




One Economy

Building Opportunity for All

The State of Black Polk County

April 2017

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You have a place in One Economy.

This is a simple tagline. It's elegant. It's inviting. But don't let its simplicity fool you. This tagline sets a vision. With many critical dimensions, it offers a powerful redirection for our community. In a few short words, it realigns our future. It says, "We can do better. We must do better." It acknowledges our inequities and failings and stands them alongside tremendous hope. It says we will no longer tolerate the historical racial wealth divide between Whites and African Americans in Polk County. It says African immigrants are welcome to rebuild their lives here - lives of safety, stability, and deep connection. It says this is our table. We have built it together. We always pull up an extra seat. There is room for everyone - you, me, yours, and mine. It says come sit. I have saved a place for you. It says look at our community - **we are all here together.**



Today's Story

The intent of this work is to provide the reader a snapshot of the financial stability and well-being of African Americans and Africans living in Polk County, Iowa, at this point in time. It is part of the early work of the One Economy initiative, a partnership of organizations and individuals, led by The Directors Council, and designed to engage the Polk County community in activities that, sustained over time, result in expanded opportunities for increased financial capacity for African American and African families and businesses.

This report takes an uncommon approach and uses familiar language as it provides foundational knowledge to inform action. While we are including the facts and figures one might expect - and need - in a report on the economic well-being of a population of people, special attention has been given to context. Some would argue that context is everything. By centering on the lived experiences and perspectives of African American and African community members as captured through a series of guided discussions, we attempt to sincerely and responsibly create a greater truth. The traditional research and data gathering, we hope, is made real through the revelations and experiences of those in Polk County who opened a part of their lives as a contribution to this research.

Because of the limitations in how data is collected and reported, it can be difficult to provide statistical information on the lives of African immigrants and refugees. Their unique realities melt into the data on the lives of African Americans, mirroring the ways the dominant White culture often sees Black people as a single group. Moreover, due to language barriers, it can be difficult to collect immigrant and refugee stories with the kind of nuance and complexity one can achieve when the same language is shared. The ethnic and cultural diversity of the population further complicates the task. For these reasons, this report provides limited, yet valuable, insight into the economic well-being of Polk County's African immigrant and refugee communities.

The Impetus for the Study of Black Polk County

Understanding the financial stability and well-being of African Americans and Africans in Polk County is imperative to moving toward creating One Economy. Though Polk County is not unique in facing these challenges, it is no less important to utilize quantitative and qualitative research to guide a movement for change. The Directors Council (TDC) is working with the Northwest Area Foundation as part of a broader initiative across the northwestern part of the country. Northwest Area Foundation has recognized the need and committed a major investment to planning and initiatives to make improvements in the financial security of Blacks across its region.

The Polk County research is one element of a first year of work to address the financial capacity and wealth divide between the Black community and the mainstream economy and community. TDC functions not only as the leading organization for this work but a primary link into the vitality of the Black community. TDC is a Des Moines-based nonprofit organization comprising community leaders collectively dedicated to improving the conditions of individuals in the neighborhoods they serve. TDC members and their respective organizations offer a range of services specific to the African and African American communities in Polk County, including workforce development and placement services, financial education and literacy, and asset building and wealth creation.

The Community of Practice (COP) of The Directors Council provided leadership and direction to implementation of the first year activities, including the research. COP member agencies also have a history of delivering a robust continuum of services related to African and African American financial stability. The COP member organizations include Evelyn K. Davis Center for Working Families, John R. Grubb YMCA, Oakridge Neighborhood, and the Financial Capability Network, all located in Des Moines.

As the first year of this initiative draws to a close, the future is informed by the findings of this work. With the data and voices of the Black community framing current experiences and economic disparities, it is clear that next steps in this and other initiatives in the greater Polk County community must join together in a movement to create the level of unity of purpose and investment to effect significant closing of the gap in economic disparities for the Black community.

As one of six cities conducting similar initiatives under the purview of the Northwest Area Foundation's African American Financial Capability Initiative, financial and technical support for this initiative comes from the Northwest Area Foundation (NWAFF), NAACP, and Corporation for Enterprise Development - CFED. Other cities participating in similar initiatives are Portland, Oregon; Seattle, Washington; Tacoma, Washington; Denver, Colorado; and Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota.

The Directors Council engaged State Public Policy Group (SPPG) to work with the Community of Practice in completing this study of Africans and African Americans in Polk County with a focus on financial well-being. SPPG developed the methodology, and the qualitative and quantitative research was gathered by SPPG. The methodology sought input from the Black community to inform the issues related to financial security and

THE TALE OF TWO CITIES

Data show significant racial disparities in the traditional economic and financial indicators including banking, savings, employment, and housing.



Banking



Savings & Investments



Employment



Housing & Home Ownership

ensure the report reflects the issues as experienced by the community. SPPG is a local small business working for 33 years in the Polk County community and Iowa on related issues around well-being of the people. SPPG brings those impacted by the issues into the discussion in order to find solutions that work - whether in planning, researching, or managing change over time.

Methodology

Primary research for this report included 14 guided small group discussions with community members as well as dozens of individual interviews. The guided discussion questions were scripted for consistency and to assist in understanding community members' lived experiences and perceptions about issues related to the financial well-being of African Americans and African immigrants and refugees living in Polk County. Discussion group participants included educators, nonprofit and business owners, state employees, high schoolers in the Des Moines Public School system, African refugees, faith community members, single parents, former offenders, and other members of the African American community in Polk County. The SPPG team led the discussions, with specific preparation for effectively supporting group dynamics on this sensitive topic. SPPG also wrote detailed and non-attributable notes during each discussion.

Secondary research conducted by SPPG provided a strong baseline for the broad range of topical findings that impact the financial security of African Americans and African immigrants and refugees living in Polk County. The topics included, but were not limited to, education, employment, housing, healthcare, public safety, financial services, and demographics. Some findings are directly tied to the financial well-being of Africans and African Americans in Polk County while other findings have an indirect impact. Likewise, some findings showed a disproportional impact on Africans and African Americans, while others had impact across the population. In all cases, these findings were reviewed and included with explanations of their relevance and impact.

Research reviewed during this process included government data from the U.S. Census Bureau and other national, state, and local sources; historical research from the State Archives of Iowa; recent city and county plans by various local planning initiatives; and individual interviews with local data experts. The research net was cast wide intentionally, with the most instructive and relevant data informing the issues of financial security organized into this report.

Today's Cultural Climate

This report comes at a difficult moment in our nation's history. The research and writing has occurred at a time of intensified race relations in our country. For over two years, we have bore witness to a steady stream of killings by police of unarmed Black men, women, and children along with several incidents of targeted gun violence perpetrated against Black people by those with ties to White supremacist organizations and otherwise. Our social media feeds complicate things further as family, friends, and neighbors argue over the legitimacy of these killings. Now, with our first African American president in his final months in office, a political campaign season unlike any other has unfolded to let loose a divisively fearful, embittered, and, at times, volatile citizenry. Surely, our nation is deeply challenged by the intensity of this moment.

Beneath the intensity, this moment reveals a painful truth: despite undeniable progress, Black people living in the United States are not yet equal to White people. Black lives are not yet of equal worth and dignity, deserving of the same respect and humanity as White lives. Invariably some will argue this truth. Even so, it holds deep resonance with millions more. This resonance has given birth to a new powerful and decentralized movement for racial justice. Across the country and locally, often led by youth and women of color, people are organizing in resistance, claiming that Black lives do matter and demanding justice for those Black and brown-skinned people who live - and die - in our communities. Moreover, in unprecedented



numbers, White people are joining in this movement, thoughtfully examining the ways White privilege and traditional power structures support the systemic oppression of Black citizens and joining in the demands for justice. From standards-based school assessments to disproportionality in arrests and police shootings to discrimination in mortgage lending to the racial wealth gap, a cultural shift is taking place that moves Black lives into focus in powerfully new and renewed ways.

This has been the daily backdrop for the development of this report. It is in this cultural context that the all-White project team at SPPG made a repeated request. They asked for invitation into all-Black groups of fellow community members to lead facilitated discussions on African Americans' and Africans' economic well-being in Polk County. To be sure, this was a bold request. In addition to the nation's troubling cultural context, we live in a community that touts its livability for young professionals and retirees alike, yet landed at #3 of the Worst Cities for African Americans just this year. So, for White people to seek access to the personal experiences of Black folks' financial lives here in Polk County could seem inappropriate. Even so, doors opened for the team with the help of the African American leadership of The Directors Council and the every-day graciousness of our many hosts. In total, SPPG spent 96 hours listening to nearly 250 people in focus groups and other formal meetings. The words and emotions from those discussions inform much of this text.

Because of the graciousness and trust afforded the SPPG team in these discussions, they promised to carry back a repeated admonition to be included in this report. That admonition is,

Make this count. Do more than just collect our stories into a report. After all, these are our stories. These are our lives. They matter. And we expect real change to happen because we trusted you. Again, we trusted you to capture our lives in a report. Please don't read it once and then leave it on a shelf. Do something with it so that we can together change the conditions of our lives.

LET'S MAKE IT COUNT.

This call to accountability reflects the deeper cultural context at play as this report was prepared.

Stream of History

While it is beyond the scope of this report to provide an analysis of the historical policies and practices that created the economic realities of today, this report is alive with history. The economic conditions of Black and White and other people in Polk County in 2016 are built upon a complicated shared history. This history includes enslavement and emancipation, immigration and migration, coal mines and agriculture, segregation, the jazz age, lunch counter sit-ins, Black Panther free breakfasts, desegregation, urban renewal, white flight, the war on drugs, hip hop, and much more. To be sure, history is not a series of unrelated moments. It is more like a rolling river, with all of life flowing into it, giving contour to the landscape of today. So it's important that we state what is not always recognized, that the conditions reported in this document were shaped by the stream of history. And today's conditions will shape the future for our community, for better or worse, unless we act to change them.

That said, there is a piece of recent history which continues to reverberate in the lives and memories of African Americans living in Polk County. It was described in several of the guided discussions and followed up with historical research preserved in the State Archives. As this introduction closes, we share the personal story of one community member who helped us to understand the relevance of history and public policy as they continue to impact the cultural and financial lives of Black Polk County. This is Laticia's story. (Her name has been changed for reasons of privacy.)

Laticia's Story

"I grew up on the east side of Des Moines, near East High School. I would describe my community as old-school African American. We are very family oriented and working class. As an African American woman, I'm always in the minority here. Even so, as an adult, I chose to build a life in Des Moines because it's home. My family is here, and I feel very connected to Iowa. African Americans in Polk County have a rich history, and I feel proud about that.

"I grew up in a household with three generations. My grandma knew every other grandma up and down the block. The neighborhood was like an extended family. All the folks around there owned their homes. There were generations within the homes, so everyone knew everyone. There was a deep interconnectedness. I have really fond memories of my community.

"But when I was in my twenties, that was destroyed. Actually, the first phase of the destruction happened before I was born. Center Street in Des Moines was where Black people had their businesses, including doctor's offices, hotels, and theaters, because we couldn't receive those services in white establishments. Of course, Black folks also owned most of the houses in the Center Street neighborhood. Many of these families had migrated to Des Moines from Buxton, Iowa, when the coal mines closed. They were hard-working people who had earned good money and who were used to living together in a vibrant Black community. Well, in the 1960s, the city planners chose the path of Center Street, rather than Grand Avenue and Ingersoll where there were lots of wealthy white houses, for the construction of the freeway. So, in the name of progress, much of Center Street - and the center of Black cultural life in Polk County - was destroyed.

"Then, in the 1990s, additional freeway expansion destroyed what was left. They took my home and half of the neighborhood. My family went into deep negotiations with the city and eventually got into a new house. But that was because we had the access, the knowledge, and the ability to engage in legal negotiations. Folks around us either didn't know how or didn't want to organize. So the city plucked them off one by one. We were able to get my grandma into another home, but we could have done so much more if people

could've recognized what was really happening. Instead, our neighbors took the first low-ball offer that was presented them rather than negotiate. That little bit of money looked like a lot to working-class folks.

"Now, more than twenty years later, most of those families are still living in rental apartments, never able to recover financially from the loss of their homes. It's sad. I feel like that was the last of the deeply-rooted, deeply connected old-school Black community here in Polk County. It was divide and conquer. It was planned. It's a shame.

"Now, in terms of solutions, it's power in numbers. If the Black folks scattered across the city and county would gather together, we can re-establish those roots and re-create those community connections that sustained generations. Yes, the re-investment has to come as money and White folks must do their part, but it also has to come in restored human relationships. We've got to be in this together."

What is your place in One Economy?

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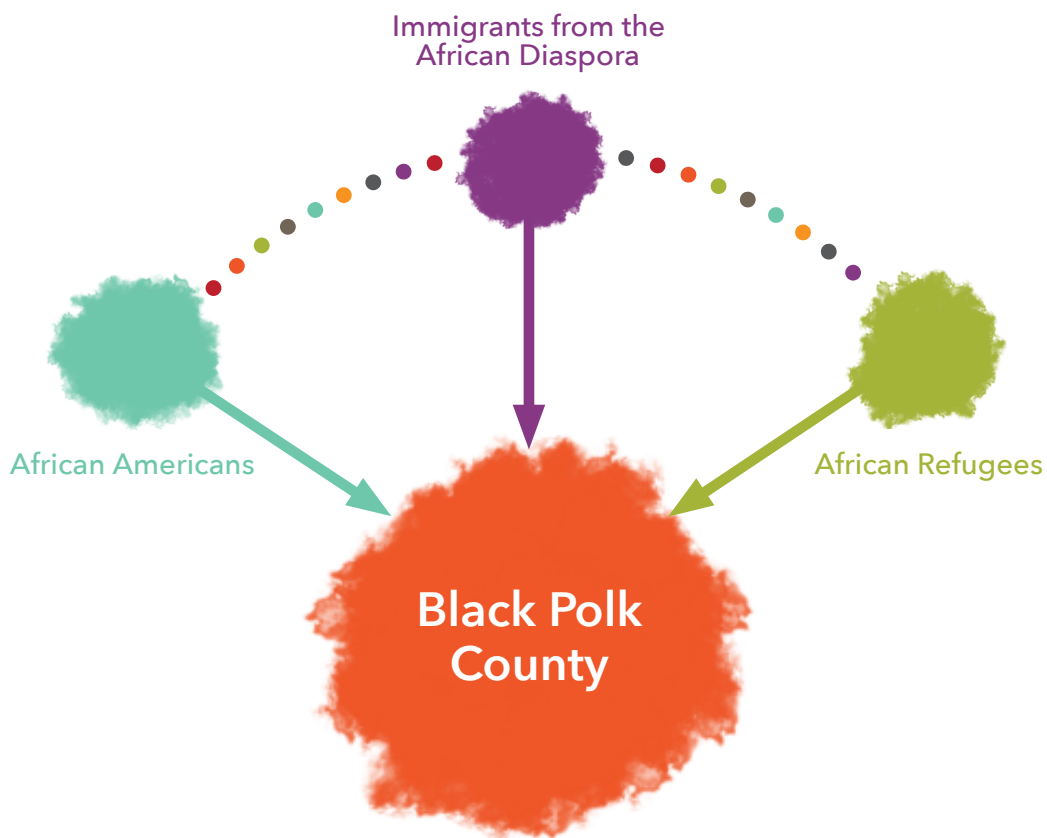


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Healthcare Coverage



Section 1: Who is Black Polk County?

Black Polk County is a diverse community representing multiple cultures, ethnicities, nationalities, languages, religions, and immigration statuses. This section describes three subgroups within Black Polk County and provides basic demographic data. This is followed by a discussion of current community strengths and concerns, framed and informed by qualitative data from the guided discussions.





African Americans

The majority of Polk County's Black population are descendants of the enslaved peoples from West and Central Africa who were brought to this country in the transatlantic slave trade. Their freed ancestors migrated to Iowa and Polk County in search of economic opportunity. Others have more recently migrated to Polk County from large urban centers, like Chicago, and from southern states - including Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, Texas, Tennessee, and North Carolina - in search of economic opportunities, better education, and more peaceful neighborhoods. For the purposes of this report, the term African American is consistently used to identify this population of people.

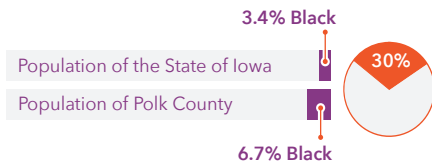
Immigrants from the African Diaspora

A second subgroup of people in Black Polk County are immigrants from other parts of the world, including various African countries, and their descendants. Countries of origin include Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Cameroon, Egypt, Kenya, Liberia, Ivory Coast, Jamaica, Brazil, and others. Some immigrated to be with family or for economic opportunities while others immigrated for university studies. While many of these immigrants have become naturalized U.S. citizens, strong cultural ties, including language and ethnic identities within the countries of origin, are distinct characteristics of this population. Because of restraints in data collection and reporting, it is especially difficult to determine the number of African immigrants living in Polk County. This presents real limitations in providing demographic data for this important subgroup of Black Polk County. For the purposes of this report, the term African immigrant is consistently used to identify this population of people. When discussing African immigrants and refugees together, the term African is used. Please note that many sources include this population in the term "African American or Black" and is thus reflected in this report.

African Refugees

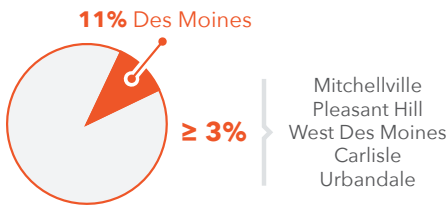
A third subgroup of people within Black Polk County is African refugees. Unlike most of Polk County's African immigrants, the African refugees who live here are unable to live in their home countries due to war, genocide, internal conflict, or widespread drought or famine conditions. Polk County's African refugee population has grown significantly in the past two decades. Since 1993, people from Sudan - and now South Sudan - have resettled in Des Moines. Des Moines has the second-largest population of Sudanese refugees in the United States at nearly 8,000 in 2012. According to the Iowa Bureau of Refugee Services, other African refugees have settled in Polk County. Between 2015 and 2016, 3 refugees arrived from Burundi, 109 from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 14 from Eritrea, 6 from Ethiopia, and 39 from Somalia. While there is information on the total number of African refugees originally settled in Polk County, these numbers do not include refugees who have moved here from other U.S. locations or their children born since arriving in the United States. In addition, restraints in data collection and reporting result in significant limitations in providing demographic data for this important subgroup of Black Polk County. For the purposes of this report, the term African refugee is consistently used to identify this population of people. When discussing African immigrants and refugees together, the term African is used. Please note that many sources include this population in the term "African American or Black" and is thus reflected in this report.

Statistical Data



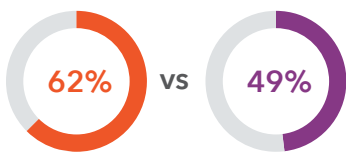
African Americans and Africans are 3.4 percent of the total Iowa population.

African Americans and Africans are 6.7 percent of the population in Polk County. Polk County has the largest Black population in Iowa, representing nearly 30 percent of all African Americans and Africans living in the state.

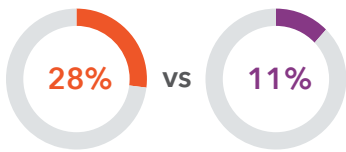


African Americans and Africans are almost 11 percent of the total population in Des Moines. This is the highest proportion for any city or town in Polk County. Other Polk County communities with African American and African populations at or above 3 percent are Mitchellville, Pleasant Hill, West Des Moines, Carlisle, and Urbandale.

