	20.9%
Single-Parent Families			
	2005 – 2007	45.2%	43.9%
	2006 – 2008	43.2%	46.9%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. 2005-2007, 2006-2008, American Community Survey. Analysis by Pete Wilmoth.

Food Stamp Reciprocity		White	Black/African American
	2005 – 2007	12.0%	24.2%
	2006 – 2008	12.1%	25.5%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. 2005-2007, 2006-2008, American Community Survey. Analysis by Pete Wilmoth.

Labor Data

Unemployment Rate		White		Black/African American	
	2005 – 2007	6.8%		10.4%	
	2006 – 2008	6.1%		8.6%	
		White Male	Black/African American Male	White Female	Black/African American Female
	2005 – 2007	7.2%	12.6%	6.2%	8.1%
	2006 – 2008	6.4%	11.1%	5.7%	6.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. 2005-2007, 2006-2008, American Community Survey. Analysis by Pete Wilmoth.

Labor Force Participation Rate		White	Black/African American
	2005 – 2007	66.3%	57.9%
	2006 – 2008	66.8%	58.8%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. 2005-2007, 2006-2008, American Community Survey. Analysis by Pete Wilmoth.

Type of Occupation	White	Black/African American
Management, Professional, and Related Occupations		

	2005 – 2007	29.1%	25.5%
	2006 – 2008	29.4%	26.0%
Service Occupations			
	2005 – 2007	17.1%	26.6%
	2006 – 2008	17.2%	30.0%
Sales and Office Occupations			
	2005 – 2007	25.0%	29.7%
	2006 – 2008	24.7%	27.1%
Farming, Fishing, and Forestry Occupations			
	2005 – 2007	0.6%	0.1%
	2006 – 2008	0.5%	0.4%
Construction, Extraction, Maintenance and Repair Occupations			
	2005 – 2007	13.2%	6.8%
	2006 – 2008	13.4%	4.8%
Production, Transportation, and Material Moving Occupations			
	2005 – 2007	14.9%	11.3%
	2006 – 2008	14.7%	11.7%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. 2005-2007, 2006-2008, American Community Survey. Analysis by Pete Wilmoth.

Social Data

Education Attainment		White	Black/African American
Less Than High School			
	2005 – 2007	19.1%	16.9%
	2006 – 2008	18.6%	17.1%
High School Graduate			
	2005 – 2007	42.2%	40.8%
	2006 – 2008	41.7%	40.3%
Some College or Associate's Degree			
	2005 – 2007	22.1%	28.8%
	2006 – 2008	22.8%	28.8%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher			
	2005 – 2007	16.7%	13.6%
	2006 – 2008	16.9%	13.8%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. 2005-2007, 2006-2008, American Community Survey. Analysis by Pete Wilmoth.

Note: The universe is age 25 and higher.

Average Test Scores, Public School Students	National Average	White	Black/African American	Black Scores as Percentage of White
Grade 4				
Mathematics (2009)	239.09	233.44	225.13	96.4%
Reading (2009)	219.60	215.18	203.62	94.6%
Science (2005)	149.30	151.64	135.36	89.3%

Writing (2002)	152.67	146.62	146.15	99.7%
Grade 8				
Mathematics (2009)	281.67	270.62	263.31	97.3%
Reading (2009)	262.29	255.02	250.02	98.0%
Science (2005)	147.15	147.69	128.17	86.8%
Writing (2007)	154.28	146.55	136.47	93.1%

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress, State Comparisons. Analysis by Pete Wilmoth.

Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT)	White	Black/African American
Percent of Total Test-Takers	86%	4%
Critical Reading (mean)	514	439
Mathematics (mean)	503	422
Writing (mean)	502	430
American College Testing (ACT)		
Average Composite Score	20.8	17.5
% Meeting English Benchmark	72%	42%
% Meeting Math Benchmark	31%	10%
% Meeting Reading Benchmark	55%	26%
% Meeting Science Benchmark	25%	7%
% Meeting All Benchmarks	17%	4%

College Board, College-Bound Seniors 2009, State reports. Analysis by Pete Wilmoth; American College Testing, 2009 ACT National and State Scores, Selected WV Data.

Home Ownership	White	Black/African American
Own		
2005 – 2007	76.0%	48.5%
2006 – 2008	75.6%	48.7%
Rent		
2005 – 2007	24.0%	51.5%
2006 – 2008	24.4%	51.3%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. 2005-2007, 2006-2008, American Community Survey. Analysis by Pete Wilmoth.

