



## **HIGH BLACK UNEMPLOYMENT WIDESPREAD ACROSS NATION'S METROPOLITAN AREAS**

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**E**ven before the recession, many Midwestern African American communities were in economic distress, with high African American unemployment rates common in Rust Belt metropolitan areas such as greater Detroit, Cleveland, and Milwaukee. In contrast, blacks were doing relatively well in Sun Belt metropolitan areas such as Tampa, Miami, and Las Vegas. Unfortunately, these metros are now showing some of the highest unemployment rates and largest percentage-point increases in unemployment. As a result, black unemployment rates in 2010 were high in Rust Belt and Sun Belt areas alike. Milwaukee stands out for being among the worst off for African Americans on all of the unemployment measures examined in this issue brief, including having the largest black-to-white unemployment rate disparity in 2010.

Without a strong federal jobs program, the pain of very high unemployment is likely to be long lasting for most of America's metropolitan blacks. This issue brief finds:

- In 2007, before the recession, Detroit, Chicago, Cleveland, Kansas City, Memphis, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, and St. Louis metropolitan areas all had black unemployment rates of 10 percent or higher.
- In 2010, Detroit, Milwaukee, Las Vegas, and Minneapolis all had black unemployment rates of 20 percent or higher, comparable to the peak national unemployment rates during the Great Depression of the 1930s.
- In 2007, the Sun Belt metropolitan areas of Charlotte, Miami, Tampa, and Las Vegas all had black unemployment rates below the national rate for blacks. By 2010, these Sun Belt metropolitan areas had unemployment rates that were above the national black rate and were among the highest rates of all the metropolitan areas examined.
- In Milwaukee, Minneapolis, and Baton Rouge, La., blacks were more than three times as likely to be unemployed as whites in 2010. Milwaukee had the biggest disparity with a black-to-white unemployment rate ratio of 3.8-to-1.

(A companion Issue Brief #314 on Hispanic unemployment in metropolitan areas is available through [EPI's website](#).)

## Unemployment rates and increases

Even before the recession, which began in December of 2007, African Americans in many metropolitan areas were experiencing very high unemployment rates. (This analysis is limited to the 31 metropolitan areas for which the data were sufficient for reliable unemployment estimates.) Distress before the downturn was concentrated in Midwestern metropolitan areas. The Detroit, Chicago, Cleveland, Kansas City, Memphis, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, and St. Louis metropolitan areas all had average black unemployment rates of 10 percent or higher in 2007 (**Table 1**). Detroit and Cleveland—with black unemployment rates of 14.9 percent—tied for the highest position. At one time, these Midwestern metropolitan areas beckoned blacks from

**TABLE 1**

### Black metropolitan unemployment rates for selected areas, 2007

Rank*	Metropolitan area	2007
1	Detroit-Warren-Livonia, Mich.	14.9%
1	Cleveland-Elyria-Mentor, Ohio	14.9
3	Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington, Minn.-Wis.	13.8
4	Milwaukee-Waukesha-West Allis, Wis.	10.8
5	St. Louis, Mo.-Ill.	10.7
6	Memphis, Tenn.-Miss.-Ark.	10.6
7	Chicago-Naperville-Joliet, Ill.-Ind.-Wis.	10.3
8	Kansas City, Mo.-Kansas	10.0
9	Jackson, Miss.	9.5
10	San Francisco-Oakland-Fremont, Calif.	9.2
11	Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana, Calif.	8.3
11	Denver-Aurora, Colo.	8.3
11	Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Marietta, Ga.	8.3
14	New Orleans-Metairie-Kenner, La.	8.1
15	Baton Rouge, La.	8.0
15	Charlotte-Gastonia-Concord, N.C.-S.C.	8.0
17	Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, Texas	7.8
18	Houston-Baytown-Sugar Land, Texas	7.5
19	Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington, Pa.-N.J.-Del.	7.0
20	New York-Northern New Jersey-Long Island, N.Y.-N.J.-Pa.	6.9
21	Columbia, S.C.	6.8
22	Baltimore-Towson, Md.	6.6
23	Orlando, Fla.	6.5
23	Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Miami Beach, Fla.	6.5
25	Providence-Fall River-Warwick, Mass.-R.I.	6.4
26	Las Vegas-Paradise, Nev.	6.2
27	Birmingham-Hoover, Ala.	5.7
28	Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater, Fla.	5.2
29	Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, D.C.-Va.-Md.-W.Va.	4.8
30	Richmond, Va.	4.7
31	Virginia Beach-Norfolk-Newport News, Va.-N.C.	4.1
	<b>National black unemployment rate</b>	<b>8.3%</b>

\* The table uses "standard competition ranking," where items that tie for a position in the ranking receive the same ranking number, and the position of all those ranked below them reflects how many competitors rank above them.