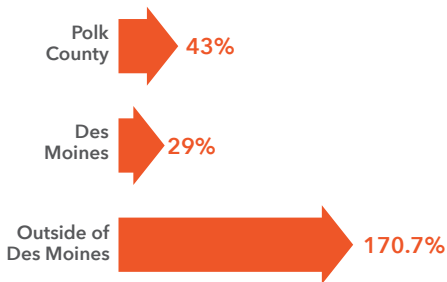
Those in Polk County who identify as *White and Black* or African American make up 1.2 percent of the population.



Over 62 percent of the 10,037 African American and African households in Polk County are married. In comparison, just over 49 percent of the 174,759 total households in Polk County are married.



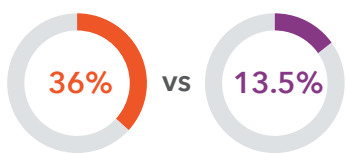
Over 28 percent of Polk County's African American and African households are headed by a single female. In comparison, just over 11 percent of Polk County's total households are headed by a single female.



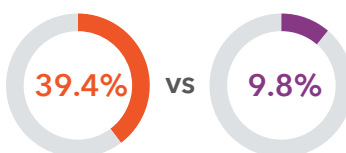
In the decade between 2000-2010, Polk County's African American child population age 0-17 increased 43 percent from 6,386 to 9,109. In Des Moines, there was a 29 percent increase, from 5,772 to 7,447. In the rest of Polk County, not including Des Moines, the increase was most dramatic - from 614 to 1,662, a 170.7 percent increase.

\$26,725 / \$59,844

The median household income for Black or African American households in Polk County is \$26,725. In comparison, the median household income for all of Polk County is \$59,844.



According to the 2016 Polk County Health Report, 36 percent of African American and African households with children in Polk County live at or below the federal poverty line. In comparison, 13.5 percent of the total Polk County population lives at or below the poverty line.



While over 60 percent of Polk County's African American population lives above the federal poverty level, a disproportionate number are living in poverty compared to Whites, at 39.4 percent vs. 9.8 percent respectively.

Polk County is a unique place for African Americans and Africans to live. The historically small numbers of Black people compared to the predominant White population living in Polk County has created an environment with distinct economic challenges and opportunities.

In response to these conditions, African Americans and Africans living here build upon the generational legacy of community resourcefulness and resilience necessary to survive difficult circumstances. From family to faith, the arts to activism, Black Polk County draws on many strengths.

Family is perhaps the most valued resource in Black Polk County. Family is the reason many people choose to build a life here, in spite of the challenges. Across cultural, ethnic, and other differences, people in Black Polk County describe the extended family networks that provide emotional, financial, childrearing, and other supports for them as they strive for economic survival and well-being.

Similarly, as described by many of the guided discussion participants, involvement in a local faith community gives meaning and hope to life. Faith communities provide spiritual uplift, and emotional, social, financial, and material support to families in need. Faith communities often fill the gap where employment and state assistance end but basic survival needs continue. There is considerable diversity in the local Black faith community. Many African Americans in Polk County attend religious services in traditional Black Christian churches. Some participate in increasingly multi-racial and multi-ethnic non-denominational churches. For African immigrants and refugees who are Christian, the ability to freely practice their faith traditions provides a deep sense of continuity and strength in the midst of tremendous change. Locally, some participate in one of several culturally and linguistically specific congregations situated within larger traditionally White churches, such as the Congolese congregation of a local Lutheran church. Others join multi-ethnic nondenominational churches. For Muslims, participation in one of Polk County's local mosques provides the sense of community and temporary reprieve to survive the pressures they face in building new lives here.

For some Black professionals, employment opportunities draw them to Polk County. For those in secure positions, employment keeps them here long term to build a life. For others, Polk County is a temporary stop as they advance in their careers and seek vibrant and supportive community with others.

For those who have lived in other urban areas within the United States or in war-torn countries on the African continent, the relative safety of life in Polk County is an important factor in building a life here. Compared to inter-ethnic violence in Sudan or epidemic gun violence in neighborhoods of Chicago, neighborhoods in Polk County provide relative calm and security for families who have experienced individual and collective violence.

The community strengths within Black Polk County are significant. Both the African American and African populations in Polk County use the arts, community organizing, and activism to create and maintain community ties, to share their experiences, and to assert their belonging. Each year since 1998, Polk County is the location for the statewide I'll Make Me a World in Iowa festival, celebrating the history and cultures of African Americans in Iowa. Other cultural institutions include the annual Juneteenth celebrations, the Des Moines branch of the NAACP, and the nation's oldest minority-focused presidential forum, the Iowa Brown & Black Forum. Moreover, in response to the police killings of unarmed Black people, a decentralized local movement for racial justice, organized by young African American and African women, has begun, often under the banner of Black Lives Matter. An organization of African immigrants, Africans in Iowa for Empowerment (AIFE), organized the 2016 African Festival for the first time in downtown Des Moines. African-led nonprofits, like NISAA African Family Services, provide culturally responsive services to African immigrants and refugees in ways the wider community's traditional nonprofit organizations simply cannot.

Even with this richness in culture and community, Black Polk County faces real challenges. As revealed in the guided discussions with community members, across age, gender, income, and educational attainment, people are hurting. In the face of the current cultural context (described in the introduction), a sense of despair looms large. Among the young, there is a hopelessness rooted in a lack of opportunity for them in Polk County. They do not see themselves reflected in the school teachers and administrators, public officials, and wider community leadership in Polk County, signaling the absence of sufficient and significant role models. A crisis of low expectations, both from within and outside the Black community, stunts confidence in themselves and in what life has to offer them. Some simply cannot see a positive future here – or at all.

There are other challenges. Internal community fractures between adult leaders and organizations hinder collective forward movement. In addition, the stress of dealing with personal, systemic, and structural racism results in the distrust, exasperation, and fear that echoed through the guided community discussions.



“America’s wealth came from the shoulders of Black men and women for free. Why can’t you be nice to me when my folks helped your folks get where you are?”

“I’m mentally drained and angry. I’m constantly in prayer and meditation. I have a war going on within me. I’m struggling financially, but I don’t want to put my anger out on others.”

“When you ask us how we feel, that’s a dumb question. We’re mad! We have our first Black president, but no matter how high we go, we’re still considered not good enough. As a people, we are raised to give grace under fire. We thank the Lord for our jobs, but we’re not making as much as we could. We are going to try to keep going even though they’re keeping us down.”

“There is a lack of appreciation, respect and recognition of the talents, skills, and intellectual horsepower that people of color bring. There is a discomfort in accepting that. We were brought to this country as 3/5 of a person. To some today, we are still not a full person. What do we do about it? That’s the question of a couple of centuries.”

“We can say it loud or soft. What do we do? We’re tired. We have to fight constantly. How much proof do you need? We’ve got data and statistics, but White folks want to dispute the data. They want to dispute the examples. They say, *We’re not doing that.*”

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Section 2: Racial Economic Disparity in Black Polk County

Racial Economic Disparities in Polk County

Across the United States, there is increased focus on racial and economic inequality. Recent attention to racial economic disparities extends beyond the numbers. Potent and challenging analyses examine the complex historical and structural barriers Black families face in building household wealth. Difficult questions frame the national dialogue.

“How is it that a nation legally committed to equal opportunity for all – regardless of race, creed, national origin, or gender – continually reproduces patterns of racial inequality?”

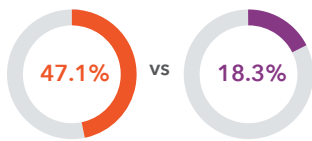
“Why, in the world’s wealthiest country, is there such enduring poverty among people of color?”

“How is it that in our open, participatory democracy, racial minorities are still underrepresented in positions of power and decision making?”

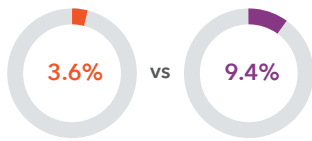
It is true that many African Americans and African immigrants and refugees build economic wealth while many Whites remain desperately poor. Yet the overall pattern of opportunity and advantage persists in which White Americans are significantly more likely than Blacks and other people of color to achieve economic stability and wealth. The pattern of public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other norms that reinforce and perpetuate racial economic inequities can be hard to see. After all, most explicit and legally sanctioned forms of racial discrimination have been eradicated. Still, largely unconscious and unintentional “racialized patterns in policies and practices permeate the political, economic, and sociocultural structures of America in ways that generate differences in well-being between people of color and Whites. These dynamics work to maintain the existing racial hierarchy even as they adapt with the times or accommodate new racial and ethnic groups. This contemporary manifestation of racism in America can be called structural racism” (The Aspen Institute, 2004).

Structural racism and the evidential wealth disparities of the United States are reflected in Iowa and its communities. The community of Polk County is no exception. The historically small numbers of Black people compared to the predominant White population living in Polk County has created an environment with distinct economic challenges. In 2014, the median household income for Black or African American households in Polk County was \$26,725. In comparison, the median household income for all of Polk County was \$59,844 – a \$33,119 difference. In Des Moines, where most of Polk County’s Black population lives, 52 percent of African American households in Des Moines are considered asset poor, compared with only 20 percent of all households.

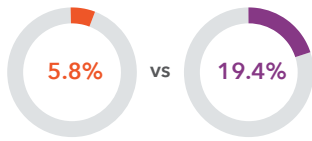
In Polk County,



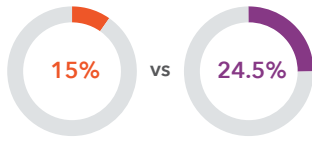
47.1 percent of Black households have an annual household income of less than \$25,000. This compares to just 18.3 percent of all Polk County households.



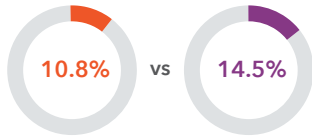
3.6 percent of Black households have self-employment income compared to 9.4 percent of total Polk County households.



5.8 percent of Black households have assets that earn interest or dividends compared to 19.4 percent of total Polk County households.



15 percent of Black households have Social Security income compared to 24.5 percent of total Polk County households.



10.8 percent of Black households have retirement income compared to 14.5 percent of total Polk County households.

On nearly every measure, local racial wealth disparities are evident. This is true for traditional economic measures like banking, housing, and employment, as well as other measures that have a direct impact on the ability of individuals and families to earn income and build wealth. What follows are the economic and financial indicators which together create a snapshot of the economic disparities experienced by Black Polk County. Followed by revealing first-person perspectives from African American and African community members, the complexities driving the local racial wealth divide come into sharper focus still.

In the section that follows, this report provides a detailed analysis of racial disparity in four key areas of Black Polk County: education, health, justice systems, and political representation. While not exhaustive, the analysis provided attempts to illustrate the systemic and structural ways racial bias, be it unintentional or otherwise, has produced profound negative outcomes for Black Polk County.

This report examines key indicators in the economic lives of African American and African people living in Polk County, Iowa. When county data is not available, state data provides insight. When possible, city-level data within Polk County is provided.

Please note that many sources include Africans in the term "African American or Black" and is thus reflected in this report. This report also uses the term Black Polk County to identify the entire community in Polk County that is of African descent.

Black Polk County describes its economic stability:

BEHIND / *Entrepreneurial* / *Getting by* / *Good, or not* / Invisible
Needs improvement / **Not fully known** / *Painful* / *Restrained* / SHAKY
Struggling / *Unaware* / **UNEVEN** / *Unstable* / *Unstudied* / *Varied*

Across income levels, many families lack even the basic tools to save for household emergencies. Traditional bank accounts, savings, earned investments, and retirement plans are underutilized by Black Polk County. Financial literacy and access to loans as a means to build wealth are limited. Challenges to employment, transportation, home ownership, and affordable child care compound upon one another to illustrate the complex and systemic impediments to building economic stability and well-being in Black Polk County.

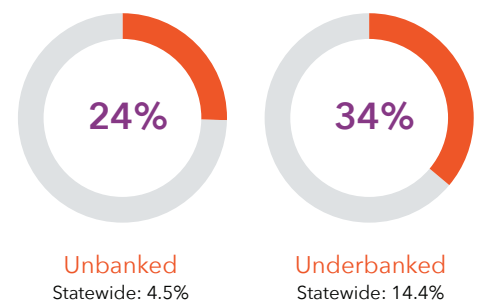
Banking

Indicators

Data on the percentage of unbanked and underbanked residents is an indicator of financial security. Both Des Moines and statewide rates indicate disparities in participation with traditional banking services. Unbanked and underbanked rates this high are often linked to lack of access to affordable credit.

- * 24 percent of Black Des Moines residents are unbanked compared to the statewide rate of 4.5 percent. To be unbanked means that one does not have a traditional checking or savings account.
- * 34 percent of Black Des Moines residents are underbanked compared to the statewide rate of 14.4 percent. To be underbanked means that, despite having a mainstream checking or savings account, one uses alternative banking services, such as payday-lending at high interest rates.

Black Des Moines Residents are:



Community Experiences

There are significant negative feelings toward banks across poor, low-income, and middle class Black Polk County. There is longing for community banks invested in the Black community.



"When I go to the bank, I'm treated badly. They get nasty with you."

"I closed my bank account because I wanted to! I don't have to have a bank account."

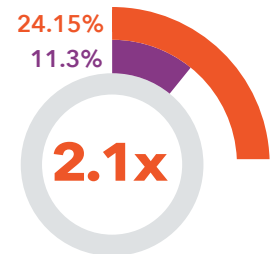
"Even though my paycheck was cut from an account at that bank, they wouldn't allow me to cash it because I didn't have an account there. They wanted my thumbprint in order to cash it. They aren't getting my fingerprint."

"We need financial institutions for Black people to become entrepreneurs, inventors, and to train and fund them."

Disproportionate loan application denials and approvals signal a significant disadvantage to building economic security and wealth for Black Polk County. For all applicants not specific to race, some reasons given for denial include credit history, lack of capital, and debt-to-asset ratio.

Indicators

- * From 2010 to 2013, there were 120,047 applications in Polk County for loans that fall under the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act (HDMA). African Americans were denied for these loans at a rate of 24.15 percent compared to the overall denial rate in Polk County of 11.3 percent. These loans are tied to property such as a mortgage, refinancing, or home renovation loan.
- * Between 2010 and 2014, only 1.4 percent of all home mortgages in the Des Moines-West Des Moines area were made to African Americans.
- * In 2014, African Americans applied for 552 total mortgage, refinancing, or home improvement loans in the Des Moines-West Des Moines area. Of that number, more than a quarter of those applications were denied.



African Americans are denied loans at a rate **2.1 times higher** than the Polk County average.

Community Experiences

The collective frustration of a community of people unable to access loans for home or business needs is evident for Blacks in Polk County. Disparities in loan approvals reinforce the sense of two economies as Blacks find other ways to support their dreams of home and business ownership.



"Even if you want to be entrepreneurial, it's difficult to get a good loan that can help support you. The good loans happen by word of mouth, and this doesn't get filtered through to the Black community."

"For minorities to be able to do some of the things they need or want to do, the lenders make you jump through hoops that other people don't."

"My White counterparts can file bankruptcy and, two months later, turn around and get a huge loan. That makes me upset. I'm someone who is honest and wants to do well, but I can't touch a loan. They want to give me \$5,000, but that's not going to get me anywhere. I understand you have to start small, but that's a joke."

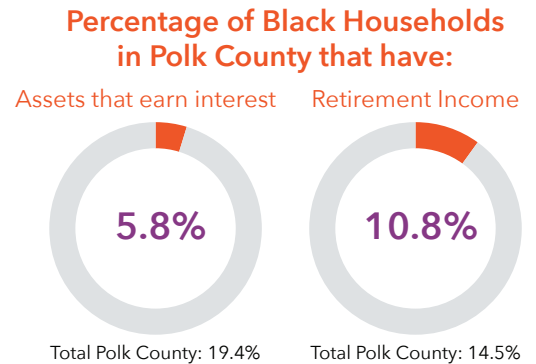
"I self-fund because I don't want to deal with the fuss of getting a bank loan and being turned down."

"You have to have grit and determination. For me, not getting the loan could've stopped me. But I had to get creative to work around it. You have to have the determination; we have to be creative. We can't do things the normal way because that's not available to us."

Significant disparities exist in Black Polk County's savings and investments practices, creating often-insurmountable obstacles towards building economic stability and wealth.

Indicators

- * 5.8 percent of Black households have assets that earn interest or dividends compared to 19.4 percent of total Polk County households.
- * 10.8 percent of Black households have retirement income compared to 14.5 percent of total Polk County households.



Community Experiences

To some community members, building wealth does not seem possible or culturally relevant. For others, the old ways of saving money, dictated by structural barriers, are still utilized.



"A lot of people say, 'Well, I don't have any money to save or budget,' so they just tune it out. If someone feels like they don't have money to budget, they're not going to care at all about it."

"When you're poor and you don't have money, your focus isn't on saving because you don't have anything to save."

"I don't have a problem saving money, I have a problem earning money."

"Oh, you got a savings account? You got good credit? That's a White thing."

"There's a mindset of some people with no money. They get some and then spend it all. That comes with how they were brought up. In the past being poor meant make money, hustle more, and save more. Then there was a mindset shift. Now if you're poor, you gotta hustle more to spend more to look like you have more."

"I won't say all African Americans don't know about savings and investing, but a lot of them still do it like the old school generation: in the sock, under the bed, in the drawer."

"When my father died a few years back, we found thousands of dollars he had saved in the ceiling of his basement. He had thousands stashed in a safety deposit box too, but none in savings or investments that could've accrued interest."



There is no available data on financial literacy despite attention drawn to the topic by policy and education experts. However, in Iowa, schools are not required to teach financial literacy. If a school elects to teach financial literacy, standards are in place for personal finance courses.

Financial literacy efforts occurring in Polk County include:

- * Financial Capability Network
- * Evelyn K. Davis Center for Working Families
- * NAACP Economic Development Committee

Community Experiences

With financial literacy taught unevenly across local school systems, most people learn about money in other ways. In Black Polk County, some learn from family or in community programs, but many others learn by trial and error. The cultural relevance of financial literacy is also questioned.



"I didn't learn how to manage money until I had some money to manage. Growing up poor, you're just trying to survive; there's nothing to manage. Unless you're thinking, Okay, do I pay my gas bill or my electric bill?"

"Family is vitally important with money and helping you understand how to think about money. I always teach my kids so they know a little bit, so they know about savings and investing."

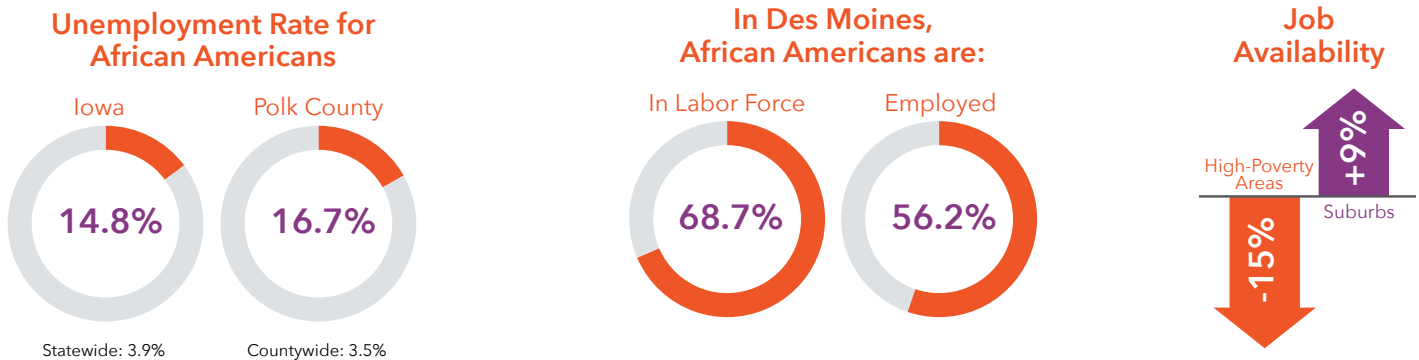
"I learned about money from poor people. About how to spread your money thin, how to save money and what the value of that dollar is. But, if you don't have a community around you, you are not sharing knowledge because you're so isolated from each other. Everything's so corporate, so industrial now. It's not communal."

