



 COMMENTARY RACE & INEQUALITY

New Data Reveals Huge Increases in Concentrated Poverty Since 2000

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A new report from The Century Foundation reveals the number of people who live in high poverty neighborhoods has almost doubled since 2000 from 7.2 million to 13.8 million—the highest number ever recorded.

Meanwhile, poverty has become more concentrated along racial lines—more than one in four of the black poor and nearly one in six of the Hispanic poor lives in a neighborhood of extreme poverty, compared to one in thirteen of the white poor.

One year on from the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson and the violent street protests that followed, *“Architecture of Segregation: Civil Unrest, the Concentration of Poverty and Public Policy”* compares historical census data with the 2009-13 American Community Survey (ACS) to examine changes in poverty concentration and segregation from 1990 to today.

The report was authored by TCF fellow Paul A. Jargowsky, professor of public policy and director, Center for Urban Research and Urban Education, at Rutgers University-Camden.

The key findings include:

- There was a dramatic increase in the number of high-poverty neighborhoods between 2000 and 2013, significantly reversing any gains achieved between 1990 and 2000.
- The number of people living in high-poverty ghettos, barrios, and slums has nearly doubled since 2000, rising from 7.2 million to 13.8 million—the highest ever recorded.
- These increases were well underway before the Great Recession began.
- Poverty became more concentrated along racial lines—more than one in four of the black poor and nearly one in six of the Hispanic poor lives in a neighborhood of extreme poverty, compared to one in thirteen of the white poor.
- To make matters worse, poor children are more likely to reside in high-poverty neighborhoods than poor adults.
- The fastest growth in black concentration of poverty (12.6 percentage points) since 2000 was not in the largest cities, but in metropolitan areas with 500,000 to 1 million persons.

“Something important is being left out of the national conversation about race, violence, and policing: namely, that we are witnessing a nationwide return of concentrated poverty that is racial in nature,” Jargowsky said.

“There are more Americans living in high poverty neighborhoods today than at any other time in recorded history and these neighborhoods continue to be segregated by race. We can’t begin to tackle intergenerational poverty and racism without acknowledging that, for instance, 28 percent of poor black children aged 0 – 5 years live in high poverty neighborhoods compared to 6.2 percent of poor white children.

“If we are serious about changing the conditions that contributed to the unrest we’ve seen in Ferguson and Baltimore, we have to go beyond criminal justice reform and break down the architecture of segregation. In short, we need to stop creating so many high-poverty neighborhoods in the first place.

“The two main changes that need to occur are simple to state, but hard to bring about. First, federal and state governments must begin to control suburban development so that new housing construction is in line with metropolitan population growth, and second, every city and town in a metropolitan area should be required to ensure that the new housing built reflects the income distribution of the metropolitan area as a whole.”

The study reveals notable declines in concentration of black poverty in major metropolitan centers including New York (-5.6 percentage points), Los Angeles (-2.5), Atlanta (-3.1), and Washington, D.C. (-1.1), figures that Jargowsky contends may have contributed to the lack of public attention on the issue, prior to the outbreak of violence in Ferguson a year ago.

Read the full Century Foundation report online [*“Architecture of Segregation: Civil Unrest, the Concentration of Poverty and Public Policy”*](#).