**SOURCE:** EPI analysis of Current Population Survey and Local Area Unemployment Statistics from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

the South with their strong growth in manufacturing jobs. In recent times, however, growing numbers of blacks have been moving away from these areas in search of better opportunities (Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture 2011).

In 2010, three Midwestern metropolitan areas remained among those with the very highest unemployment rates; Detroit, Milwaukee, and Minneapolis were the first, second, and fourth highest in black unemployment rates, respectively (Table 2). Las Vegas ranked third. All of these areas had black unemployment rates of over 20 percent, comparable to the peak national unemployment rates during the Great Depression of the 1930s (Carter 2006).

**TABLE 2**

**Black metropolitan unemployment rates for selected areas, 2009 and 2010**

2010 rank*	Metropolitan area	2009	2010	Percentage-point change
1	Detroit-Warren-Livonia, Mich.	20.6%	24.7%	4.1
2	Milwaukee-Waukesha-West Allis, Wis.	21.2	22.3	1.0
3	Las Vegas-Paradise, Nev.	17.9	21.4	3.5
4	Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington, Minn.-Wis.	20.6	20.7	0.1
5	Charlotte-Gastonia-Concord, N.C.-S.C.	15.3	19.5	4.2
5	Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana, Calif.	15.0	19.5	4.5
7	Cleveland-Elyria-Mentor, Ohio	14.8	18.1	3.4
8	Chicago-Naperville-Joliet, Ill.-Ind.-Wis.	15.5	17.0	1.6
9	Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Miami Beach, Fla.	15.1	16.9	1.8
10	St. Louis, Mo.-Ill.	17.2	16.5	-0.6
11	Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater, Fla.	na	16.1	na
12	Providence-Fall River-Warwick, Mass.-R.I.	18.2	15.8	-2.4
13	Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Marietta, Ga.	14.4	15.7	1.3
14	San Francisco-Oakland-Fremont, Calif.	12.1	15.5	3.4
15	Memphis, Tenn.-Miss.-Ark.	15.5	15.3	-0.2
16	Baton Rouge, La.	na	15.0	na
17	Orlando, Fla.	14.3	14.9	0.6
18	Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington, Pa.-N.J.-Del.	12.2	14.6	2.5
19	New York-Northern New Jersey-Long Island, N.Y.-N.J.-Pa.	14.0	14.4	0.3
20	Denver-Aurora, Colo.	14.9	14.1	-0.8
21	Baltimore-Towson, Md.	11.5	13.7	2.2
22	Birmingham-Hoover, Ala.	16.0	13.6	-2.5
23	Houston-Baytown-Sugar Land, Texas	12.4	13.5	1.1
24	Columbia, S.C.	12.7	13.1	0.3
25	Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, Texas	10.7	12.7	2.0
26	Jackson, Miss.	8.4	12.0	3.5
27	Kansas City, Mo.-Kans.	15.9	10.9	-5.0
28	Richmond, Va.	12.3	10.6	-1.7
29	Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, D.C.-Va.-Md.-W.Va.	8.2	9.6	1.4
30	New Orleans-Metairie-Kenner, La.	8.0	8.8	0.8
31	Virginia Beach-Norfolk-Newport News, Va.-N.C.	10.1	8.5	-1.6
<b>National black unemployment rate</b>		14.7%	15.9%	1.2

\* The table uses "standard competition ranking," where items that tie for a position in the ranking receive the same ranking number, and the position of all those ranked below them reflects how many competitors rank above them.

**NOTE:** Some ratios are not available because the sample size is too small for reliable estimates; 2009 estimates may differ from Austin (2010) because of revised inputs, reestimation, and new statewide controls in Local Area Unemployment Statistics.

**SOURCE:** EPI analysis of Current Population Survey and Local Area Unemployment Statistics from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

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In 2007, the Sun Belt metropolitan areas of Charlotte, Miami, Tampa, and Las Vegas all had black unemployment rates below the national rate for blacks (Table 1). Black unemployment rates in Miami (6.5 percent), Tampa (5.2 percent), and Las Vegas (6.2 percent) were significantly below the national black rate (8.3 percent) and among the lowest of the 31 metropolitan areas examined. By 2010, these four Sun Belt metros had unemployment rates ranging from 16.1 percent to 21.4 percent—above the national black rate of 15.9 percent and among the highest rates of the 31 metropolitan areas.