"Going into college, you have so many people trying to give you credit cards and student loans. Financial literacy needs to start early."

"For most folks, financial literacy is not even part of the picture. The financial literacy perspective is based on a White middle class perspective. The White perspective is not the best perspective all the time."

The disparities in unemployment rates signal deep concern for the ability of Black Polk County - and the wider African American population in Iowa - to build economic security and wealth. Jobs providing economic mobility are often only available a far enough distance from where the worker lives to create another barrier to employment. In Polk County, such employment opportunities trend away from neighborhoods with concentrated numbers of African Americans and towards the suburbs where African Americans make up a lower percentage of the population.

Among all Census groups statewide, the African American unemployment rate is the highest.



Indicators

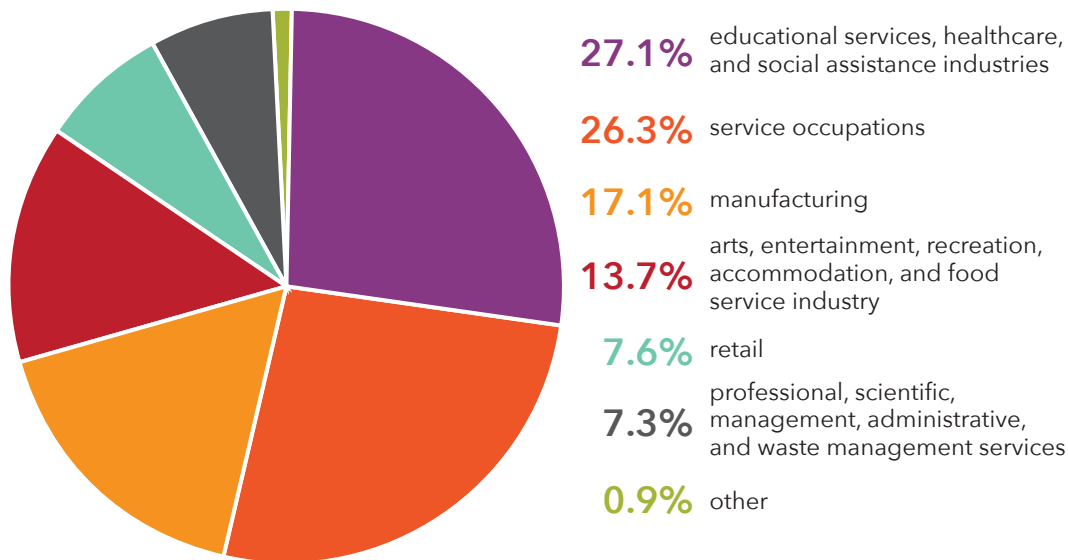
- * The unemployment rate for African Americans in Iowa is 14.8 percent, the worst rate in the U.S., compared to the statewide unemployment rate of 3.9 percent.
- * The unemployment rate for African Americans in Polk County is 16.7 percent compared to the overall county unemployment rate of 3.5 percent.
- * In Des Moines, 68.7 percent of African Americans are in the labor force and 56.2 percent are employed.
- * The median earnings for African Americans in Polk County is \$19,776 compared to \$35,542 for all of Polk County.
- * Between 2000 and 2012, there was a 15 percent decrease in jobs in high-poverty areas. However, there was a 9 percent increase in jobs in the Des Moines suburbs.
- * 26 percent of those living in the Urban Core are African American; 4 percent of those living in the Des Moines/West Des Moines Metro are African American; 5 percent of those living in Polk County are African American.

Median Earnings in Polk County

\$19,776 / \$35,542

African Americans Total

African Americans Living in Iowa Worked in the Following Fields in 2014



Community Experiences

For community members looking for employment or working in hostile environments, discouragement is a daily companion. Unconscious bias in hiring decisions and extra scrutiny in the workplace are burdens. So are impacts from the disproportionate incarceration rates of Polk County’s African American population. A collective sense of hopelessness accompanies the disparities in data.



“It might be a livable wage, but when you’re starting from nothing, it’s negative because you have no clothes, you owe money. You don’t have a car or the driver’s license. So it’s still not a livable wage.”

“I know a person who got out of jail and was in drug court. He was offered a job at Firestone working the 3 to 11 shift. Drug court prevented him from taking the job because they thought he’d get into trouble if he got off at 11.”

“From my perspective, when I look at my generation, a lot of the people are doing well. The employment opportunities opened up for several decades for African Americans. But now it seems like that door has closed. It seems really different for the generation coming through now as compared to my generation, especially for the men. They worked for a meat packing company, Bridgestone, the bus company then. It seems harder now for them to get their foot in the door.”

“Filling out an application, drawing up a resume . . . if you don’t have access to a computer, it’s hard. Now all applications are online. If you didn’t keep up with your computer skills, you’re at a disadvantage.”

“After you’ve gotten turned down so many times, it becomes very difficult to get up and try again. Unless you have a support system like your church or family saying, ‘Today’s going to be the day,’ you won’t. Then you get labeled as lazy. Sometimes you need encouragement, but you’re not seeing it. There’s no one telling you that you can. The discouragement becomes a barrier.”



"That's why some people are business owners, because they can't get a job with a criminal background."

"I had a co-worker come up and say a racist saying, thinking it was a joke. I went and talked to HR. Didn't give any names. They said to report it to the supervisor. They make excuses. "

"There were things I did at my last job to act less Black. I don't know other races that have to do that. At times, I know they don't like to see two or three Black people gathered together. We have to be quick when we talk to each other socially so we don't raise suspicion."

"As young children, we are raised by our parents to have a clear understanding that in order for you to be considered to be equal, you have to work twice as hard. You have to be the overachiever. You have to be perfect, the A student. In that same regard, in the corporate world, when you present yourself with all those credentials, you have to dial it back so not to intimidate with all those credentials, experience, and the skills."

"In addition to economic disadvantage, there are pipeline issues. There is linkage in privilege. When I think about how to connect people to jobs, it's about who you know, not your skills. We don't come from the places with 'the know', the circle, the connection. We cannot call up those connections. We cannot get our foot in the door. We cannot connect on our career paths. We don't even know the right person who can help us get the interview..."

There is no comprehensive source of accurate data on the total number of Black-owned businesses in Des Moines, Polk County, or Iowa. Business registrations do not ask information about race or ethnicity. In addition, many Black businesses are not formally registered as a business and would not appear on the state business registration database. Nonetheless, the numbers provided by Iowa's Targeted Small Business program provide limited indication of the numbers of Black-owned businesses here. This data does not include nonprofits in Polk County that are headed by African Americans or Africans.

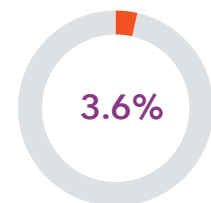
Black-Owned Small Businesses in Polk County*



Black Female-Owned Businesses in Polk County*



Black Households with Self-Employment Income in Polk County



Polk County: 9.4%

Indicators

- * In 2016, there are 4,482 minority-owned firms in Polk County.*
- * There are 23 Black-owned small businesses in Polk County.*
- * There are 9 Black female-owned businesses in Polk County.*
- * 3.6 percent of Black households have self-employment income compared to 9.4 percent of total Polk County households.

**This data is from the Targeted Small Business (TSB) database found on the Iowa Economic Development Authority website. For reasons stated above, we know these numbers do not include all Black-owned businesses in Polk County.*

Community Experiences

Many factors limit Black business growth in Polk County. Community members describe a lack of Black role models and mentors as a critical void in rebuilding a vibrant Black business community. Others perceive a lack of access to and support from the predominant White business community. The destruction of the vibrant Black business district on Center Street continues to be felt. These realities inform the existence of dual economies in Polk County.



"Most of the Black people in Des Moines who are successful were not born in Des Moines. They have perspective. Growing up, they saw Black people who were leaders and doing great things in their community. Some came from Cedar Rapids, Waterloo, or Iowa City, but there are not a lot of strong entrepreneurs who are born and raised in Des Moines. That's attributable to the fact that there's not a lot of role models who can help them with their vision."

"At [a recent business networking event], there were three to five Black business owners among hundreds. Looking at the panel of CEOs who are successful, none of them were Black. And none of the businesses who pitched were Black. If this [kind of event] was provided to Black-owned businesses, I could see that really being something that would move everyone forward."



"There are a lot of 'no's' that you get in Des Moines. There is an infrastructure network that's not available to the African American population in Des Moines."

"They'll help you get in the door, but they don't help you with financing. There are so many things you have to worry about and do. We're going strong, and we're going to make it. But it's not because of what the city is doing. I think there's a lot of things stacked against us."

"[Regarding the Targeted Small Business list and mandates], our customers will give us a few jobs, but they won't give us the big jobs. It's not hiring local, it's hiring people that look like them and people they know."

"A lot of the Black businesses went underground. We have a lot of Black plumbers, electricians, and landscaping. They don't bother getting contracts with the city or the state. They give you so much paperwork. Even after you have the certification, you still have to do the paperwork. A lot of Black businesses left town. We moved our company [out of state]."

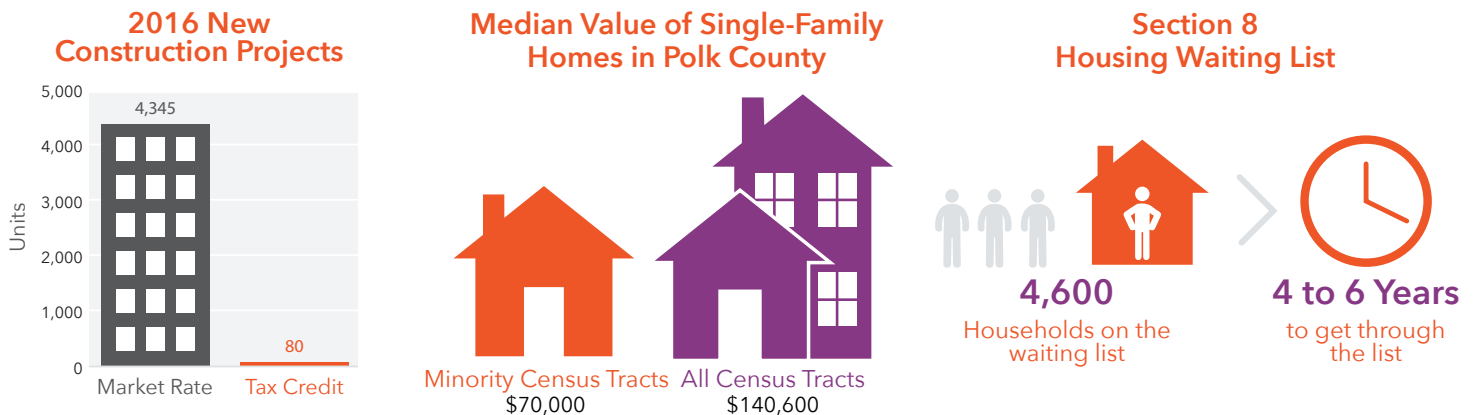
"We've had to go outside of where we bank locally to get a loan for our business. I've been with my local bank all my life. My cousin connected me with a loan officer in New Jersey after my local bank refused me. It had to happen outside of Iowa."

"I have a cleaning company. When a local bank had water damage in the middle of the night, I could get the contract to clean it. But they would not give me a business loan."

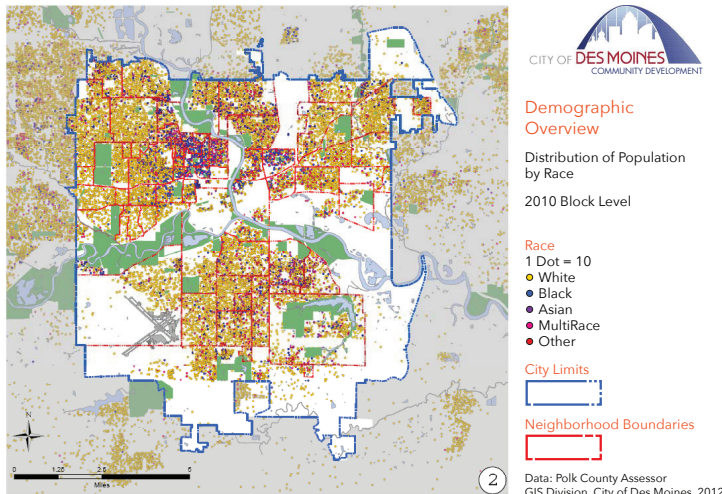
"As soon as Center Street was destroyed by the interstate, all the Black businesses went underground. I know five plumbers and electricians that do cash and carry. We have excellent landscape workers as well."

Home ownership is the traditional means of building economic wealth. However, disparities in home ownership and rental statistics suggest systemic obstacles are in place for African American home ownership in Polk County. In addition, the concentration of existing low-income housing in neighborhoods with concentrated numbers of African Americans perpetuates the isolation of residents from employment opportunities in more affluent areas.

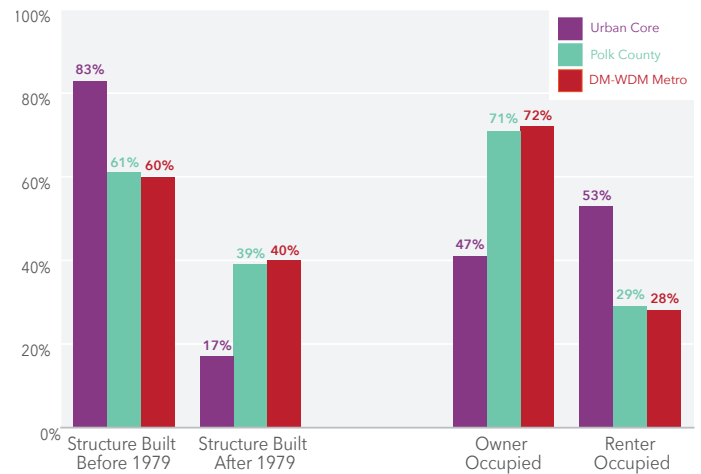
Indicators



- * In 2010, African Americans in Polk County represented 11.2 percent of all renters while representing just 6 percent of the county's total population.
- * In that same year, African Americans represented 65 percent of cost-burdened renters in Des Moines. These are renters who pay more than 30 percent of their income towards rent.
- * The limited availability of rental units in Polk County limits the housing options of African Americans further. The average apartment vacancy rate in the Des Moines metro area is 3.8 percent, the lowest vacancy rate for the area since the mid 1990s. The vacancy rate for low-income and tax-credit housing is even lower, at 2.7 percent.
- * The 4,345 market rate apartment units set for construction in 2016 represent a 45 percent increase compared to 2015 new construction projects. However, only 80 tax-credit apartment units typically rented by low-income renters - or 1.84 percent of all new construction - will be built in the same year.
- * In 2010, African Americans represented just 2.6 percent of all homeowners in Polk County.
- * In 2010, the median value of single-family homes in minority Census tracts was \$70,000, less than half the Polk County median value of \$140,600.
- * Section 8 currently provides housing for 3,200 households in Polk County with 80 percent of the units in Des Moines. The waiting list for Section 8 housing is 4,600 households. Government officials estimate it will take four to six years to get through the list. The waiting list is currently closed and not taking additional applications.
- * In Polk County, all public housing units are located within the Des Moines city limits. There were 790 units available, and 800 households were on the waiting list in 2010.



Housing Characteristics



Community Experiences

There is a longing in Black Polk County for home ownership, not just individually, but for the wider Black community. Residents feel ignored and intentionally excluded from opportunities to improve residential neighborhoods where significant numbers of Black people live. Others perceive exploitation by wealthy landlords of poor Black renters.



"I suspect, whether or not we like it, housing controls us. It controls our environment, how we socialize, how we are educated, who we are. Look at the history of housing in the U.S.; it's had a detrimental impact on all communities of color. It's always this tangible object that we have to go to someone else to acquire."

"City planners ignore Black folks and just keep us living in pockets of the city. They don't want us downtown where they're building beautiful new apartments for young people."

"My company has met with Polk County Housing Authority to propose buying and flipping the boarded-up houses that sit empty. We could buy the houses, flip them, and sell them to lower income people. These people need housing."

"In the inner city of Des Moines, the majority of homes are rented. They use redlining, because we have White landowners who are making a lot of money on the backs of Black people. The landlords are not repairing the houses, but are writing off the deterioration on their taxes."

"My dad and I lived on the same street. We lived across the street from one another. I was redlined and my dad was able to get a loan for \$60,000. How can he get it and I can't? So I asked the bank. They admitted that they redlined my neighborhood."

"How many people in our neighborhood are renters? Our homeownership has depleted 90 percent. The older generation that owned their homes has died."

"We know a young woman who was getting evicted. We asked, 'How much do you need?' She said, '\$90.' \$90 a month? 'No, just \$90.' She paid just \$30 a month for rent. The actual rent was \$900, but this was Section 8 housing. Now, how is [the land owner] getting all this money, but he's putting her out because she's out \$90? She was on disability. You hear this kind of story, you see this kind of struggle, and you have to ask, 'How do you have the heart to do this?'"

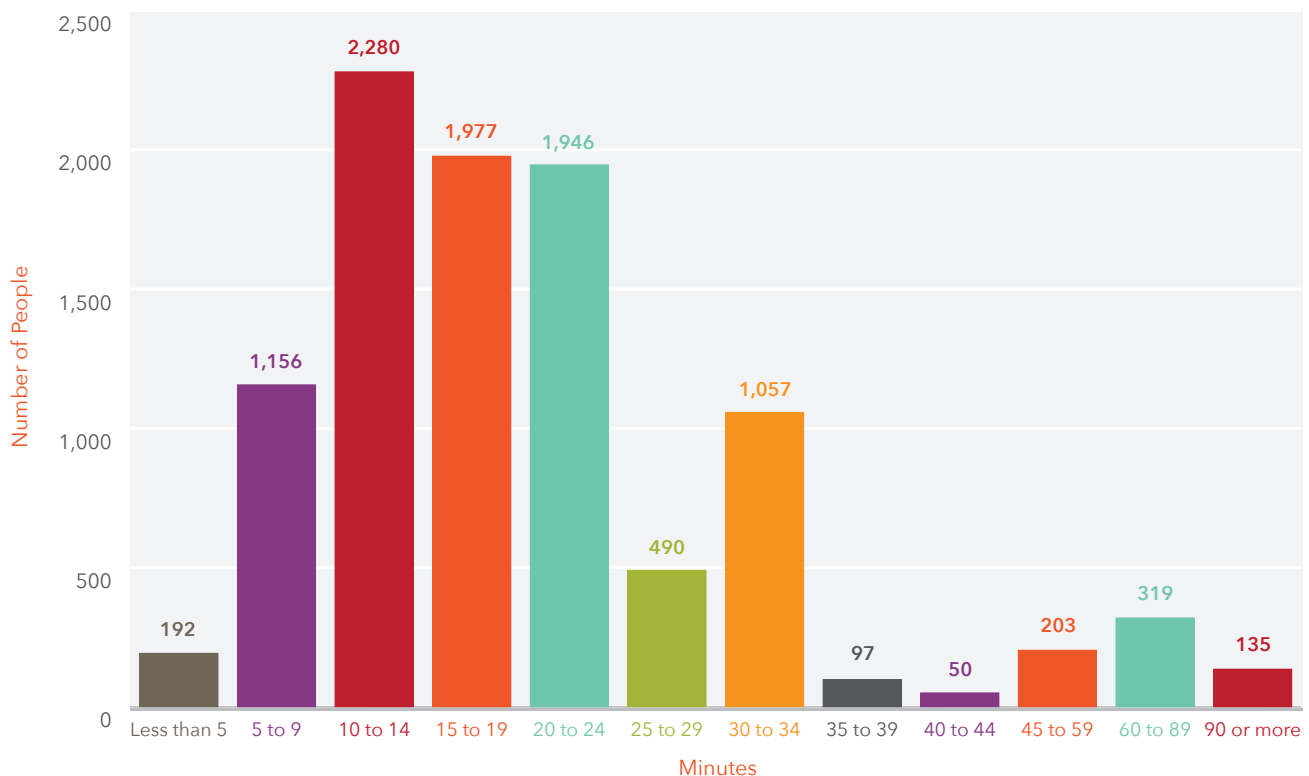
Transportation

There is limited transportation data disaggregated by race for Polk County. This report relies, instead, on limited correlations to understand how Black Polk County accesses and experiences transportation. If analysis of the entire Des Moines Metro Area was included, these correlations would be much stronger. Even so, the economic challenges to owning and maintaining a car are evident in these correlations.