	White	Black/African American
Inmates in WV Prisons and Jails (per 50,000 residents), 2009	180	520

WV Division of Corrections Annual Report Fiscal Year 2008-2009; U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts Data for WV, 2009. Analysis by Pete Wilmoth.

Veteran Status	White	Black/African American
2005 – 2007	12.4%	11.0%
2006 – 2008	12.3%	11.2%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. 2005-2007, 2006-2008, American Community Survey. Analysis by Pete Wilmoth.

Health Data

Percentage With No Health Insurance	White	Black/African American
Total	17.7%	23.0%

Men	18.7%	25.1%
Women	16.6%	20.8%
At or Below 200% Poverty Level	28.5%	29.0%
At or Below 250% Poverty Level	26.4%	28.1%

U.S. Census Bureau, Small Area Health Insurance Estimates, 2006. Analysis by Pete Wilmoth.

	White	Black/African American
Low Birthweight	9.5%	16.3%
Preterm Births	13.9%	19.0%
Mothers Receiving Prenatal Care in First Trimester	83.5%	68.4%
Infant Mortality Rate (>1 year old)	7.3%	15.1%
Child Mortality (deaths per 100,000; age 1-17)	69.7	101.4
Adult Mortality (deaths per 100,000; age 18+)	946.0	1,069.0
Diabetes Deaths (per 100,000 residents)	32.5	63.3
Deaths Caused by Stroke and Other Cerebrovascular Diseases (per 100,000 residents)	47.7	52.1

Kaiser Family Foundation, statehealthfacts.org, West Virginia data. Analysis by Pete Wilmoth; Center for Disease Control, Health Data Interactive, West Virginia data. Analysis by Pete Wilmoth.

Policy Options

- Enact a State Earned Income Tax Credit.** At the federal level, the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) has been one of the most successful anti-poverty, pro-work policies ever enacted. Each year, the federal EITC helps thousands of the state’s working families out of poverty. West Virginia could build on the success of the federal credit by keeping pace with the 24 other states that have adopted a state EITC. Given the data above, such a credit would help to remedy racial disparities in income by supplementing the wages of poor working families of all races and promoting tax fairness.
- Create a State Office of Minority Affairs.** A government agency charged with the task of reviewing information and coordinating agency-level programs across state government to combat the racial disparities identified in this report would go a long way toward establishing a continued effort to improve the well-being of African American families in West Virginia.
- Improve education and job training programs.** Programs should specifically target communities of color, address labor market discrimination, and provide transitional job training for the formerly incarcerated.ⁱⁱ

Data Limitations

The information in the economic and labor tables above comes primarily from two three-year averages (2005-2007 and 2006-2008) in the American Community Survey (ACS), sponsored by the U.S. Census Bureau. These averages utilize larger samplers than the one-year surveys, and using multiple three-year ranges further mitigates sample size issues. However, this study still has limitations related to sample size, simply because African Americans only comprise four percent of the state’s population.

Because the ACS is based on a sample and not a comprehensive measure of all housing units and all members of a population, these estimates are associated with a degree of uncertainty. This is called *sampling error*—and all data contains some. The larger the sample size, the smaller the sampling error and the more accurate the estimates.

The ACS expresses the sampling error by including “margin of error” with each estimate. This is the difference between an estimate and its upper and lower confidence bounds. Margins of error are often included beside research numbers, expressed as “+/-” an amount.

For example, the table below shows estimates and the margins of error for median household income, by race, in West Virginia.

Median Household Income	Estimate	Margin of Error (+/-)
White	\$38,411	\$351
Black/African American	\$24,145	\$1,701

U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2008 American Community Survey.

The ACS uses a confidence interval of 90 percent, meaning that you can be 90 percent confident that the median household income for white households is +/- \$351 from the estimate of \$38,411. In this example, the margin of error is almost five times greater for black households. Expressed as a percent, the margins of error in the above estimates are +/- approximately one percent for white households and +/- approximately seven percent for black households. Thus, the estimates assigned to African Americans in West Virginia have a broader and range and less accuracy.

ⁱ United States Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2091rank.html>

ⁱⁱ Algernon Austin, “Getting Good Jobs to America’s People of Color” (Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute, November 2009).