



***The Souls of Poor Folk:
Auditing America 50 Years After the Poor
People's Campaign Challenged Systemic
Racism, Poverty, War Economy/Militarism & Our
National Morality***

**Fact Sheet¹
April 2018**

Systemic Racism

- There are fewer voting rights in place today for people of color than 50 years ago when the Civil Rights Act was passed. **Since 2010, 23 states passed racist voter suppression laws**, from racist gerrymandering and redistricting, laws that make it harder to register, reducing early voting days and hours, purging voter rolls, more restrictive voter ID laws and felony disenfranchisement. In 2016 at least 17 states saw voter suppression cases targeting Native American and Alaskan Native voters.
- In 2013, the Supreme Court struck down a key provision of the Voting Rights Act that had required certain jurisdictions receive federal preclearance before changing their voting laws. **By 2016, 14 states² had new voting restrictions** in place for the first time in a Presidential election: 7 in the South, 5 in the Midwest, 2 in the Northeast. **There were 868 fewer polling places for the 2016 Presidential election.**
- Thirteen states that passed voter suppression laws also opted not to accept expanded Medicaid benefits offered under the Affordable Care Act. Seven have either no minimum wage or a minimum wage law before the federal minimum wage.
- As of **July 2017, 25 states have passed laws that preempt cities** from passing their own local minimum wage laws. Most of these have been in response to local city councils passing or wanting to pass minimum wage increases.
- Since 1976, the criminalization of poverty has raised federal spending on prisons tenfold to **\$7.5 billion a year**. The number of state and federal inmates grew from **188,000 in 1968 to nearly 1.5 million in 2016**. The share of inmates who are people of color has grown from less than half in 1978 to 69% in 2016. The number of citizens who have been disenfranchised due to felony convictions has tripled from 2 million in 1968 to 6.1 million in 2016, including one in 13 Black adults.
- Federal spending on immigration, deportations and the border has gone from **\$2 billion in 1976 to \$17 billion in 2015**, with 10 times as many deportations (333,000 deportees in 2015).

Poverty

- In 2016, there were **40.6 million people** living below the federal poverty line³. Of this population, 17.1 million are White, 11.1 million are Latinx, and 9.2 million are Black. Native Americans and Alaskan Natives have the highest poverty rate of any racial group at 26.2%, followed by the Black population (22%), Latinx (19.4%), White (11%), and Asian Americans (10.1%). Of the 3.3 million people who live in Puerto Rico, 43.5% are poor.
- Nearly **140 million (43.5% of population)** are poor or low income using the Supplemental Poverty Measure⁴.
- Of the 40.6 million people who fall below the poverty line: **16 million are women and 13.2 million are children**; in other words, **more than 70% of people living below the poverty line** are women and children. Almost four in ten children will spend at one year of their lives in poverty.

Jobs, Income, Wealth, Welfare, Housing and Health

- The U.S. economy has grown more than 18 times in the past 50 years. **From 1973-2016, productivity went up 73.7%, but hourly compensation only went up 12.3%**. Beginning in the 1970s, wages for the bottom 80% of non-supervisory workers have largely remained stagnant. Between 1968 and 2017, the share of U.S. workers in unions was cut by more than half, from 24.9% to 10.7%.
- From 1968-2017, the top 1 percent's share of the economy has nearly doubled. In 2017, the **400 wealthiest Americans owned more wealth than the bottom 64% of the U.S. population (204 million)**. Of these 400, only two are Black and five are of Latinx backgrounds. Just 3 people had a combined wealth of \$248.5 billion, the same amount of wealth as the bottom 50% of the country (160 million people).
- The AFDC program⁵ assisted 68% of poor families with children in 1996. Today, TANF assists only 23% of these families. In all but 3 states, TANF benefits have declined since 1996.
- **Meanwhile, the costs of basic needs like housing, health care, food, and gas have risen**. Over the past 30 years, rents have gone up faster than income in nearly every urban area in the country. **Since 2010, the affordable housing stock has declined by 60%**. In 2016, there was no state or county in the nation where someone earning the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 could afford a 2-bedroom apartment at market rent. In 2017, the minimum wage required to afford even a one-bedroom unit was \$17.14/hr. The median cost of a home has ballooned from \$23,500 in 1968 to \$318,700 in 2017. In December 2017, there were more than **60,000 new foreclosure** filings, bringing the total of properties in foreclosure to 572,344.
- There were over **553,000 who experienced homelessness** every night in 2017. Of this population, 41% were Black, 47% were White and 22% were Latinx. **Another 2.5-3.5 million are included in the "sheltered" homeless population.**⁶ An **additional 7.4 million** were estimated to be on the brink of homelessness, having lost their own homes and transitioned

into the homes of others. A majority of homeless families are headed by single women with young children. LGBTQ youth represent between 20-40% of the homeless population.