Indicators

- * Polk County Census tracts with a higher African American population will likely have a greater number of households without a car.
- * Polk County Census tracts with a higher African American population will likely have a greater number of individuals commuting to work on foot or by public transit.
- * Polk County Census tracts with a higher African American population will likely have lower pavement quality.
- * Polk County Census tracts with a higher African American population will likely have a greater number of crashes.

African American Commute Time (Polk County)



Community Experiences

Transportation was cited as one of the biggest barriers individuals and families face to gaining greater access to employment opportunities and community resources. The lack of adequate public transportation promotes a sense of isolation, limiting how Black Polk County interacts with the rest of the community. For example, when youth cannot access extracurricular activities and community events due to transportation, the divisions within the wider community expand as only those with economic means are able to travel to and from events.



"Access to transportation is a barrier for Black youth who want to do internships or attend activities. They can't be a part of anything because they don't have transportation or they have to rely on a parent who might need that car to go to their job. For them to use the money they earn just to get to and from work - it doesn't make sense."

"We just recently did an event for youth, and we did it at the Grubb YMCA because we knew kids from the neighborhood could walk there. There are a lot of activities for middle and high school students, but lots of low-income and Black kids simply miss out because they can't get there. It creates a divide in who gets to participate and who stays home - or gets in trouble."

"On the south side of Des Moines, past the Hy-Vee, there are a lot of apartments. Some are Section 8 and some are not. The bus only comes back there at 3:00 a.m., 6:45 a.m., and 7:20 a.m. You have all these people in the apartments who need jobs, but they might need to work the night shift or second shift. There are no buses coming at those times. You could walk to a bus stop, but not all the roads have sidewalks. A whole neighborhood seems trapped."

"There are some Section 8 housing units on 63rd Street. There is no bus and no sidewalk to travel the mile to the nearest place to buy groceries, which is a QuikTrip. You know how expensive milk and stuff is at QuikTrip, but that's all there is. They don't have a choice. They'll continue to be in poverty because the system isn't working for them."

"My house and my job are straight down East 14th from each other, but there's no bus that I can take to work to earn my money. But if I want to go to Jordan Creek or any of the malls, there are 10 different buses I can take to spend my money."



Parents in Black Polk County face similar barriers to accessing affordable child care as the wider community. However, with income disparities impacting more African Americans, the ability to pay for child care presents a greater obstacle to Black Polk County’s economic stability and well-being. The Child Care Assistance program, in which low-income working parents receive a public subsidy for child care expenses, can help to fill this gap. However, income thresholds in Child Care Assistance do not allow parents the opportunity to incrementally increase their wages to work toward self-sufficiency. As a parent’s earnings increase, even a small increase in pay can cause them to lose eligibility for child care subsidies even though they are not yet self-sufficient. So, although parents may be working and earning more, the cost for child care may cripple their ability to move towards financial stability. This is called the Cliff Effect. It results in many parents refusing pay increases, forcing them to rely on public assistance and limiting their ability to be economically self-sufficient, let alone build economic stability and wealth.

Indicators

- * A single mother with one child who works full time is eligible for as much as \$5,245 per year in Child Care Assistance if her wages reach as high as \$11.10 per hour. But if she earns just a nickel an hour more, she would lose her eligibility altogether.
- * A working couple with two children would lose their child care subsidy when each parents earn as little as \$8.50 per hour working full time. The Child Care Assistance they would lose would cost them nearly \$9,000 annually.
- * In July 2016, over 1,200 African American children received child care services paid for by the Child Care Assistance program.
- * For African immigrants and refugees, language barriers, mistrust of non-family members, and other cultural differences make securing child care a special challenge.

Child Care Assistance Eligibility Single Mother with One Child

	Hourly Wage	Assistance Provided
Equal or less than	\$11.10	\$5,245
More than	\$11.10	\$0

Community Experiences

Frustration is the norm for parents in Black Polk County who seek affordable quality child care. Besides the expense, barriers including poor quality, lack of diversity, and limited hours reduce the ability of Black parents to maintain employment, often with negative economic impact on families. Without the support of extended family, many parents could not survive.



“Over the summer, my son has his daughter. Because of hours he works, there’s no day care available. I know women who work the third shift and they have no child care. It’s a big problem if you work the second or third shift.”

“When they get to the point where they can finally get off assistance, they’re responsible for paying for food and full child care. I know people who’ve quit their good jobs to get back on assistance because they just can’t get ahead.”

“Child care is so expensive. I know a friend who had to move back in with her parents. Child care was not an option; otherwise she couldn’t feed her kids.”



"I have six kids. I wanted to raise my children and give them my foundation, not society's foundation. Between that and the cost, I just didn't feel like it was worth it. There were times, if my mother was able to, I would ask her to watch them. I did home child care for a while so I could be home. Once the youngest was school aged, I did go back to work."

"There are so many who don't have the choice to stay home. Day care is expensive, and if you find a good day care, it's even more. I was blessed that my mother was here. It's hard finding a job where your entire check isn't going to just day care."

"At one day care, it was very diverse, but the quality wasn't there. They forgot one child outside in the dead of winter. I mean, they didn't even notice. I felt guilty because of all of the other kids stuck there, but in the end, I made the change. I had to beg the most expensive day care because I was desperate. I have the privilege and the ability. I have the time to call around and beg, and the money. But the parents who don't have that, they don't have the choice and are relying on child care that's not safe. So you can't have both diversity and quality. Not in Iowa you can't."

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Section 3: Analysis of Racial Disparity in Black Polk County

A comprehensive analysis of the federal, state, and local policies and practices at play in facilitating persistent racial disparities and their related impact upon the economic well-being of Black Polk County is beyond the scope and capacity of this - and perhaps any - single report. The historical dimensions alone are significant and complex. However, this analysis of racial disparity in four key areas of Black Polk County makes a modest attempt to illuminate significant aspects of the systemic, structural, and dynamic nature of racial disparities as they impact the economic well-being, and otherwise, of Black Polk County. By developing an understanding of the constructs that have built and maintained racial disparities in Polk County, community leaders and members can begin to prioritize the lives of Black Polk County with intentional policy and practice improvements.

The following four areas are addressed:



Education



Public Policy
Leadership &
Engagement



Justice
Systems



Health &
Healthcare

Student Population

Polk County enrolls a greater percentage of Black students than the state as a whole. In the 2015-2016 school year, 7,927 Black students were enrolled in Polk County public schools, representing 10 percent of the total Polk County PK-12 student enrollment; the statewide number is 6 percent. In the Des Moines Independent School District the proportion is even higher; Black students represent 18 percent of the district's PK-12 student enrollment and account for 78 percent of all Black students in Polk County. This number has continued to trend down as African Americans and families of African descent have moved into Des Moines suburbs.

In 2000, Des Moines Independent School District Black student enrollment represented 89 percent of total Black Polk County PK-12 student enrollment. The following table ranks all Polk County public school districts according to percentage Black student PK-12 enrollment and the percentage change in Black PK-12 enrollment since 2000.

Rank	2015-2016 Black Student Enrollment as a Percentage of Total Student District Enrollment	Percentage Change in Black Student Enrollment 2000-2001 to 2015-2016
1	18.3% Des Moines Independent School District	+250% Southeast Polk Community School District
2	7.2% West Des Moines Community School District	+168% Johnston Community School District
3	6.4% Urbandale Community School District	+167% Bondurant-Farrar Community School District
4	5.1% Johnston Community School District	+167% Urbandale Community School District
5	3.5% Southeast Polk Community School District	+132% West Des Moines Community School District
6	1.9% Ankeny Community School District	+58% Ankeny Community School District
7	1.0% Saydel Community School District	+24% Des Moines Independent School District
8	0.8% Bondurant-Farrar Community School District	-23% Saydel Community School District
9	0.2% North Polk Community School District	-67% North Polk Community School District

Polk County Public School Districts: Ankeny Community School District, Bondurant-Farrar Community School District, Des Moines Independent School District, Johnston Community School District, North Polk Community School District, Saydel Community School District, Southeast Polk Community School District, Urbandale Community School District, and West Des Moines Community School District

Black Student Enrollment in Polk County Public School Districts 2000-2015

Iowa Department of Education

Each row of the chart below shows the public school enrollment in 2000-2001 and 2015-2016 for the school districts in Polk County. It also shows the percentage of Black student enrollment in each district.

Finally, the chart shows the percentage that Black students in each district represents of the total Black student enrollment in Polk County.

District	2000-2001			2015-2016			% Change in Black Enrollment 2000-2015
	Total Enrollment PK-12	% of District Enrollment - Black	% of Total Polk County Black Enrollment	Total Enrollment PK-12	% of District Enrollment - Black	% of Total Polk County Black Enrollment	
Ankeny	5,698	1.2	1.3	11,072	1.9	2.6	58
Bondurant-Farrar	935	0.3	0.1	1,981	0.8	0.2	167
Des Moines	32,252	14.7	89.3	33,565	18.3	77.5	24
Johnston	4,173	1.9	1.5	7,044	5.1	4.5	168
North Polk	927	0.6	0.1	1,621	0.2	0.0	-67
Saydel	1,486	1.3	0.4	1,331	1.0	0.2	-23
Southeast Polk	4,516	1	0.8	7,091	3.5	3.1	250
Urbandale	3,498	2.4	1.6	4,196	6.4	3.4	167
West Des Moines	8,594	3.1	5.0	9,270	7.2	8.4	132
Polk County	62,079	8.6	100.0	77,171	10.3	100.0	20

The term “Black” in State of Iowa data is inclusive of African American students and students of African descent. The State of Iowa also collects enrollment data for immigrants as well. However, the term “immigrant” is inclusive of students of African descent, and thus is reflective of a broader diversity of ethnicities and nationalities. Among all Polk County school districts, Des Moines Independent School District enrolls the largest percentage of immigrant students at 4 percent of total 2015-2016 district K-12 student enrollment. This is a 20 percent increase in immigrant enrollment since the 2005-2006 school year.

Immigrant Enrollment in Polk County Public School Districts 2005-2015

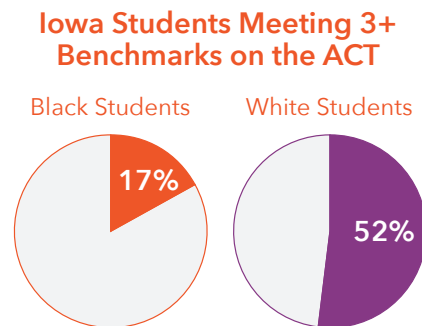
Iowa Department of Education

District	2005-2006			2015-2016			% Change in Immigrant Enrollment 2005-2015
	K-12 Enrollment	Total K-12 Immigrants	% Immigrant	K-12 Enrollment	Total K-12 Immigrants	% Immigrant	
Ankeny	6,961	72	1.0%	10,605	3	0.0%	-100
Bondurant-Farrar	1,113	0	0.0%	1,888	0	0.0%	0
Des Moines	31,022	1,080	3.5%	31,609	1,327	4.2%	20
Johnston	5,126	14	0.3%	6,747	1	0.0%	-100
North Polk	1,031	0	0.0%	1,510	0	0.0%	0
Saydel	1,403	1	0.1%	1,277	0	0.0%	-100
Southeast Polk	5,201	10	0.2%	6,741	19	0.3%	50
Urbandale	3,352	60	1.8%	3,949	40	1.0%	-44
West Des Moines	8,544	147	1.7%	8,804	27	0.3%	-82
Polk County	63,753	1,384	2.2%	73,130	1,417	1.9%	-14

Academic Performance & Attainment

Across the state of Iowa, Black students underperform White students on academic assessments. In 2015, Black 4th grade students had an average reading score 32 points lower than that of White students. This performance gap was not significantly different from that in 1998 (31 points). This performance gap continues through 12th grade.

Statewide, only 17 percent of Black students taking the ACT, a primary assessment of college readiness and one of two primary college entrance exams accepted by post-secondary institutions, met three or more benchmarks, or indicators of college readiness, compared to 52 percent of White students.



In 2005 12.9 percent of Black Polk County residents had less than a high school education. By 2014, this number had risen to 17.1 percent.

Black or African American vs. Total Polk County Educational Attainment

U.S. Census Bureau, 2005 and 2014 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates

	2005		2014	
	Total (%)	Black (%)	Total (%)	Black (%)
Less than 9th Grade	2.4	1.6	2.8	5.7
9th to 12th Grade, no diploma	6.6	11.3	5.3	11.4
High School Graduate (includes equivalency)	29.1	27.7	25.7	30.5
Some college, no degree	21.5	35	20	26.6
Associate's Degree	8.2	5.3	10.6	7.1
Bachelor's Degree	22.9	11.3	24	14.9
Graduate or Professional Degree	9.3	7.7	11.6	3.5

Compared to the general population of Polk County, Black residents are losing ground in educational attainment, and at an alarming rate. In contrast to the total population of Polk County, the proportion of Black Polk County residents with less than a high school degree or equivalency has grown between 2005 and 2014. Black Polk County residents have significantly lower levels of post-secondary degree attainment than the general population. Since 2005, the total population of Polk County has improved the proportion of the population receiving a post-secondary degree by 14 percent. However, Black residents were not attaining post-secondary degrees in 2014 significantly more than in 2005; the proportion of Black Polk County residents receiving a post-secondary degree only rose by 5 percent.

Special Education

A significant issue facing the state of Iowa is the disproportionality of African American students in special education and related services. According to the Iowa Department of Education, disproportionality “refers to the percent probability, or likelihood, of disproportionate representation of racial and/or ethnic groups in special education and related services that is the result of inappropriate identification.” (The Annual Condition of Education Report 2015) In the 2013-2014 school year, African American students had a 74 percent probability of being disproportionately represented in special education compared to all students. Although down from a 113 percent probability in 2011-2012, African Americans are still significantly more likely to be placed in special education or receive related services than their peers.

74%
Probability of African American students being placed in special education compared to all students

Dropout Rates

The two highest margins of African American dropouts to overall dropouts among Polk County public school districts belong to Southeast Polk (2.8 percent African American, 0.7 percent overall) and West Des Moines (3.5 percent African American, 1.8 percent overall).

Dropout Rate for African Americans
West Des Moines
2x
higher than overall rate

Considering the significant academic achievement gaps, it may not be surprising that African Americans would drop out at a higher frequency than their peers at the same schools. Data reported to the Iowa Department of Education reveal narrow margins between African American dropouts and overall dropouts in some Polk County public schools. For some suburban schools, the margin is significant. For Des Moines Independent School District, the district enrolling the largest number of Black students in the county and the state, there is only a .5 percent difference in dropouts for African American students compared to dropouts across the district (4.8 percent to 4.3 percent dropouts overall). However, Des Moines Independent School District has the distinction of the highest dropout rate for African Americans in the county. Compared statewide, several districts beat that marginal rate, some by as much as 15 percent.

Trends for educational attainment show very different outcomes for Black or African American individuals based on gender lines: (All data U.S. Census)

Percent of Black Males in Polk County with a High School Education



Percent of Black Females in Polk County with a Post-secondary Degree



- ★ In 2014, Black males were less likely to have a high school education than they were in 2005. 4.5 percent of Black or African American males in Polk County in 2005 had less than a high school education, 9 percent of Black or African American males in Polk County had less than a high school education in 2014.
- ★ In 2014, Black females were more likely to have a post-secondary degree than they were in 2005: 11 percent of Black or African American women in Polk County in 2005, 16 percent of Black or African American women in Polk County in 2014.

Overall versus African American Dropout Rates – Polk County Public School Districts

Iowa Department of Education, 2014-2015

District	Overall			African American		
	Dropouts	Enrollments	Rate	Dropouts	Enrollments	Rate
Ankeny	32	3,944	0.81	0	56	0
Bondurant-Farrar	4	673	0.59	****	****	****
Des Moines Independent	579	13,361	4.33	116	2,433	4.77
Johnston	4	2,898	0.14	1	108	0.93
North Polk	1	585	0.17	****	****	****
Saydel	15	665	2.26	****	****	****
Southeast Polk	21	3,006	0.7	2	72	2.78
Urbandale	6	1,836	0.33	0	133	0
West Des Moines	74	4,204	1.76	9	259	3.47

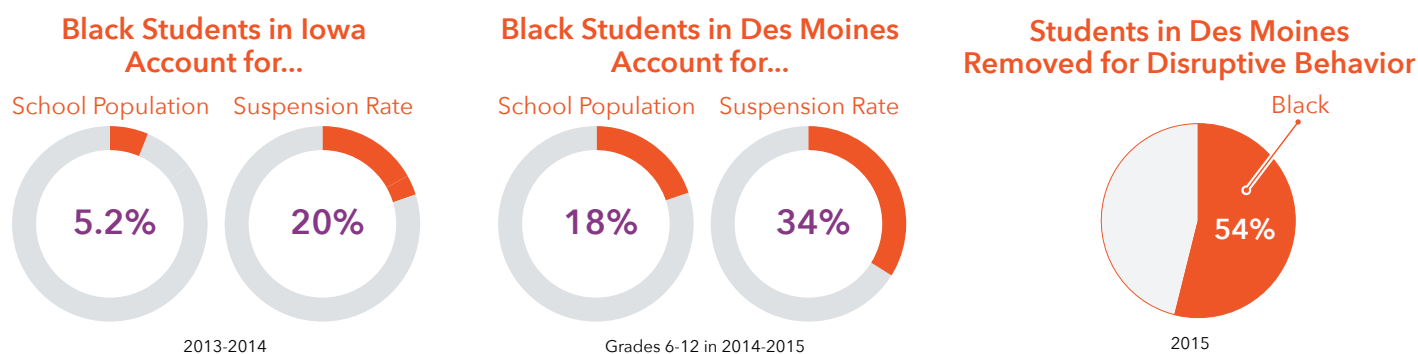
**** Information not available

School Discipline

In Polk County, the majority of public high schools and some public middle schools have school resource officers (SRO) who are a part of the local police department and who work in the school during the day. These SROs are present to create and maintain a safe learning environment in the school, which also means being quickly available if there are disruptions or law violations at the school. In theory, they work to build relationships with individuals and groups within the schools they serve with an aim of preventing adverse behaviors. Although SROs are not in the school buildings as disciplinarians, they are often called into classrooms and play a role in the disciplinary decisions when a student does not follow school code. SROs are brought into situations where there are suspected violations of the law to help make the determination whether the issue can best be handled through school disciplinary action or whether it rises to the level of referral to the juvenile justice system. This includes a variety of incidents from bringing drugs or weapons to school, to fighting, to simply being disobedient or disrespectful.