The five metropolitan areas with the largest black populations are New York, Atlanta, Chicago, Washington D.C., and Philadelphia (Frey 2011). Of these areas, Chicago had the highest black unemployment rate in 2010, 17 percent, and it ranked eighth of the areas analyzed. Atlanta ranked 13th, with a black unemployment rate of 15.7 percent. Philadelphia and New York ranked 18th and 19th, with rates of 14.6 percent and 14.4 percent, respectively. Washington D.C., ranked 29th, third from the bottom, with a rate of 9.6 percent.

Los Angeles, Charlotte, and Detroit all had black unemployment rate increases of more than 4 percentage points from 2009 to 2010. In total, 16 metropolitan areas had unemployment rate increases of at least 1 percentage point.

## The black-to-white unemployment ratio

A high black unemployment rate could reflect generally high unemployment in a metropolitan area that affects all racial groups, or it could be because of a high racial disparity in unemployment rates that negatively affects blacks (or it could, of course, be due to some combination of both factors). Generally, racial disparity plays a role. In 2009 and 2010, the national black-to-white unemployment rate ratio was basically 2-to-1, meaning that blacks were about twice as likely to be unemployed as whites. (See the appendix for metro unemployment rates for blacks, whites, and the entire metropolitan population in 2009 and 2010.)

Three metropolitan areas stand out with particularly large black-to-white unemployment rate disparities. In Milwaukee, Minneapolis, and Baton Rouge in 2010, the black-to-white unemployment rate ratio exceeded 3-to-1 (Table 3). It was highest in Milwaukee, where blacks were 3.8 times as likely to be unemployed as whites. In Minneapolis, blacks were 3.6 times as likely as whites to be unemployed. In Baton Rouge, blacks were 3.4 times as likely to be unemployed.

The metropolitan areas with the five largest black populations were about average in their black-to-white unemployment rate disparity. In 2010, Atlanta had the largest disparity with a ratio of 2.2-to-1. Chicago had a ratio of 2.1-to-1. New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C. all had ratios of 2.0-to-1.

## Hard times in black Milwaukee

In the various ways this issue brief examines high black unemployment rates, one metropolitan area presents itself again and again: Milwaukee. In 2007, before the full effect of the recession, Milwaukee already had a black unemployment rate exceeding 10 percent, the fourth highest of the areas examined. Although not shown in the tables, it ranked third highest in the percentage-point increase from 2007 to 2010. In 2009 and 2010, Milwaukee ranked, respectively, first and second highest among metros in the black unemployment rate. In 2009 and 2010, Milwaukee also had the highest black-to-white unemployment rate ratio.

If this issue brief tried to identify the most socially and economically marginalized black metropolitan population, the unemployment situation of black Milwaukee suggests that it would be a candidate. Additionally, the Brookings Institution has reported that Milwaukee has the highest degree of black-white segregation of the nation's 100 largest metropolitan areas (Frey 2011). As the Supreme Court wisely observed in *Brown v. Board of Education*, it is impossible to guarantee equal opportunity under conditions of racial segregation.