- Although the U.S. spends more per capita on health care than any other country, **32 million people remain uninsured**, including 7.1 million Black people, 6.4 million Latinx, and 18.7 million Whites. Of those who are insured, **73% cut back on basic household needs and food to pay for their medical bills**. An estimated 40% of Americans taking on debt because of medical issues, making medical debt the number one cause of personal bankruptcy filings.
- Student debt amounts to \$1.34 trillion and affects 44 million Americans.
- Excluding the value of the family car, 19% of all U.S. households – 30% of Black households, 27% of Latinx households and 14% of White households – or 60 million people have zero wealth or negative net worth.

War Economy and Militarism

- At the height of the Vietnam War, military spending was \$354 billion. Today it is nearly twice that at **\$668 billion, while anti-poverty programs receive \$190 billion. Out of every dollar of federal discretionary spending, 53¢ goes directly to the military**. Just 15¢ goes to anti-poverty programs. Under the proposed budget of the Trump administration, 66¢ would go to the military and only 12¢ to anti-poverty programs by 2023.
- The cumulative costs of the U.S. wars in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan and Pakistan, and post 9/11 Veterans Care and Homeland Security **from 2001-2018 are estimated at \$5.6 trillion**.
- There have been **almost 100 times as many military contractors per soldier** in the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars as there were during the Vietnam War. In 2016, CEOs of the top five military contractors earned on average \$19.2 million – more than 90 times the \$214,000 earned by a U.S. military general with 20 years of experience, and 640 times more than the \$30,000 earned by Army privates in combat.
- Nearly half of female military personnel sent to Iraq or Afghanistan had been reported being sexually harassed and nearly 25% said they had been sexually assaulted.
- In 2012, suicide claimed more military deaths than military action. **In 2014, the risk of suicide was 22% higher among veterans than among U.S. civilian adults**. In September 2017, an average of 20 veterans were still dying by suicide every day.
- City police departments are getting military weapons and equipment left over from the Pentagon's wars, escalating the violence against poor communities. **Young Black men are 9 times more likely to be killed** by police officers than other Americans. Police killings of Native American and Latinx men are also disproportionately high.
- **The poor have been increasingly criminalized over the past 50 years**. The Department of Defense acknowledged that 95% of the growth in the incarcerated population since 2000 has been from defendants who cannot

make bail. This is reflected in the rise of pretrial detention rates, which rose 68% nationally and 436% in rural counties, between 1970 and 2013.

Ecological Devastation

- Fossil fuel, chemical and other industries have been allowed to poison our air, water and land, contributing to an estimated **9 million premature deaths in 2015 worldwide**. This is 3 times as many deaths as from AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria combined and 15 times more than from wars and other forms of violence. **Water pollution alone kills 1.8 million** a year around the world.
- The **U.S. is the largest producer of oil and natural gas** in the world. Between 1997-2016, there were more than 5600 oil or gas leaks or ruptures on U.S. pipelines. Between 1964 and 2015, there were more than 2400 spills from offshore drilling in U.S. waters. The largest of these was the 4.9 million barrel Deepwater Horizon “BP” oil spill in 2010, accounting for nearly 95% of the oil spilled during these years.
- The Department of Defense was responsible for emitting 72% of the U.S. Government's total greenhouse gas emissions in 2016.
- Federal assistance to local water systems is now 74% below its peak in 1977, even as pipes are aging and infrastructure needs are rising. At least **4 million families with children are being exposed to high levels of lead** from drinking water and other sources.
- There are in the U.S. **13.8 million low-income households that cannot afford water**. This number could triple if water prices continue to rise. There are also 540,000 households with a lack of access to complete plumbing. The 20 counties with the highest percentage of households lacking access to plumbing are all rural counties. Thirteen of these counties had a majority Native American or Alaskan Native population.

¹ For more complete information and sources, see, *The Souls of Poor Folk: Auditing America 50 Years After the Poor People's Campaign challenged Systemic Racism, Poverty, Militarism and Our National Morality*, April 10, 2018.

² The 14 states are: Alabama, Mississippi, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Arizona, Virginia, Kansas, Ohio, Indiana, Nebraska, Wisconsin, Rhode Island, New Hampshire

³ The federal poverty line is an income-based measure. Low income is defined as living at below twice the poverty line.

⁴ The Supplemental Poverty Measure goes beyond income to account for out of pocket expenses for food, clothing, housing, utilities, work expenses, and federal assistance.

⁵ The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act was passed in 1996 and eliminated Aid to Families with Dependent (AFDC) to replace it with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

⁶ This includes those living in shelters, transitional housing centers, and makeshift outdoor shelters, such as clustered encampments colloquially referred to as “tent cities.”