To critics, however, the presence of police in public schools contributes to the school-to-prison pipeline, the idea that punitive school discipline practices, including suspensions, expulsions, and school-based arrests, drive students out of education and into the juvenile justice system. Critics' concerns ring true locally as Black students are disproportionately disciplined. To be clear, disruptive behavior resulting in a suspension is not criminal behavior, but the high level of disproportionate minority contact with school leadership and/or SROs is significant and has broad and lasting impact.

"Evidence indicates that police in schools exacerbate these issues. Just the presence of a police officer in a school significantly increases the likelihood that a student will be referred to outside law enforcement for even minor misbehavior, according to research." (Nance, 2015) Advocacy groups, including the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, recommend against policing in public schools, citing its disproportionate negative impact on African American students. Instead, they recommend that schools employ peacekeepers or restorative justice coordinators rather than SROs. Via trained staff, the school culture should promote positive approaches to discipline, de-escalation techniques, and conflict resolution.



- * Black students had a statewide suspension rate of about 20 percent in 2013-2014, although they only made up 5.2 percent Iowa's total student enrollment.
- * In the 2014-2015 school year Black students made up 18 percent of students enrolled in Des Moines Public Schools, but accounted for 34 percent of the suspensions. The most common suspension reason for Black students was disruptive behavior.
- * Black students accounted for 54 percent of removals for disruptive behavior during 2015 in Des Moines Public Schools.
- * Black students were the only group to have an increase of removals for violent behavior without injury in Des Moines Public Schools (from 2011-2015, a 17 percent rise).

Having an SRO involved in a school discipline issue does not guarantee that the juvenile justice system will be involved. However, it has increased juvenile justice system involvement in school-based cases. According to some who work in the system, up to half of the cases which stem from a school incident should have been handled within the school's disciplinary system. Reasons offered by teachers and officers for this shift to more SRO involvement include increased class size and limited time or capacity for teachers to immediately address issues due to increased instructional demands.

There is some discretion on how school incidents are handled, and decisions on handling a case typically involve school officials and SROs together. Referrals to juvenile court can only occur when laws are broken. Handling a case in juvenile court creates unnecessary fees and gives the child involved a criminal record. It can also have extreme negative effects on those students who are eighteen and become a part of the adult criminal justice system due to a minor school incident. Criminal records often act as barriers to employment, leaving youth with lifelong impacts for minor incidents.

Even if a student does not end up in the justice system due to the incident, there can still be harmful effects of a resource officer pulling a student out of class or arresting them in school. This could be mortifying and stigmatizing for a student. The student is now subject to feeling as though they are criminals in the eyes of their peers and teachers. This can be traumatizing for a student and ultimately affect their academic performance, mindset towards school and learning, and continuation in school.

Education Correlations to Lifetime Earnings

Education is one of the most effective social justice strategies as evidenced by its strong correlation with several important outcomes impacting an individual’s quality of life: crime and incarceration, lifetime earnings and employment, and health.

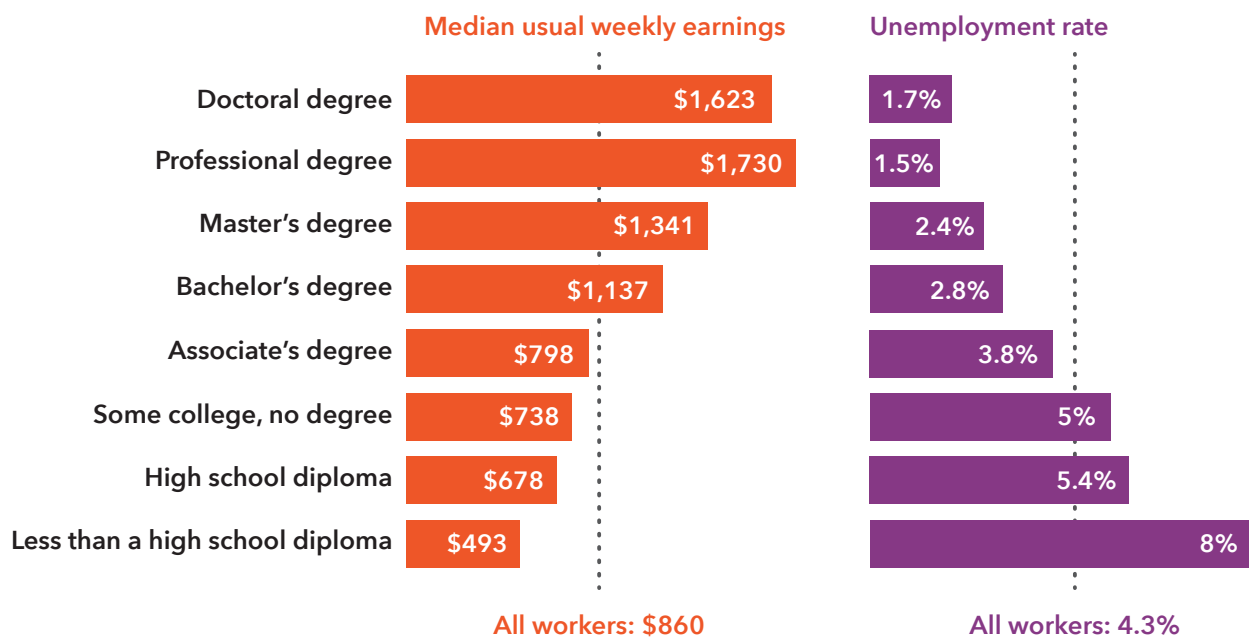
In their study titled, “The Effect of Education on Crime: Evidence from Prison Inmates, Arrests, and Self-Reports” (2003), Lochner and Moretti state several findings that highlight the critical connection between education and the likelihood of incarceration. Schooling significantly reduces the probability of incarceration, and they suggest that the impacts are greater for African Americans than for Whites. One extra year of schooling results in a 0.10 percentage point reduction in the probability of incarceration for Whites, and a 0.37 percentage point reduction for African Americans.

Lochner and Moretti also assess the opportunity cost of crime. First, schooling increases individual wage rates, thereby increasing the opportunity costs of crime. Second, punishment is likely to be costlier for the more educated. Incarceration implies time out of the labor market, which is costlier for high earners. Furthermore, previous studies estimate that the stigma of a criminal conviction is larger for white collar workers than blue collar workers, which implies that the negative effect of a conviction on earnings extends beyond the time spent in prison for more educated workers.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics further substantiates the positive correlation between education and lifetime earnings and employment. Data show that with each increase in educational attainment, the higher the median weekly earnings and probably of employment.

In total, these findings underscore the importance of attaining, at minimum, a high school education.

Earnings and Unemployment Rates by Educational Attainment, 2015



Note: Data are for persons age 25 and over. Earnings are for full-time wage and salary workers.
 Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey

Local Education Initiatives

Des Moines Public Schools and United Way of Central Iowa are two active leaders in education equity in Polk County. United Way of Central Iowa focuses on this issue in its OpportUNITY Plan, calling for greater investments in early childhood, afterschool and summer programming, and family supports that are connected to improved educational outcomes for youth.

Des Moines Public Schools are undertaking several initiatives to ensure equity in education. Most importantly, there is focus on cultural proficiency throughout all levels of the school district, from teachers working directly with students to central office administrators. This includes ensuring all professional development across the district is culturally proficient and implementing practices through a culturally-responsive lens. The Des Moines Public School District has several other initiatives or projects that seek to support minority students, including the Dream to Teach program (which strives to recruit minority teachers), Urban Leadership Program, Brother 2 Brother mentorship program, and Our Brother's Keeper-modeled programming.



Racial Disparity in Engagement in Public Life & Leadership

[* Click here view all report sections](#)

Our communities, states, and nation are reflections of the public policy that guides them. Likewise, supporting the collective health and well-being of the people is the foundational reason for public policy in our democracy. A vast array of public policies affect everyone's day-to-day lives. And, while the goal of public policy is to benefit society as a whole on behalf of the people within the policies' jurisdiction, if there is little representation of minority groups at any stage of public policy development, it can lead to public policy benefitting the majority at the expense of the minority.

African Americans need to both be considered a part of the larger community and to literally be seen at the tables where public policy is shaped or made. To see how African Americans participate in public policy and policy leadership in Polk County, this section will provide information about three critical elements: Black people in elected positions, advocacy by and on behalf of issues impacting African Americans and Africans, and participation in our election processes.

Lack of Representation in Elected and Appointed Positions

When African Americans and people of African descent are elected to represent constituents in policy-making bodies, those typically under-represented constituents gain a voice in the policies that impact them. Though many non-Black elected officials make an effort to represent minority and majority constituents, it is important for people of color to have someone represent them who comes from their community, who looks like them, and who understands their issues from lived experience.

Data is stark in demonstrating the lack of representation of people of color in elected positions representing Iowa and Polk County and how long it has taken for African Americans to be accepted into these leadership positions.

- * Iowa has never nominated an African American candidate for either U.S. Senate or U.S. House of Representatives.
- * Iowa has never nominated an African American candidate for Governor.
- * Almo Hawkins was a candidate for Lt. Governor on the Jim Ross Lightfoot ticket in 1998, the only African American ever nominated for that position.
- * The first two African Americans were elected to the Iowa House of Representatives in 1964: Willie Glanton of Des Moines and James Jackson of Waterloo.
- * The first African American elected to the Iowa Senate was Thomas Mann, Jr. of Des Moines in 1982.

In 2016, we see little change from the 1960s and before in the balance in representation in elected positions. In the Iowa General Assembly, Polk County Board of Supervisors, city councils throughout Polk County, and all school boards in the county there are only 7 African American elected officials. Five African Americans serve in the Iowa House of Representatives, two of whom are from Des Moines. The remaining 2 individuals serve in school board positions.

These numbers show a serious lack of representation of Black Polk County in state and local level government as well as in positions of power within small communities.

Number of African Americans in Elected Policy Positions in Polk County

	# African Americans Currently in Office
Iowa Senate Statewide - 50 members	0
Iowa House of Representatives Statewide - 100 members (includes Polk County)	5

	# African Americans Currently in Office
Iowa Senate Polk County	0
Iowa House of Representatives Polk County	2
Polk County Board of Supervisors - 5 members	0
Des Moines City Council * - 6 members + mayor	0
West Des Moines City Council * - 5 members + mayor	0
Ankeny City Council - 5 members + mayor	0
Urbandale City Council * - 5 members + mayor	0
Johnston City Council - 5 members + mayor	0
Clive City Council * - 5 members + mayor	0
Altoona City Council - 5 members + mayor	0
Norwalk City Council * - 5 members + mayor	0
Pleasant Hill City Council - 5 members + mayor	0
Grimes City Council * - 5 members + mayor	0
Windsor Heights City Council - 5 members + mayor	0
Carlisle City Council * - 5 members + mayor	0
Bondurant City Council - 5 members + mayor	0
Polk City City Council - 5 members + mayor	0
Mitchellville City Council * - 5 members + mayor	0
Granger City Council * - 5 members + mayor	0
Elkhart - 5 members + mayor	0

	# African Americans Currently in Office
Runnells - Unknown	-
Alleman - Unknown	-
Sheldahl * - Unknown	-
Des Moines Public Schools Board - 7 members	2
West Des Moines Community Schools Board - 7 members	0
Southeast Polk Community School Board - 7 members	0
Urbandale Community Schools Board - 7 members	0
Johnston Community Schools Board - 7 members	0
North Polk Community School Board - 5 members	0
Ankeny Community School Board - 7 members	0
Saydel Community School Board - 7 members	0
Bondurant-Farrar Community School Board - 5 members	0
Total Representation in Polk County	4

*Indicates city is in two or more counties

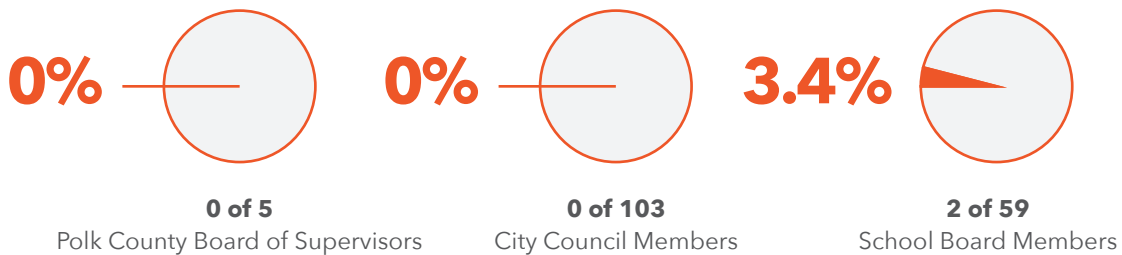
Public Leadership Positions

Iowa Senate and House of Representatives



5 out of 150 members of the Iowa General Assembly are Black and 2 represent Polk County.

Black Individuals in Elected Positions in Polk County



Why are there so few Black people in elected positions in Polk County? In some of the small towns, makeup of the population is certainly a factor, but other questions must also be raised. Why do so few Black individuals seek office, and what factors contribute to those decisions? What are the policy issues that cry for African American representation; is financial well-being one of them? How can communities and advocates support equitable representation that may bring stronger voices for equitable laws, regulations, ordinances, and practices?

There are African Americans represented on lesser-impact Boards and Commissions and appointed staff positions at all levels of government. There are also opportunities to volunteer for these positions. The vast majority of those positions are lower profile and carry a lower level of policy authority, if any. Even so, the argument has been made that the “real work” gets done at this level. In reality, although the work is very important, recommendations that come from these groups are frequently advisory. The elected bodies with the authority to implement policy change can accept the recommendations, move forward differently, or not act on an issue at all.

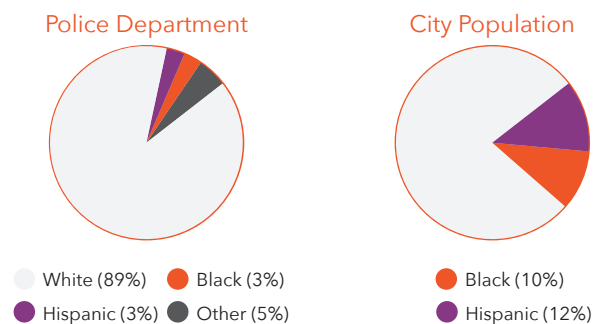
The City of Des Moines administers the Neighborhood Revitalization Program, a longstanding program that brings priority-setting to the neighborhood level and has had positive impacts for improving neighborhoods that participate. This program encourages neighborhoods to formally organize and develop public/private partnerships to take on neighborhood revitalization projects in the area. With the requisite levels of organizational structure, a neighborhood may be “recognized” by the City Council and County Board of Supervisors, leading to additional opportunities to undertake specific projects. The Neighborhood Revitalization Program manages the state and federal funds that make some of the projects possible. There are three stages to the growth and accomplishments of a neighborhood: recognition, designation, and charter status.

The City of Des Moines lists 52 neighborhoods. Of those, 22 have completed the required action planning. Sixteen of those have shown their success in achieving their goals and have moved to charter status. Neighborhoods in the urban core are among those who are established over time and have achieved charter status.

This effort and others that engage Black people in leadership to shape programs or projects to address issues at a neighborhood or community level are small steps to bring a degree of policy influence to Black Polk County. That said, the lack of African Americans elected to leadership in higher profile positions perpetuates the status quo lack of elected representation.

The lack of Black people employed as staff in state and local public organizations across Polk County and its cities is also noticeable. This means, as they implement public policy, those organizations do not equitably represent the diverse populations living within their jurisdictions. Our public schools, health care settings, and public safety agencies, among others, struggle toward achieving minority representation at all employment levels. For example, the Des Moines Police Department in 2014 had a racial makeup of 89 percent White, 3 percent Black, 3 percent Hispanic, and 3 percent Asian. Yet the city makeup was 12 percent Hispanic and 10 percent Black according to Sgt. Halifax, the department’s public information officer.

Racial Makeup of Des Moines



Public Policy and Political Advocacy in Black Polk County

The United States is a representative democracy that allows, encourages, and expects that individuals and groups will advocate for public policy that benefits them and addresses inequities. All have a right to bring their specific issues forward individually or organize in a unified effort to educate, inform, and shape public policy. The impact of public policy on African Americans and Africans must be considered as it effects financial well-being and security.

In Polk County, the African American community certainly shares concerns with the broader community about financial security and the many factors that impact economic well-being for individuals and families. The unique experiences and impacts on people of color, and African Americans specifically, are not often detailed in public policy discussions or represented in public policy.

During the 2016 election cycle, a number of issues emerged that brought a political spotlight closer to African Americans than in the past. It remains to be seen whether this will be a catalyst or a diversion to progress toward financial security for Black people in Polk County. The issues of crime and unarmed African Americans being killed by police have reverberated across the nation. Political rhetoric spills beyond the debates over Black Lives Matter to racism in general, discrimination against Muslims, and painting people of color as “illegal” at best and “terrorist” at worst. It is within this 2016 political reality that African Americans seek to stimulate constructive change that eliminates the economic divide between the greater community and the African American community.

Iowa invests a great deal to position itself to have a meaningful voice in the political process through the first-in-the-nation Iowa Caucuses every presidential election cycle. During each four-year cycle since 1984, Mary Campos and Wayne Ford have collaborated to give voice to Latinos and African Americans on issues important to them though a national forum. The **Iowa Brown and Black Forum** forced political attention to people of color in one of the first efforts to elevate their voices to the national stage. In January 2016, the Brown and Black Forum was held with the Democratic candidates and again brought national media focus on the policy issues that impact people of color.

In Polk County, civil political discourse is expected to contribute to understanding and advocacy on issues. After all, good politics makes good policy, or that is the way our system is set up to work. Parties and issue-based organizations are central to educating and activating African Americans and other voters in Polk County.

For African Americans who wish to become active politically, Iowa’s and Polk County’s major political parties present opportunities for individuals to become involved with the political process and promote voting in elections. The political parties seek to reach African Americans with their messages and engage them in local efforts. Both major party websites offer information on the party platform and volunteer opportunities for those who have time and transportation available.

During the political off-seasons in Iowa, attention can turn more heavily to issue-based advocacy, recognizing that effective advocacy must be designed with an understanding of the political landscape. Advocacy efforts for public policy that aligns with issues related to African American and African financial security is seen in an array of organizations and initiatives, with some focusing on specific issues and some more generally addressing African Americans and Africans. Still others that advocate do so on a broader basis, with their efforts benefitting African Americans and Africans as well as others.

Iowa-based groups, national groups with an Iowa presence, and other organizations are among the many that provide policy information and advocacy around issues that specifically impact African Americans and other minorities. It would not be possible to include an exhaustive list of these efforts, but examples of groups that address the economic well-being of Black Polk County are noted here. Individuals who want to shape public

policy and bring greater attention to certain issues might become involved with forming the policy agenda and advocating as part of one or more of these organizations.

The **NAACP - Des Moines Branch** aligns its legislative priorities with those of the National NAACP. Policy priorities include eliminating racial profiling, increasing fair employment opportunities, eliminating criminal justice disparities, seeking fair drug sentencing and treatment policies, and addressing the economic, education, and health gaps. It is clear that those priorities directly impact the financial security of African Americans and people of African descent in Polk County.