TABLE 3

## Black-to-white unemployment rate ratio for selected metropolitan areas, 2009 and 2010

2010 rank*	Metropolitan area	2009	2010
1	Milwaukee-Waukesha-West Allis, Wis.	3.5	3.8
2	Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington, Minn.-Wis.	3.1	3.6
3	Baton Rouge, La.	na	3.4
4	Memphis, Tenn.-Miss.-Ark.	3.0	2.7
5	Baltimore-Towson, Md.	1.9	2.6
6	Cleveland-Elyria-Mentor, Ohio	1.9	2.4
7	Charlotte-Gastonia-Concord, N.C.-S.C.	1.7	2.3
7	Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, Texas	1.5	2.3
9	Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Marietta, Ga.	2.0	2.2
9	Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Miami Beach, Fla.	1.9	2.2
9	Houston-Baytown-Sugar Land, Texas	2.3	2.2
12	Chicago-Naperville-Joliet, Ill.-Ind.-Wis.	1.8	2.1
13	New York-Northern New Jersey-Long Island, N.Y.-N.J.-Pa.	2.1	2.0
13	Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, D.C.-Va.-Md.-W.Va.	1.8	2.0
13	Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana, Calif.	1.7	2.0
13	Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington, Pa.-N.J.-Del.	1.7	2.0
13	Columbia, S.C.	1.9	2.0
18	St. Louis, Mo.-Ill.	2.1	1.9
18	San Francisco-Oakland-Fremont, Calif.	1.5	1.9
20	Richmond, Va.	2.2	1.8
20	Detroit-Warren-Livonia, Mich.	2.1	1.8
20	Denver-Aurora, Colo.	2.1	1.8
23	Birmingham-Hoover, Ala.	2.3	1.7
23	Las Vegas-Paradise, Nev.	1.7	1.7
23	Orlando, Fla.	1.8	1.7
23	Jackson, Miss.	1.2	1.7
27	Providence-Fall River-Warwick, Mass.-R.I.	1.9	1.6
28	Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater, Fla.	na	1.4
29	Kansas City, Mo.-Kan.	2.0	1.3
29	Virginia Beach-Norfolk-Newport News, Va.-N.C.	1.9	1.3
29	New Orleans-Metairie-Kenner, La.	1.3	1.3
	<b>National</b>	1.9	2.0

\* The table uses "standard competition ranking," where items that tie for a position in the ranking receive the same ranking number, and the position of all those ranked below them reflects how many competitors rank above them.

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**SOURCE:** EPI analysis of Current Population Survey and Local Area Unemployment Statistics from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

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### APPENDIX

#### Metropolitan unemployment rates for selected areas for all, blacks, and whites, 2009 and 2010

Metropolitan area	Race	2009	2010
Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Marietta, Ga.	All	9.7%	10.2%
Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Marietta, Ga.	Black	14.4	15.7
Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Marietta, Ga.	White	7.2	7.0
Baltimore-Towson, Md.	All	7.5	7.9
Baltimore-Towson, Md.	Black	11.5	13.7
Baltimore-Towson, Md.	White	6.0	5.4
Baton Rouge, La.	All	6.2	7.5
Baton Rouge, La.	Black	na	15.0
Baton Rouge, La.	White	4.6	4.4
Birmingham-Hoover, Ala.	All	9.0	9.0
Birmingham-Hoover, Ala.	Black	16.0	13.6
Birmingham-Hoover, Ala.	White	6.8	7.8
Charlotte-Gastonia-Concord, N.C.-S.C.	All	11.5	11.6
Charlotte-Gastonia-Concord, N.C.-S.C.	Black	15.3	19.5
Charlotte-Gastonia-Concord, N.C.-S.C.	White	9.3	8.3
Chicago-Naperville-Joliet, Ill.-Ind.-Wis.	All	10.0	10.2
Chicago-Naperville-Joliet, Ill.-Ind.-Wis.	Black	15.5	17.0
Chicago-Naperville-Joliet, Ill.-Ind.-Wis.	White	8.5	8.2
Cleveland-Elyria-Mentor, Ohio	All	9.0	9.2
Cleveland-Elyria-Mentor, Ohio	Black	14.8	18.1
Cleveland-Elyria-Mentor, Ohio	White	7.8	7.5
Columbia, S.C.	All	9.2	9.3
Columbia, S.C.	Black	12.7	13.1
Columbia, S.C.	White	6.8	6.7
Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, Texas	All	7.8	8.3
Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, Texas	Black	10.7	12.7
Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, Texas	White	6.5	6.5

