

February 19, 2018



Speak Out Now

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The State Of Black America - A State Of Emergency

Donald Trump has boasted about a December, rate of unemployment of 6.8% for Black people which then shot up to 7.7% in January. What do these numbers mean? First, there is unemployment because this society doesn't provide enough jobs. Secondly, these statistics don't count the millions of people who have given up looking for a job, or the over two million people that are incarcerated.

There is nothing to celebrate about a rate of unemployment for Black people that is always higher than that of white people. The 6.8% rate Trump brags about is the same reported for white people during much of the 2008 recession. There is nothing to celebrate about recession-level unemployment for Black people!

What Trump says is irrelevant. He has shown where he stands – on the side of open racists; on the side of the rich against the poor; on the side of those who benefit from all forms of exploitation.

More important than Trump are the realities of this society. The impact of racism starts before birth. In the Bay Area, between 2012 and 2014, Black women were almost twice as likely to give birth to preterm babies as other women. They were nearly three times as likely to give birth to low birth weight babies - infants born weighing less than 5.5 pounds - than white women. Preterm babies have higher rates of death and disabilities. The impact of racism begins in the womb!

The inequalities continue in childhood. Schools today are as segregated as they were in the 1960s. Nationwide, districts with the most students of color receive 15% less per student in state and local funding than the wealthier white districts. In 2014, Black people with a college degree had an unemployment rate almost as high as white high school graduates.

The unemployment statistics don't reflect the kinds of jobs people are working, the number of hours worked and certainly not the wages paid. An average Black family has only \$1,700 in wealth - total assets minus debt. Thirty years ago, that same family had \$6,800 in today's dollars. In 2013, a

single Black mother had an average of \$0 in wealth compared to \$3,000 for a single white mother. Nearly one in five Black families have zero or negative net worth, twice the rate of white families.

Black people are 13% of the U.S. population and are 38% prison population. One in three Black males will be incarcerated during their lives and receive 19% longer sentences when convicted of the same crime as white males. In 2017, police killed 1,147 people. One in four, 282, were Black.

Black people often live in places with some of the worst environmental pollution. Black children are six times more likely to die from asthma than white children. Developers are trying to build a coal shipping facility in West Oakland which would further poison the air people breathe.

Black History Month is a celebration of the struggles and gains of the past. From the fights against slavery to the fights against police killings, the story of Black people in the U.S. is one of resilience and resistance. The victories of past struggles have benefited and inspired working women and men of all colors. But despite how hard fought these struggles have been, it is clear that they are unfinished and we have a long way to go.

We confront a system that created and maintains deep racial divisions as a way for a wealthy few to benefit. Their system has pushed increasing numbers of people into desperate poverty and into prisons and jails. This has created a true state of emergency for tens of millions of Black people.

As we have seen in the past, we can expect that people will respond. People rose up and refused to accept the police murder of Mike Brown in Ferguson, Missouri and across the country people proclaimed that "Black Lives Matter". This is the proud heritage of Black people in this country. Black people have played a leadership role in many of the most important battles for human rights. We can learn from the lessons of the past if we are going to organize ourselves to fight to take control of and transform this society so we can all live our lives as full human beings.