The Interfaith Alliance of Iowa works to ensure civil rights for all people as well as celebrates and protects the richness of Iowans' religious expression. The organization takes an education and advocacy approach to policy change, engaging stakeholders to support equality related to civil rights, education, faith, and other issues. Interfaith Alliance of Iowa is an affiliate of the national Interfaith Alliance. A separate organization, Iowa Interfaith Alliance Action Fund, takes strong advocacy positions and has an active presence at the Iowa Capitol on issues impacting African Americans including employment barriers for ex-offenders, women's health care, and voting rights.

ACLU of Iowa is a statewide organization whose work focuses on criminal justice reform, racial justice, voting rights, freedoms of speech and religion, and more. The organization, organized 75 years ago and affiliated with the national American Civil Liberties Union, is active in informing Iowans of the laws that impact them and promoting active engagement in the voting process. Released in October 2016, *Every 25 Seconds: The Human Toll of Criminalizing Drug Use in the United States* is a 205-page joint report by Human Rights Watch and the American Civil Liberties Union that documents the devastating harms caused by enforcement of drug possession laws.

With a mission to end discrimination in the state, the **Iowa Civil Rights Commission** is a neutral, fact-finding law enforcement agency. The seven-member Commission is appointed by the Governor and undertakes education and training to the public. The Commission's primary duty is to enforce state and federal laws that prohibit discrimination in employment, public accommodations, housing, education, and credit by investigating and litigating civil rights complaints. Though not directly involved in the political and elections system, the Commission rules on public policy issues.

Additional Iowa organizations with education and/or advocacy initiatives that seek to shape policies that - directly or indirectly - improve the economic well-being of African Americans and Africans include:

- ★ African American Leadership Forum
- ★ AMOS
- ★ Black civic and service organizations: The Links, Inc; Sigma Pi Phi
- ★ Child and Family Policy Center
- ★ Des Moines Civil and Human Rights Department
- ★ Every Child Matters Iowa
- ★ Faith-based organizations
- ★ Historically Black sororities and fraternities
- ★ Iowa Coalition for Juvenile Justice
- ★ Iowa Commission on the Status of African Americans
- ★ Iowa-Nebraska NAACP
- ★ Iowa Policy Project
- ★ Justice Reform Consortium
- ★ National Bar Association

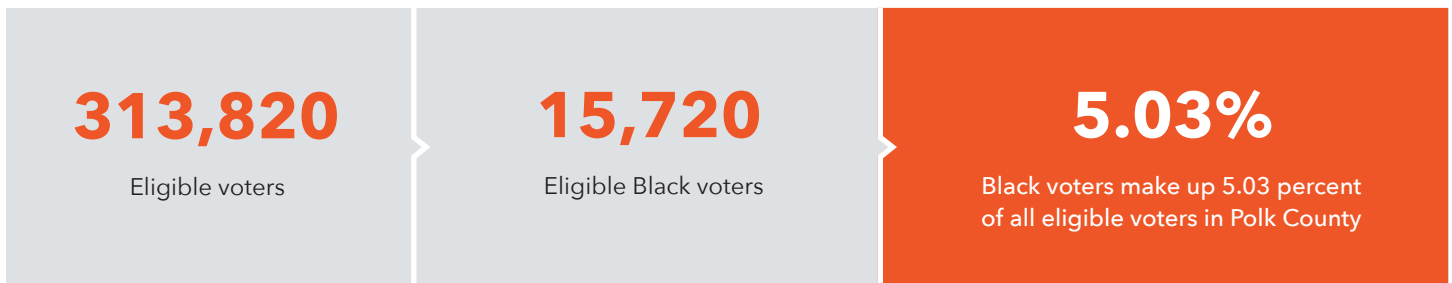
Participation in Election Processes in Black Polk County

Participation in elections processes by African Americans is the third critical element of public policy and policy leadership. African Americans express their public policy views through their votes, whether for candidates for office or on bond and other ballot measures. The question then arises whether they are proportionately represented in elections.

When people register to vote, they do not provide any information about race or ethnicity. To learn more about the voting habits of Blacks, a number of other factors are taken into consideration.

Of the U.S. Census Bureau’s estimated population of Polk County in 2015, 6.7 percent identified as Black or African American alone; in Des Moines the number was higher at 10.3 percent.

A person needs to be a U.S. citizen and at least 18 years old to be eligible to vote. The U.S. Census Bureau provides data by county on the citizen voting age population from the 2010-2014 American Community Survey. Polk County data show the following:

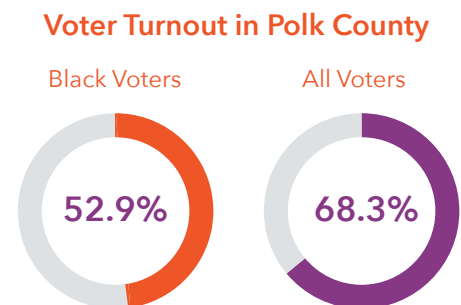


- ★ There are an estimated 313,820 people in Polk County who are U.S. citizens and 18 years of age or older.
- ★ There are an estimated 15,720 people in Polk County who identify as Black or African American alone, are U.S. citizens, and are 18 years of age or older.
- ★ Based on citizenship and age, Black or African American voters make up 5.03 percent of all eligible voters in Polk County.

Of course, eligibility to vote includes additional factors, such as felony status, that would impact the above estimates. Finally, being eligible to vote does not mean an individual has either registered to vote or cast a ballot in an election.

As noted at the outset, voter registration data does not include race or ethnicity using these estimates. This makes estimates of the number of Blacks who participate in elections much more difficult to determine. It is estimated by the national data analysis group Catalist that 8,312, or 52.88 percent, of Black or African American eligible voters in Polk County voted in elections.

A comparison can then be made with the total voter turnout in Polk County. Turnout rates for national elections in Polk County average 68.3 percent for the last four elections, from 2008 to 2014, according to the Iowa Secretary of State’s election statistics. This period covers two Presidential elections and two off-year elections. Turnout rates for the last two Presidential elections average 77.90 percent turnout in Polk County and 58.7 percent for the two off-year elections.



Using the Polk County figures for average turnout of 68.3 percent and the 52.88 percent Catalist figure for Black or African American voter turnout in Polk County, we see that turnout for Black or African Americans is 15.4 percent lower than the average turnout for Polk County voters.

This tells us that African Americans, for various reasons – and with the exception of voting for Barack Obama in the historic presidential election of 2008 – are not voting in the same proportions as the overall voting population in Polk County. With Polk County’s disproportionate arrests and sentencing of African Americans, felony voter disenfranchisement is possibly at play. Other factors that may be contributing to the disparity include political parties and advocacy groups not adequately targeting high-minority neighborhoods, an inability to get time off from work (especially if someone is working a low-wage job), lack of transportation to get to a polling place, mistrust of institutions, and possible previous negative experiences at polling places involving microaggressions or other forms of racism.

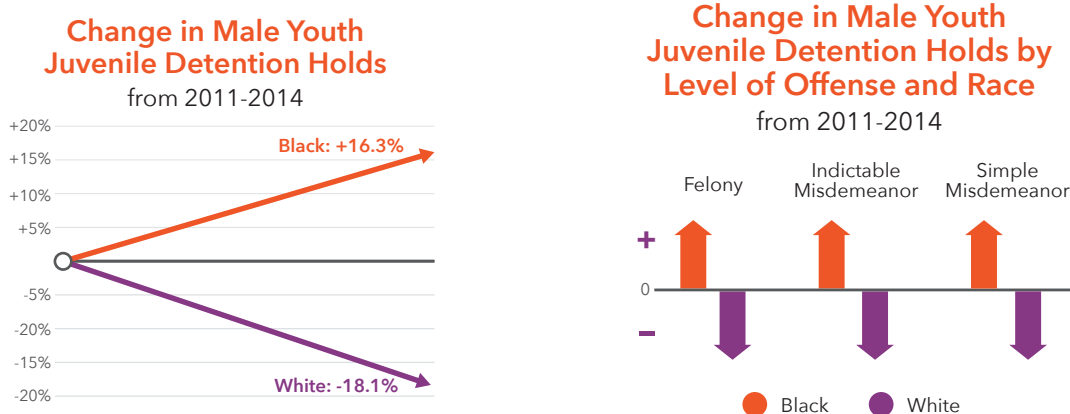
The rates and depth of contact with the justice systems for juvenile and adult Black individuals tell a story that consists of disparities along racial lines which have been occurring at a national and state level throughout American history. As the issue of racial equality is brought to the forefront once again, Americans must take a critical view of the systematic processes by which we continue to bring Black individuals into juvenile justice and adult criminal justice systems at significantly disproportional rates.

Disproportionality in the Juvenile Justice System

The juvenile justice system in the state of Iowa handles criminal cases involving minors age 17 and under. The findings show that within these juvenile cases statewide there is disproportionate contact between law enforcement and minority youth. This disproportionate contact leads to disproportionate arrest rates and charges for minority youth. The data shows that this is an issue that is getting progressively worse.

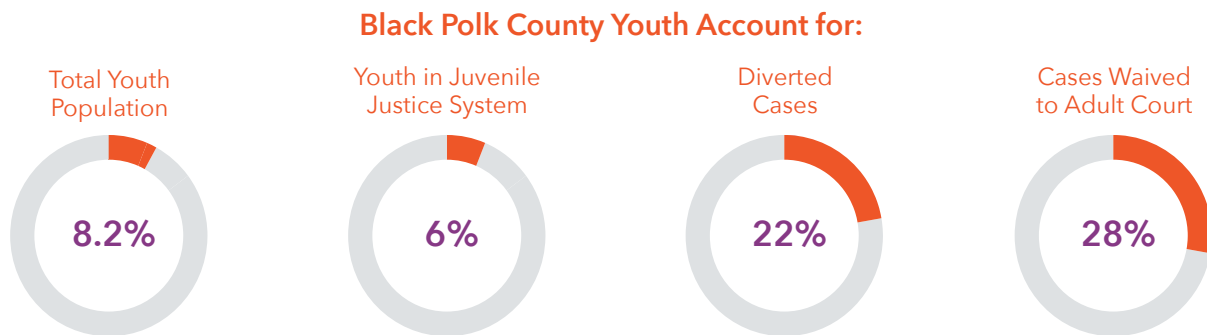
A young adult entering the juvenile justice system who is accused of a violent crime, or under certain other circumstances prescribed by law, may require being held in a safe and secure environment while decisions are made regarding disposition of the case or placement of the juvenile. These are juvenile detention facilities operated by counties with county and state funding.

When examining the numbers of juveniles who are held in a juvenile detention facility in Polk County for any length of time, the disproportionality is clear.



- * When comparing juvenile detention holds for Black youth female and males with female and male youth of White and Hispanic races throughout 2011-2014, the percent of Black youth holds for both genders increase while the holds for both genders of the other two races decreased.
- * This increase is the most significant for Black male youth who have an increased detention hold rate of 16.3 percent, while their White male youth counterparts had a detention hold decrease of 18.1 percent.
- * When the breakdown of the level of offenses that Black youth are being held for is shown, the percent of Black youth holds for both male and female in all three levels of offense (felony, indictable misdemeanor, and simple misdemeanor) have increased, with the exception of felony holds of Black female youth which have decreased by 26.7 percent from 2011-2014.
- * Comparably, the percentage of White male youth holds has decreased in all three offense levels.

- * The two offense levels that had significantly larger increases of holds for Black youth of both genders were for the two lowest levels of offenses, indictable misdemeanor and simple misdemeanors.
- * Black male youth have the longest average stay in a juvenile detention facility compared to all other races.
- * Black female youth are the only race and gender to have an increase in delinquency complaints from 2011-2014, and Black male youth had the smallest decrease of delinquency complaints of all other races of youth males during that time.
- * Black youth had the highest percentages of simple misdemeanors overall.



When a delinquency complaint is filed, there are several options for the next steps. One option is for the case to be diverted. This includes the case being handled by another agency, being dismissed, the youth ordered to treatment, or a number of other situations which make it so that the juvenile is not engaged in formal processing.

- * Black youth account for about 22 percent of diverted cases in 2014.

Another option, depending on the severity of the crime and the age of the juvenile charged, the juvenile court system has the ability to recommend that the juvenile be tried in adult court.

- * Black youth accounted for about 28 percent of those waived to adult court.

The statistics above are significant because they paint a picture of disproportionality within the juvenile justice system. Black youth only account for about 6 percent of the juvenile justice population, yet account for a significantly higher proportion of juveniles detained, charged, and sent to adult court. Although these records do not follow the juvenile into adulthood for the most part, being a part of the juvenile justice system can have long-term effects on the youth’s life and ability to make money.

Polk County Disproportionality at Each Decision Point in Juvenile Justice

For Polk County in calendar year 2015, the following table shows the relative rate of disproportionality for Black or African American juveniles as compared with White juveniles. For example, for cases diverted, for every 1 White juvenile with a diverted case, .91 Black juvenile cases are diverted. For cases involving secure detention, for every 1 White juvenile placed in secure detention, there are 2.15 Black juveniles placed in secure detention. In both examples, disproportionality is demonstrated.

Racial Disproportionality in the Juvenile Justice System

	White	Black or African-American	All Minorities
Juvenile Arrests	---	---	---
Refer to Juvenile Court	---	---	---
Cases Diverted	1.00	0.91	0.97
Cases Involving Secure Detention	1.00	2.15	1.94
Cases Petitioned	1.00	1.78	1.60
Cases Resulting in Delinquent Findings	1.00	0.97	1.06
Cases resulting in Probation Placement	1.00	1.63	1.68
Cases Resulting in Confinement in Secure Juvenile Correctional Facilities	1.00	0.95	0.85
Cases Transferred to Adult Court	1.00	0.72	0.75
Group meets 1% threshold?	Yes	Yes	

Key:

Bold font: Statistically significant results

Regular font: Results that are not statistically significant

--- Missing data for some element of calculation

Disproportionality in Waivers to Adult Court in Iowa

Under Iowa law, waiver to adult court means a hearing can be held to determine whether an individual 14 or over charged with a violent act should be tried in adult court. A youth age 16 or older charged with a forcible felony is automatically waived to adult court. Those tried in adult court are subject to the laws and processes of the adult court rather than the juvenile court, including the criminal record as public information.

★ During the period 2011-2014, 61 Iowa juveniles were admitted to adult prisons in Iowa. Of those 61, 40 were African American (60 percent).

Juveniles Admitted to Adult Prison in Iowa
2011-2014



40 of 61 Juveniles were African American

Impact of Costs to Juveniles and Families

The financial cost of being a part of the juvenile court system can be detrimental to a family's finances. Although the juvenile record will drop off once the youth is an adult, it can cause issues with employment as well as a time constraint from the many other obligations that a young person must fulfill. This means that when court and lawyer fees, along with restitution, must be paid, it becomes a financial burden to the juvenile's family. There is a \$2,000 limit on the amount that will have to be paid back per case. This amount of money could very well cause financial ruin to families who are barely making ends meet. Fortunately, there is a program through the juvenile justice system where young adults can perform community service for minimum wage to pay off their restitution. However, if transportation is a challenge for the individual or their family, this may not be a realistic solution to pay off the money owed. With disproportionate numbers of Black youth involved in Polk County's juvenile justice system, these costs disproportionately burden Black families in Polk County and Iowa.

Disproportionality in the Criminal Justice System

Although the juvenile justice system in Iowa is disproportionate in all aspects, burdening Black families at a disproportionate rate, the adult justice system in Iowa and Polk County is much bleaker. For a number of years, Iowa was the worst state in the country for disproportionate arrests of Black or African American individuals in comparison to Whites.

* In 2016, Iowa ranks third in the nation for disproportionate arrest rates of African Americans.

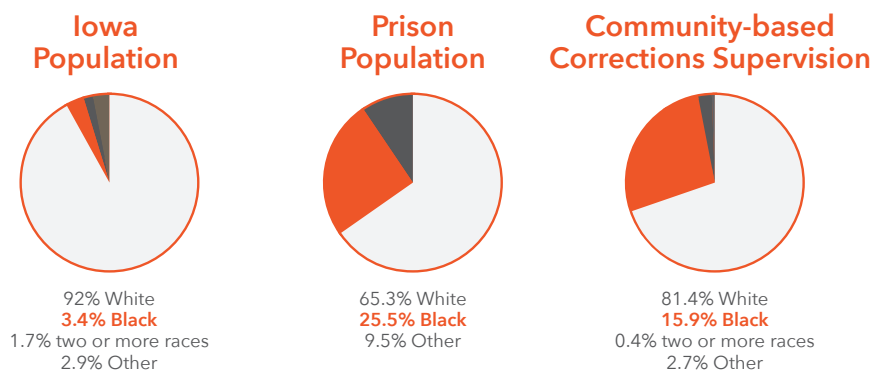
Comparative Incarceration Rates

In a January 26, 2016, memo from Holly Lyons, Fiscal Services Directory for the Legislative Services Agency (LSA), to members of the Iowa General Assembly, background information regarding minorities in the correctional system at the national and state level was provided in accordance with Iowa's requirements to identify the minority impact of state legislation. The memo included the following data that relates to African Americans in the federal and Iowa prison and parole systems. (Note that the figures below do not include those for Hispanic or Latino, American Indian or Alaska Natives, or Asian or Pacific Islander, which were included in the LSA memo.)

Applying the information provided by Legislative Services Bureau for the Minority Impact Statement, we can quickly illustrate the disproportional minority impacts in Iowa's prison population as well as those involved with community-based corrections.

Disproportionality in Iowa Prison Population and Community Corrections Supervision

	Iowa Population	Iowa Prison Population	Iowa Community Corrections Supervision
Total	3,100,000	8,188	28,991
White	92.00%	65.30%	81.40%
Black	3.40%	25.50%	15.90%
2 or more races	1.70%		0.40%



- * This chart shows that while 3.4 percent of Iowans are Black or African American, they disproportionately make up 25.5 percent of the Iowa prison population and 15.9 percent of the community-based corrections supervision (both probation and parole).
- * Likewise, the 92 percent of White Iowans are proportionally underrepresented in the prison and community-based corrections system at 65.3 percent and 81.4 percent respectively.
- * These data show that Black or African Americans in Iowa are much more likely than their White counterparts to be held in prison, and much less likely than their White counterparts to receive probation or parole services.

When looking at drug arrest rates in a recent Human Rights Watch/ACLU study, *Every 25 Seconds*, Iowa was shown to arrest African Americans on drug charges at a 7:1 rate to the White population, second only to Montana.

The Human Rights Watch/ACLU data above is consistent with data for Iowa incarceration in general, which shows Blacks or African Americans are incarcerated at a rate 7.5 times higher than their proportional representation in the general population.

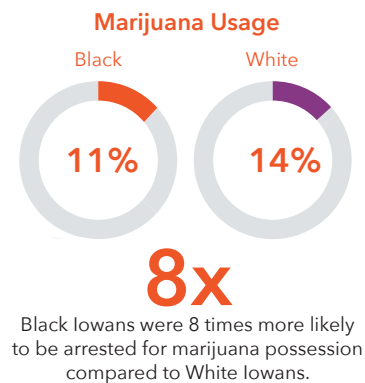
4TH	2,349 vs 211	1 in 17	11.1 X
HIGHEST RATE	Black vs White	Black males' chance of being incarcerated	The arrest rate of Black individuals is 11.1 times the arrest rate of White individuals
for Black male incarceration	Arrested for every 100,000 people		

In Iowa adult arrest rates, the disparities are also very prominent and clear.