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**APPENDIX (CONTINUED)**

**Metropolitan unemployment rates for selected areas  
for all, blacks, and whites, 2009 and 2010**

<b>Metropolitan area</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>
Denver-Aurora, Colo.	All	8.5%	9.0%
Denver-Aurora, Colo.	Black	14.9	14.1
Denver-Aurora, Colo.	White	7.3	7.8
Detroit-Warren-Livonia, Mich.	All	14.9	13.5
Detroit-Warren-Livonia, Mich.	Black	20.6	24.7
Detroit-Warren-Livonia, Mich.	White	13.6	10.9
Houston-Baytown-Sugar Land, Texas	All	7.6	8.5
Houston-Baytown-Sugar Land, Texas	Black	12.4	13.5
Houston-Baytown-Sugar Land, Texas	White	5.4	6.3
Jackson, Miss.	All	7.6	8.4
Jackson, Miss.	Black	8.4	12.0
Jackson, Miss.	White	7.0	7.2
Kansas City, Mo.-Kan.	All	8.8	9.1
Kansas City, Mo.-Kan.	Black	15.9	10.9
Kansas City, Mo.-Kan.	White	7.9	8.3
Las Vegas-Paradise, Nev.	All	12.7	15.2
Las Vegas-Paradise, Nev.	Black	17.9	21.4
Las Vegas-Paradise, Nev.	White	10.7	12.5
Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana, Calif.	All	10.9	11.9
Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana, Calif.	Black	15.0	19.5
Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana, Calif.	White	8.6	9.8
Memphis, Tenn.-Miss.-Ark.	All	9.9	10.0
Memphis, Tenn.-Miss.-Ark.	Black	15.5	15.3
Memphis, Tenn.-Miss.-Ark.	White	5.1	5.6
Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Miami Beach, Fla.	All	10.0	11.5
Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Miami Beach, Fla.	Black	15.1	16.9
Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Miami Beach, Fla.	White	7.9	7.7
Milwaukee-Waukesha-West Allis, Wis.	All	8.9	8.7
Milwaukee-Waukesha-West Allis, Wis.	Black	21.2	22.3
Milwaukee-Waukesha-West Allis, Wis.	White	6.1	5.8
Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington, Minn.-Wis.	All	7.9	7.2
Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington, Minn.-Wis.	Black	20.6	20.7
Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington, Minn.-Wis.	White	6.7	5.8
New Orleans-Metairie-Kenner, La.	All	6.5	7.4
New Orleans-Metairie-Kenner, La.	Black	8.0	8.8
New Orleans-Metairie-Kenner, La.	White	6.1	6.9
New York-Northern New Jersey-Long Island, N.Y.-N.J.-Pa.	All	8.7	8.9
New York-Northern New Jersey-Long Island, N.Y.-N.J.-Pa.	Black	14.0	14.4
New York-Northern New Jersey-Long Island, N.Y.-N.J.-Pa.	White	6.6	7.0

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APPENDIX (CONTINUED)

**Metropolitan unemployment rates for selected areas  
for all, blacks, and whites, 2009 and 2010**

<b>Metropolitan area</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>
Orlando, Fla.	All	10.2%	11.4%
Orlando, Fla.	Black	14.3	14.9
Orlando, Fla.	White	8.0	8.9
Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington, Pa.-N.J.-Del.	All	8.3	9.0
Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington, Pa.-N.J.-Del.	Black	12.2	14.6
Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington, Pa.-N.J.-Del.	White	7.0	7.4
Providence-Fall River-Warwick, Mass.-R.I.	All	11.0	11.7
Providence-Fall River-Warwick, Mass.-R.I.	Black	18.2	15.8
Providence-Fall River-Warwick, Mass.-R.I.	White	9.8	9.9
Richmond, Va.	All	7.7	7.7
Richmond, Va.	Black	12.3	10.6
Richmond, Va.	White	5.5	5.7
San Francisco-Oakland-Fremont, Calif.	All	9.6	10.3
San Francisco-Oakland-Fremont, Calif.	Black	12.1	15.5
San Francisco-Oakland-Fremont, Calif.	White	8.0	8.4
St. Louis, Mo.-Ill.	All	9.8	10.0
St. Louis, Mo.-Ill.	Black	17.2	16.5
St. Louis, Mo.-Ill.	White	8.3	8.7
Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater, Fla.	All	10.7	12.1
Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater, Fla.	Black	na	16.1
Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater, Fla.	White	9.6	11.5
Virginia Beach-Norfolk-Newport News, Va.-N.C.	All	7.0	7.4
Virginia Beach-Norfolk-Newport News, Va.-N.C.	Black	10.1	8.5
Virginia Beach-Norfolk-Newport News, Va.-N.C.	White	5.4	6.5
Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, D.C.-Va.-Md.-W.Va.	All	6.1	6.2
Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, D.C.-Va.-Md.-W.Va.	Black	8.2	9.6
Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, D.C.-Va.-Md.-W.Va.	White	4.5	4.8

**NOTE:** Some ratios are not available because the sample size is too small for reliable estimates; 2009 estimates may differ from Austin (2010) because of revised inputs, reestimation, and new statewide controls in Local Area Unemployment Statistics.

**SOURCE:** EPI analysis of Current Population Survey and Local Area Unemployment Statistics from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.