- * Iowa is the fourth highest in the nation for Black male incarceration.
- * There are 2,349 Black individuals arrested out of every 100,000 Black people; for comparison there are only 211 White individuals arrested for every 100,000 White people living in Iowa.
- * In Iowa, a Black male has a 1 in 17 chance of being incarcerated.
- * The arrest rate of Black individuals is 11.1 times the arrest rate of White individuals, which places Iowa near two other Midwestern states that have extremely high disproportional arrest rates, Minnesota and Wisconsin.
- * In Polk County, 19.7 Black individuals per 1,000 were arrested, compared to 8.4 per 1,000 for the non-Black rate.
- * More than 17 percent of individuals involved in the Iowa Corrections System in June 2012 were Black, compared with the Black population of the entire state at around 3 percent.

To illustrate this disproportionality, we look at marijuana usage and arrests by race.

- * Although marijuana usage in 2010 was nearly the same between Black and White individuals (11 percent and 14 percent), Black individuals were arrested at a rate 8.34 times that of White individuals for possession of marijuana in Iowa.
- * In Polk County, Black individuals accounted for 83 percent of arrests for possession of marijuana even though they only made up 6 percent of the population.



This is just one example of the of the disproportionate minority contact that is significantly affecting Black individuals and negatively impacting the financial stability and security of the individuals and their families.

Financial Impact of Incarceration

The cost of incarceration to a Black or African American individual varies significantly on a case-by-case basis, often starting at \$65-\$625 for only a simple misdemeanor and increasing from there for more serious charges. There are many ways in which a crime-related financial penalty inflicts more than just a financial burden on Black individuals and Black families in Polk County.

This financial burden comes at a cost to family members as well as the individual who is assessed the fines. Family members are likely to take some of the responsibility for paying reimbursement charges. Additionally, if a family member is able to help an inmate financially by sending them money for necessities in prison or jail, the money that is sent is subject to an extremely high charge before it can reach the inmate. The most common fee is about 20 percent of what is sent, but the fee can total up to 50 percent of the money sent to the inmate. This creates a situation where the family member must account for those fees and send more money than originally planned in order to help meet the needs of the inmate. This adds additional financial burdens for Black families, many of whom are already living in poverty.

Moreover, there can be a monetary charge to the inmate for the time a person spends in jail or prison. Reimbursement for certain costs associated with jail stays are legal in Iowa. Iowa Code 356.7 authorizes a Sheriff's Office to seek reimbursement for time spent in jail from inmates who are convicted in State court. Individuals are only given 10 days after release to pay in full or enter into a payment plan. This reimbursement charge is left to the discretion of the Sheriff's Office. Expecting ex-offenders to be able to monetarily contribute to their own needs ten days after their release is a high expectation, let alone being able to begin paying into a regular reimbursement payment plan. Other fees may also be charged to those who have recently been released.

Employment Barriers

Not only are there monetary fees associated with incarceration, but a criminal record greatly impacts a person's ability to find a job. Disclosure of a criminal record when applying for a job is not mandatory by law. However, there are certain career fields where there are federal restrictions on employment of people with certain criminal charges, resulting in some being barred from employment. Among the industries included in the regulation are finance, insurance, unions, healthcare, child care, prisoner transportation, aviation, port and ground transportation workers, and private security guards. Each industry or job carries different regulations on what type of criminal history bars a person from working within that field, although there

are many fields which essentially ban individuals with any type of criminal records ranging from felony to misdemeanors.

Success of a formerly incarcerated person in finding a job is limited based solely on the number of career fields which have legal bans on ex-offender employment. Another major obstacle to stable employment after incarceration is the job application form which may ask whether the applicant has been charged with or convicted of a crime or a felony. These questions are on a majority of job applications which do not have any federal restrictions on employment based on the field of work.

In Iowa there are laws in place to help protect ex-offenders from being discriminated against when seeking employment. Iowa Workforce Development states that it is illegal to exclude a person from an applicant pool based on criminal record alone if the prior offense in no way impacts the ex-offender's ability to do the job. The issue with this protective law, although well intentioned, is that it is very vague and rarely enforced. Employer disregard for this law allows potential employers to discriminate against qualified ex-offenders seeking employment. The inability of an individual to find steady work and generate income also increases recidivism, sending these individuals spiraling back into the criminal justice system to face the same hardships all over again.

Because of the stringent screening process used by many companies when reviewing job candidates, ex-offenders feel, in many cases, forced to take any job they can get just to demonstrate that they have a job. More often than not, these jobs are hourly wage, low-paying jobs.

Locally, as these factors combine in collective impact, the financial burden of racial disparities in Polk County's arrest and incarceration rates falls disproportionately on Black Polk County.

This can explain, in part, why Black Polk County struggles for economic stability and well-being.

Initiatives to Counter the Impacts of Disproportionality for Juvenile and Adult Offenders

Programs that seek to assist juveniles and adults in addressing challenges presented by their criminal activity and/or incarceration will disproportionately reach Blacks because of the high level of disproportionality in both the juvenile justice and adult justice systems.

Alternative Programs for Juveniles

There are at least two programs for juvenile offenders in Polk County that are associated with the local police departments in Des Moines and West Des Moines. The Des Moines Police Department diversion program is called "Second Chances" and its primary focus is to rehabilitate juveniles who commit a crime and to prevent them from someday entering the adult justice system. This program has the youth offender write a letter of apology to the police, complete two weeks of community service, and successfully complete a six-month probation period. Upon successful completion, the charges against the juvenile will be dismissed and the record cleared. Demand for this program outpaces program capacity.

A nationally recognized model of a juvenile diversion and restorative justice program is West Des Moines Police Department's Youth Justice Initiative or YJI. This program has capacity to accept 70-80 youth offenders each year, however, it only accepts cases of juveniles who reside in West Des Moines or are caught committing a crime in West Des Moines. This diversion program takes an environmental approach to enriching the lives and rehabilitating juvenile offenders. There is a focus on accountability but also a climate of understanding that one bad decision as a minor should not negatively impact the rest of your life. It is also important to note that West Des Moines is much less diverse than the city of Des Moines, so this program tends to serve fewer Black youth.

Polk County offers the Early Services Project for offenders younger than 12. Its goal is to decrease the likelihood that the youth will break the law again. According to the Polk County website, “The children receive family-oriented programming based on thorough assessment and skill building. The process combines traditional methods with age appropriate consequences, a positive role model and the development of long-term family recreational activities. The parents and child sign an agreement...” That agreement outlines certain conditions for participation such as obeying all laws, obeying parents, successful participation in school, restorative justice activities, and community service.

Programs for Adult Offenders and Ex-Offenders

Employment barriers have long existed for people with criminal records, but certain practices indicate many employers’ reluctance to consider an individual based on his/her criminal background. There is a growing recognition that this practice of eliminating people for consideration based only on their prior criminal record has detrimental impacts on African Americans seeking employment and employers seeking qualified employees.

The Iowa Workforce Development Ex-Offender Initiative seeks to work with offenders as they prepare to leave prison and with employers who encounter barriers to hiring formerly incarcerated individuals. They provide assistance in three correctional facilities: Mitchellville, Newton, and Rockwell City, as well as the Women’s Work Release Center. The program includes ensuring an inmate leaves prison with a National Career Readiness Certificate. They also provide employer incentives in the form of tax credit and federal bonding to companies who participate.

In the Fifth Judicial District, which encompasses Polk County, halfway houses, such as Harbor of Hope, also provide assistance through a supportive services center and offender educational groups.

An effort that includes the issue of criminal history is underway by the Greater Des Moines Partnership. The work is spurred by employers’ increasing recognition that in a tight job market they may be missing opportunities to hire qualified people if they initially disqualify an individual from employment based on a criminal record. The Inclusion Council at the Partnership is taking a deliberative approach that includes engaging employers in data gathering and employer education on the issues.

Sentencing Reform

The impact of years of mandatory minimum sentences has resulted in prison overcrowding and has also compounded the issue of disproportionality in prisons. Nineteen prison systems nationwide exceed their maximum capacities for inmates according to Bureau of Justice Statistics data, including the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

One policy solution to disproportionality in the criminal justice system that is receiving attention at the state and federal levels is sentencing reform. This is typically focused on non-violent crimes and minor drug offenses, with other measures proposed to impact the system at other steps along the way. Some worry that lowering incarceration rates will increase crime rates. Data also show that incarceration rates can drop at the same time that the crime rate drops; this has been the case in 30 states across the country.

Iowa Sentencing Reform Policy Changes

SF385 took effect January 1, 2016. This measure provides that the court will order that criminal-charge records be expunged in the cases of not guilty verdicts or dismissals of all criminal charges. Several conditions must be met, including payment of all court-ordered or assessed court costs, fees, and other financial obligations.

SF 2164, enacted in 2016, also addresses expungement of criminal offenses by amending an existing section of Iowa Code. This focuses on alcohol-related offenses such as consumption in public, public

intoxication and similar circumstances. This bill says the individual may petition the court for expungement of the records after two years following the conviction. This covers both the records pertaining to the conviction related to state law, and also any related convictions of violation of local ordinance. If there have been no additional violations, in the two-year period, the expungement occurs as a matter of law. The Judicial Branch has until July 1, 2017, to implement these measures.

HF 2064 enacted in 2016 and which took effect on July 1, 2016, amends existing legislation to provide for early release from prison under certain conditions. The bill covers sentencing and parole eligibility for nonviolent drug, child endangerment, and robbery offenses. Key elements of the bill include:

- * The parole board can consider early release for nonviolent drug offenders who have served at least half of their sentence and are not considered at high risk to reoffend.
- * Judges have discretion to set the minimum percentage of a sentence a nonviolent offender must serve before becoming eligible for parole.
- * Judges have flexibility in sentencing for second-degree robbery convictions, now allowing five to seven years before eligibility for parole. The law previously required serving at least seven of a ten-year sentence.
- * A new third-degree robbery charge as an aggravated misdemeanor with no mandatory minimum was established.
- * Coverage of Iowa's mandatory minimum sentencing laws is expanded to child endangerment. To be eligible for parole, a convicted offender would be required to serve at least 30 percent of the sentence or 15 years.

Other Justice Policy Issues Affecting Black Polk County

Federal Sentencing Reform Act

The United States Senate and House of Representatives have each introduced legislation to reform federal sentencing laws. While both were introduced in their respective chambers in early October 2015, they both remain stalled in their chamber. Brief summaries are included here.

The Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act of 2015, S.2123, was introduced in the U.S. Senate and an amendment reported back to the Senate on October 26, 2015. There has been no action since then. The Act includes two Titles: Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act. The provisions of Sentencing Reform include changes in mandatory minimum sentences for certain drug felons, increasing flexibility of the court in sentencing for drug convictions, mandatory minimums for firearm offenses, and more. The Corrections title covers recidivism reduction programming, post-sentencing assessments, pre-release custody, promoting successful re-entry, parole for juveniles, sealing or expungement of records for certain juvenile convictions, as well as additional measures. Senator Charles Grassley, R-IA, is the bill's sponsor

The Sentencing Reform Act of 2015, H.R.3713, was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives on October 8, 2015. The bill allows the court flexibility to reduce mandatory minimum prison terms for certain non-violent defendants convicted of a high-level first time or low-level repeat drug offense. It also allows the court flexibility to impose a sentence below the mandatory minimum for certain non-violent, cooperative drug defendants with a limited criminal history. Another provision reduces the enhanced mandatory minimum prison term for certain drug or firearm offenses related to drug offenses. It allows resentencing of convicted crack cocaine offenders sentenced before August 3, 2010. The sponsor of H.R. 3713 is Bob Goodlatte, R-VA-6.

Restoration of Voting Rights to Felons

There is a wide variance in how states treat the right to vote by felons and ex-felons who have completed their sentences. Iowa is one of the three most restrictive states, joining Florida and Virginia in permanently depriving felons and ex-felons of the right to vote. Two states never take away a felon's right to vote. Thirty-eight states and the District of Columbia provide automatic restoration of voting rights to most felons upon completion of the sentence. There is a waiting period in some states following completion of the sentence before voting rights can be restored. Some states require the individual to apply to the state for restoration of voting rights.

In Iowa, a felon who has completed their sentence has permanently lost voting rights. The individual has the option to petition the Governor for restoration of those rights. Some are unaware that their felony status resulted in permanent loss of those rights, and many are unaware of the possibility and process to seek restoration of their voting rights,

Even when restoration of voting rights is approved by the Governor, the process is not always timely or without barriers. In Iowa's situation, there was considerable confusion during and after the time that Governor Branstad rescinded a predecessor's Executive Order in 2005 providing for automatic restoration of voting rights upon completion of the sentence. This caused confusion and misunderstanding among ex-felons and officials alike. In addition, the application that was developed for petitioning Governor Branstad for restoration of voting rights was complicated, and the form was recently revised to somewhat simplify it.

To further complicate the issue, the Iowa Supreme Court heard and ruled in a 4-3 decision on a case in June 2016, which agreed that all felonies are "infamous crimes", meaning that all those convicted of a felony would permanently lose their voting rights.

This, however, did not change the process to petition the Governor for restoration of voting rights.

Legislation Related to Juvenile Justice

SF 2288 is a high profile piece of legislation that was enacted and became effective July 1, 2016, relating to the confidentiality of juvenile court records in delinquency proceedings. Recommended by the Governor's Working Group on Justice Policy Reform, this measure provides that certain juvenile records are confidential. Those not kept confidential and are available as public records are those of a juvenile convicted of a forcible felony. The provisions apply to all cases on and after July 1, 2016, including pending cases.

Hiring Bias and Ban-the-Box Initiatives

Employment barriers have long existed for people with criminal records, but certain practices indicate many employers' reluctance to consider an individual with a criminal record based on that fact alone. There is a growing recognition that this practice of eliminating people for consideration based only on their prior criminal record has detrimental impacts on African Americans seeking employment and employers seeking qualified employees.

One effort to that includes the issue of criminal history is underway by the Greater Des Moines Partnership. The work is spurred by employers' increasing recognition that in a tight job market they may be missing opportunities to hire qualified people if they initially disqualify an individual from employment based on a criminal record. The Inclusion Council at the Partnership is taking a deliberative approach that includes engaging employers in data gathering and education on the issues.

Research on Ban-the-Box Impacts

An October 2016 article in *Governing* magazine reports possibilities of unintended negative impacts of so-called “ban-the-box” laws. This story refers to a recent University of Michigan and Princeton University study with some surprising findings about these laws.

Most ban-the-box laws in states and cities cover public employers or government contracts. Nine states have extended coverage to private employers. According to the University of Michigan/Princeton study, more than 20 states and 100 local governments have some form of this type of re-entry policy.

Ban-the-box measures are largely intended to increase access to employment opportunities by those with criminal records. Because of the high disparities that exist for African Americans in the criminal justice system, the intent was to improve their job opportunities. Findings of the study do not support that and identify a new and broader bias in hiring.

Researchers sent fictitious applications in two waves, one before and one after a jurisdiction’s enacted ban-the-box, and used names that would imply race. Before the ban-the-box measure, applications without criminal records received a callback 63 percent more than those with criminal records. They also found that employers were abiding by the new restrictions on asking about criminal history on the initial application. Findings also showed a slight advantage of 7 percent for Whites receiving callbacks. However, after ban-the-box took effect, findings showed that gap increased dramatically to 45 percent.

In addition, findings showed that racial discrimination significantly increased among employers after ban-the box took effect. This is believed to be because, in the absence of the ability to ask about criminal records, employers make assumptions, including that African Americans have criminal records when White applicants do not.

These findings essentially mean that without specifically asking about criminal records (ban-the-box) some employers may assume that Black men are likely to have criminal records, with the result that they do not call back Black men without criminal records either.

A second study conducted by the National Bureau of Economic Research, also found that young, Black men with no criminal record in the Midwest were 7.5 percent less likely to be employed after ban-the-box took effect and there was no criminal history information, and that their rates of unemployment increased over time. Again, the researchers attributed this finding to the same statistical discrimination, assuming that African American men are more likely to have criminal records.

Young, Black men with no criminal record in the Midwest are

7.5%

less likely to be employed after ban-the-box took effect

Iowa Public Policy on Ban-the-Box

Senate File 2240 was introduced in the Iowa Senate in 2016 as a Judiciary Committee bill, but after passing through the Senate Judiciary Committee, did not have enough support to be brought before the full Senate. This is known as the “Fair Chance Act” or the “Ban the Box Bill”. Its bill introduction states it is “An act prohibiting employers and employment agencies from seeking the criminal record or criminal history from applicants for employment under certain circumstances, providing penalties, and including an effective date.”

+ Racial Disparity in Health, Healthcare, & Health Coverage

* [Click here view all report sections](#)

Indicators of the health and well-being of African Americans and Africans in Polk County should encompass three primary types of data to provide a more complete picture of the population:

- * The health of African Americans and Africans in Polk County and Iowa,
- * The utilization of healthcare services by African Americans and Africans in Polk County and Iowa, and
- * The access to healthcare coverage.

The Changing Healthcare Landscape

The past ten years have brought the most significant changes to the nation's healthcare services and systems since the establishment of Medicare and Medicaid in 1965 followed by the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) 32 years later in 1997. At the time of the passage of each, Medicare, Medicaid, and CHIP were seen as efforts to address disproportionality and improve the health of minorities and populations experiencing poverty.

Rapidly rising healthcare costs and cost of healthcare coverage available through an employer or individually came together with enough economic pressure in the federal policy arena to pass the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) in 2010. Additional pressures at the state level in Iowa have driven changes in Medicaid delivery systems to a managed care approach, beginning April 1, 2016.

The ACA's passage brought with it requirements and incentives to improve quality of care, reduce cost of care, and improve patient satisfaction in Medicare-paid services. These measures have carried over into the other services and systems providing care and services to Americans, including Iowans.

The average person in Polk County may experience these changes differently depending on where they seek healthcare services and what they need. There is a greater emphasis on coordinating care, following up, expanding access to preventive care, electronic health records, and for the healthcare providers to use data to assess their performance on an ongoing basis.

For most of us, though, the bottom line is whether we are healthy, whether we can get the healthcare services we need when we need them, and how much will it cost and who is paying that bill. Yet, even with these changes in our systems, health, healthcare, and access to healthcare coverage still have disproportionate impacts on African Americans in our own communities.

The Health of Black Polk County and Iowa

Many people understand the direct tie between health well-being and financial well-being, so taking a look at the health and related well-being factors for Polk County will inform the impact on financial well-being of African Americans and Africans in the county. It is not difficult to make the case that people who are well and relatively healthy have greater opportunities to hold a job and achieve financial security. Understanding the data and dynamics between health status and other elements of health care services and coverage will tell a more complete story.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provide information that compares indicators among similar counties and provides a comparative quick picture of how a county stacks up with other counties with

similar make-up across the nation. The following table summarizes where Polk County compares with “peer counties” across the United States for each indicator.

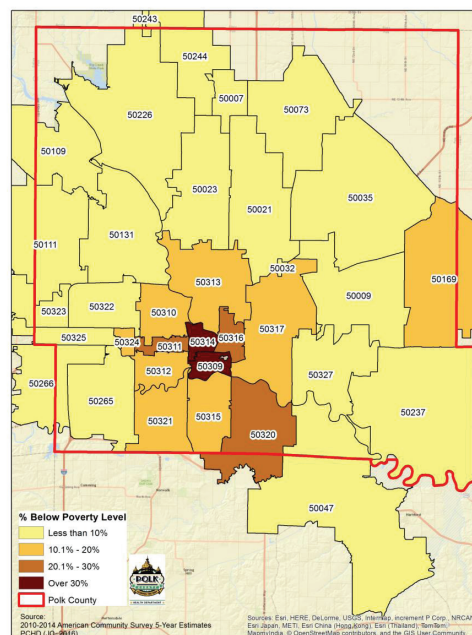
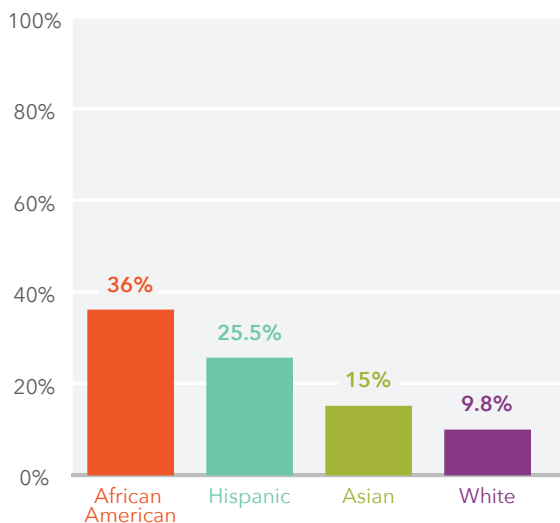
Polk County Comparison with "Peer Counties" Across the United States

Polk County Comparisons	Better (most favorable quartile)	Moderate (middle two quartiles)	Worse (least favorable quartile)
Mortality	Chronic kidney disease deaths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Diabetes deaths ★ Female life expectancy ★ Male life expectancy ★ Motor vehicle deaths ★ Stroke deaths ★ Unintentional injury (including motor vehicle) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Alzheimer’s Disease deaths ★ Cancer deaths ★ Chronic lower respiratory disease (CLRD) deaths ★ Coronary heart disease deaths
Morbidity	Older adult asthma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Adult diabetes ★ Adult obesity ★ Adult overall health status ★ Alzheimer’s Disease/dementia ★ HIV ★ Older adult depression 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Cancer ★ Gonorrhea ★ Preterm births ★ Syphilis
Health Care Access and Quality	Cost barrier to care Uninsured	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Older adult preventable hospitalizations ★ Primary care provider access 	
Health Behaviors		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Adult female routine pap tests ★ Adult physical inactivity ★ Adult smoking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Adult binge drinking ★ Teen births
Social Factors		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ High housing costs ★ Inadequate social support ★ On time high school graduation ★ Unemployment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Children in single-parent households ★ Poverty ★ Violent crime
Physical Environment	Annual average PM2.5 concentration (Particulate Matter, 2.5 micrometers or less, a fine air pollutant measure)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Access to parks ★ Housing stress ★ Limited access to health food 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Living near highways

The October 2016 *Polk County Health Report* issued by the Polk County Health Department provides insights into the current status of health for Polk County and for Blacks in the county.

Polk County Residents Living Below 100 Percent of the Federal Poverty Level by Race

2010-2014



- ★ In Polk County 36 percent of African Americans lived below 100 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) during the years 2010-2014.
- ★ Compared to 25.5 percent for Hispanic, 15 percent for Asian, and 9.8 percent for White populations, the challenges for African Americans to access healthcare coverage is disproportionately exacerbated by poverty.
- ★ Within the borders of Polk County, households living below 100 percent of the poverty level are concentrated in zip code areas where African Americans are most likely to live. (See map)
- ★ Children make up a large portion of those with low incomes; 20.5 percent of Polk County children were living below the poverty line in 2014.

Additional data are valuable to gain a broad understanding of the health status of African Americans in Polk County.

- ★ In 2010, the overall quality of health of Black children in Iowa showed that 45 percent of children were in excellent health and 31 percent were in good health.
- ★ Black children in Iowa in 2010 were most likely to be classified as having a special healthcare need.
- ★ Black children accounted for the highest percent (39 percent) of children in Iowa in 2010 that currently used or needed prescribed medication, though Black children only accounted for 5.7 percent of Iowa children.

Black children
are most likely to be classified as having a special healthcare need

- ★ In Polk County the teen birth rate for Black females is 77 births per 1,000 females. This is more than double the rate for White females in Polk County. Teen pregnancy can cause a host of financial difficulties to a family and to a young mother.

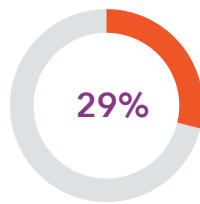
The teen birth rate for Black females is

2X

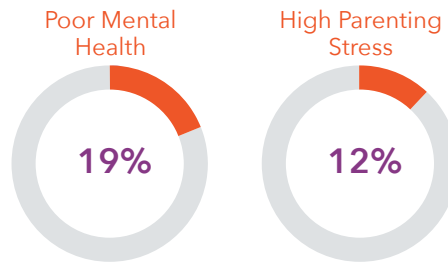
the rate for White females in Polk County

Black adults and children face mental and behavioral health issues that can be compounded by lack of financial resources to support their treatment and ongoing needs for medication or other needs.

Percent of Black Children in Iowa that Need Behavior and Emotional Care



Black Parents are the Highest Group Who Reported:



- ★ Black children accounted for the largest group needing behavior and emotional care in 2013 at 29 percent, a disproportionate number compared to the 5.9 percent share of the Black population.
- ★ Black parents were the highest group who reported poor mental health (19 percent) and the highest group reporting high parenting stress (12 percent).
- ★ In a June 2016 report, Iowa ranked 51 of the 50 states and District of Columbia in the number of state psychiatric beds. The number of beds dropped by more than half from 149 in 2010 to 64 in 2016, resulting in a remaining 2.0 state psychiatric beds per 100,000 Iowans.

The impact of financial costs of having poor health for families in the Black community cannot be underestimated. In addition to the healthcare professionals' bills, the costs of prescription medications is significant and growing. Sometimes the prescription drug costs far exceed the cost of the initial diagnosis, particularly if the patient must take the prescription for months or years. Without comprehensive prescription drug benefits, prescriptions can generate additional monthly costs in the hundreds of dollars. Recognizing that the costs of prescription drugs are rising sharply, families in poverty may face difficult financial decisions.

In 2014, Black adults in the U.S. had the highest percent of people dealing with 2-3 or 4 plus chronic conditions, 22.2 percent and 5.6 percent respectively. Black adults in Iowa have higher rates of chronic illness than any other race or ethnicity, setting the stage for ongoing, higher costs related to chronic illness.

- ★ In 2010 the average amount spent per capita on 2-3 chronic conditions was \$4,731 - \$6,751.
- ★ The average cost for 4 or more chronic conditions was \$9,162 - \$15,954. This includes spending on health insurance and the patient out-of-pocket expenses.

However, if Black adults are paying even a fraction of these costs on a yearly basis plus paying for healthcare and medications for their children, as many Black Iowa families are, medical expenses could quickly accumulate. Medical expenses can and do add to the financial insecurity that Black families face. These pressures increase the stress level for a family who is already having trouble paying their month-to-month bills.

A snowball effect could take over in some situations. For example, the increased stress over medical bills could contribute to deterioration of mental health for Black parents, who already have the highest rate of poor mental health. If Black individuals decide to seek mental health assistance, which only about 25 percent do, the financial cost can be very high. Even if the health coverage includes mental healthcare costs, co-pays and/or limitations on number of covered mental health visits can greatly increase cost to the patient. This can make mental healthcare seem to be less necessary to those who cannot afford an office visit or co-pay. This only leads to increased disparity in health issues and access to health assistance.

Nationally, the most common chronic diseases for Blacks that lead to death are heart disease, stroke, and diabetes. Obesity is directly tied to each of these.

With low income comes challenges to access nutritious food to support health and well-being. Food insecurity is becoming more frequently recognized as playing a role in the health of Black people experiencing poverty.

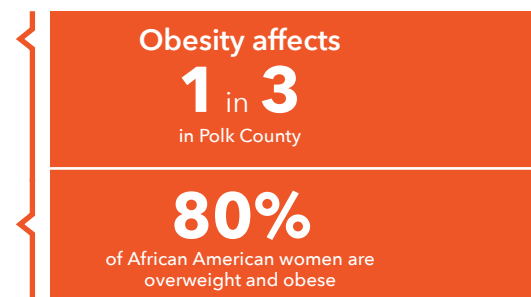
- * In 2010, 19 percent of Iowa's Black families with children reported having to cut portions or skip meals because there was not enough money for food.
- * In 2011, Black families were the highest group to report being food insecure at a high, marginal, and low level.

Skipping meals and not knowing where your next meal will be coming from is a reality faced by Black families in Iowa more frequently than any other race in Iowa. Economic insecurity, as seen here through food insecurity, has a direct impact on the health of Black children and families in Polk County and the state of Iowa. A Gallup poll reports that lower income and food insecurity have been linked to obesity.

That common health concern for African Americans - obesity - seems in juxtaposition with food insecurity. Iowans are accustomed, however, to hearing statistics that they are among the states with the highest obesity rates, meaning having a Body Mass Index of 30 or higher. Obesity calculations include a combination of weight and height.

Polk County is part of that picture, with obesity and diabetes rates steadily increasing.

- * Obesity now affects nearly one in three people in Polk County.
- * The Polk County obesity rate in 2004 was 24 percent; in 2009 it was 27.5 percent; and in 2013 it rose to 29 percent.
- * The National Office of Minority Health reports that African American women have the highest rates of overweight and obesity at 80 percent, compared to all other groups in the U.S.



What is the true impact of a family member's special healthcare need? Managing a special healthcare need is not only difficult, it isn't cheap, even with a health insurance plan. For a Black family with a child that has a special healthcare need, even with insurance to cover the majority of the cost associated with the special healthcare need, there are additional financial constraints. Seeking and receiving care for a child requires a significant amount of time by parents and family members spent with the child in providers' offices,

treatment, or in hospitals. This results in an employed parent spending time, often unpaid, away from work, cutting back on hours worked, or even losing that job. The compounding financial impacts of this situation can seriously undermine a family's ability to maintain economic stability.

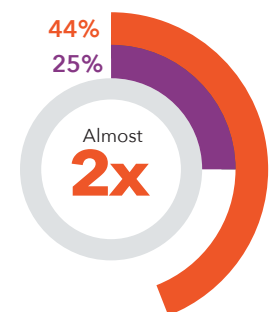
We must determine how the health status of Black individuals and families in Polk County presented here connects with the financial security and economic well-being of the African American and African community. Clearly, the picture outlined here is not cause for celebration, but is a reason to think more creatively and beyond the usual economic development solutions to disproportionality in financial and other aspects of life for individuals of Black Polk County. Health disparities directly impact financial security. Now that we have a picture of the health status, we can also examine how healthcare services are used and how the costs of those services are paid. With these three pieces of the puzzle, there will be a greater understanding of all the dynamics that disadvantage families in Black Polk County.

Utilization of Healthcare Services

Individuals without healthcare coverage are less likely to have a consistent primary care provider that provides routine preventive care and screenings. The data found in Polk County ties to the financial situation and difficulties in accessing services that are experienced disproportionately by Black people.

- * Among those who delayed accessing prenatal care until their second or third trimester, 65 percent of pregnant African American women were more likely to delay entry into prenatal care.
- * African American women in Polk County give birth to a higher percentage of low-weight babies than do Asian/Pacific Islander, White, or Hispanic women.
- * African American women are nearly twice as likely to give birth to low-weight babies as White or Hispanic women. Low-weight is defined as less than 5.5 pounds at birth. Nationally, low birth weight is one of the leading causes of infant mortality and low birth weight babies have a higher risk of health complications throughout their life.
- * Black children visited the emergency room at almost double the rate of White children in 2010 (44 percent Black, 25 percent White).
- * Black children have the lowest rate (67 percent) of having a "medical home" or a regular doctor or nurse that coordinates care.

Emergency Room Visits by Children



Black children visited the emergency room at **almost double** the rate of white children

These demonstrate additional disproportionate impacts for Black people. A root cause is that many African American or African individuals and families do not have a medical home or regular healthcare provider because of their financial insecurity. Healthcare, even preventive healthcare, is a luxury. So people need to use expensive emergency rooms because they have no money.

People with private or public health coverage may be discouraged from seeking healthcare because of a fear or knowledge that it will require costs they are unable to pay. Other cost issues come into play in the form of deductibles, co-pays, coinsurance, and elusive regulations such as the donut hole in Medicare prescription drug coverage. Though the ACA and public healthcare coverage now cover the full cost of physicals and well-baby checkups, healthcare insurance will not necessarily cover the full costs of visits for illnesses, lab work, tests, prescription drugs, medical equipment, emergency room care, hospitalization, and more. These realities and fears can cause a family to wait until a health issue is severe enough that the person needs medical assistance immediately and often at a higher cost.

Taking this information on the current health status and circumstances of Polk County residents, and add to it the data on what brings folks to the emergency room or the hospital, it is easy to see how even one episode of asthma, one complicated pregnancy, or a stroke could plunge a struggling Black family into a dire financial situation.

Access to Healthcare Coverage

The ability to access healthcare that is covered by private or public insurance is clearly connected to financial capacity. Families in Polk County with lower incomes and who experience financial hardships are challenged to obtain healthcare coverage even with the changes brought by the Affordable Care Act that passed in 2010.

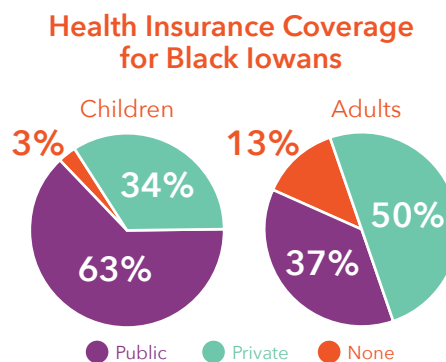
- * Some progress can be seen in healthcare coverage. After reaching a high of 9.7 percent in 2010, the rate of Polk County residents without health insurance has fallen by 3.7 percentage points to 6 percent in 2014.

The cost of healthcare is part of an Iowa Policy Project report entitled *The Cost of Living in Iowa, 2014 Edition: Basic Family Budgets*. This report details a family budget necessary for various configurations of families ranging from a single individual to a two-working-parent-two-children family. It provides costs for health insurance in each instance, both without health insurance from an employer and employer-provided health insurance.

- * According to the *Basic Family Budgets* report, in a grouping of eight central Iowa counties including Polk County, 16.2 percent of families are estimated to live below the budget break-even level.

The following data illustrate the high degree of reliance of Black children and adults on public health insurance coverage. Coverage could be through Medicaid and its expansion programs, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), or Medicare.

- * In 2010, 34 percent of Black children in Iowa were covered by a private health insurance provider, 63 percent were covered by public health insurance, and 3 percent had no health insurance coverage.
- * Black adults' insurance coverage in 2010 was 50 percent private, 37 percent public, and 13 percent with no health insurance.



Access to publicly funded healthcare coverage provides families with a safety net that complements their asset ownership and protects against the financial burdens of a major medical emergency or treatment of a chronic illness. These are the criteria for and an assessment of the strength of Iowa's state policies in this area:

- * In Iowa, parents with incomes up to 250 percent Federal Poverty Line (FPL) are eligible for coverage under Medicaid or other state-funded programs.
- * In Iowa, childless adults with incomes up to 250 percent FPL are eligible for Medicaid or other state funded programs.
- * Iowa has simplified at least four out of seven enrollment and retention procedures in both CHIP and Medicaid; it has simplified four in Medicaid and six in CHIP.
- * Iowa's Medicaid program provides comprehensive dental coverage for adults.

Iowa's Medicaid system overhaul is still in its infancy with three nationally-controlled health insurance companies taking on Medicaid managed care as of April 1, 2016. This initially created both anxiety and confusion for patients as they sought to find out if their providers, if they had one, were still going to be able to see them. The kinks are still being worked out of the system at the same time that the public is getting reports of higher denials of payments to providers. The full impact of this transition will become clear after several more years.

In the meantime, Black people receiving expanded Medicaid benefits in Polk County still need healthcare and will need to navigate through the system.

Also at play in Iowa beginning in 2017, is a reduction in the number of choices of insurance companies and plans for individuals who purchase their private health insurance on Iowa's health insurance exchange. In addition to fewer choices, the premiums for individuals purchasing insurance on the exchange have risen significantly, sometimes in excess of 20 percent over the previous year.

Eligibility for employer-based health coverage is determined by each employer. The coverage and costs vary greatly from full premium coverage for the employee and family, to no or partial premium coverage for the employer and no payment for family coverage. Many small businesses do not offer health insurance at all for employees. Different coverage can be offered for different categories of employment, sometimes seen when there is a labor union agreement in place.

Even with that wide variation in how health coverage is handled, it is less likely that employers of people in low-wage and salary near or below the federal poverty level offer paid or unpaid healthcare coverage options to those workers. Again, this brings the disparate impact on Black Polk County into focus. When a disproportionate number of Polk County's Black population is working in lower-paying positions, the availability of employer-paid health care is diminished, leaving African American or African families to find a way to access healthcare through public coverage or to go without coverage - and sometimes care - altogether.

None of these options - Iowa's overhauled expanded-Medicaid managed care system, individual private coverage through the ACA health insurance exchange, or the coverage that may or may not be offered by an employer - makes it easy or straightforward for African American or African families to find, choose, or afford healthcare coverage.

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Conclusion

For many residents of Polk County, this is the ideal place to make a life. Over the past decade, our community narrative has become that this is one of the best communities of its size in which to live. After all, our downtown has experienced a much-needed renaissance, young people are moving here after years of the lamentable “brain drain,” a vibrant parks and trails system offers respite and recreation through natural landscapes, and our progressive electorate helped elect the nation’s first African American President. In recent years, Des Moines in particular has received many positive reviews from the kinds of organizations that assess and give recognition to communities like ours. However, as the accolades roll in, persistent racial disparities shift the perspective.



In 2016, Des Moines was named the 11th best place to live in the United States. It was also named 3rd Worst City for African Americans.

In 2015, Des Moines was named #2 Best City to Find a Job. However, the unemployment rate for African Americans in Des Moines is 12.5%. For African Americans in Polk County, the rate is even higher at 16.7%.

Des Moines was named #1 Up and Coming Downtown in 2014. At the same time, many of the adjacent neighborhoods, including those with large populations of African Americans and immigrants, have concentrated high poverty due, in part, to persistent insufficient private and public investments.

In 2014, Des Moines was named Best City for Young Professionals. Nevertheless, in a 2015 series on Black Iowans, the *Des Moines Register* reported on the scrutiny experienced by African Americans in a local workforce dominated by whites.

In 2015, the Des Moines Metro was named #1 Location for Millennial Home Buyers. However, between the years of 2010 and 2014, only 1.4% of all home mortgage were made to African Americans in the Des Moines-West Des Moines Area.

In 2015, Des Moines was named #5 Best City for Retirement, while just over 10% of Black households in Polk County have retirement income.

As included in this report, the most recent economic data available indicates that on nearly every measure Black Polk County falls short of the wider community. In a review of ten recent community plans – including a comprehensive city plan, a wide-ranging poverty initiative, and more narrow housing and transportation plans – specific economic data on Black Polk County was found to be rarely included. Intentional and strategic approaches to alleviate persistent negative economic outcomes for Black Polk County were especially limited. In this way, “the existing tendency of whites to hold a less-than-serious understanding of the severity and ongoing damage of historic racism” (Harvey, 2014, p. 75) appears firmly rooted in Polk County where the planning groups who produced these plans are, with few exceptions, entirely White. The urgency echoing in the local Black community has not yet reached community leaders to impact planning initiatives.

This is not to say that Black Polk County is alone in recognizing the disparities. As growing national attention on the racial wealth divide arrives to illuminate similar conditions in Polk County, there is growing concern for issues of racial justice beyond typical efforts of achieving diversity. A small movement of individuals and

predominantly White organizations have begun to prioritize issues of racial justice alongside historically Black-led initiatives. These community leaders have begun to acknowledge and coordinate, with varying degrees of intentionality and access to resources, strategic efforts to alleviate the historic racism in Polk County. Organizations include: AMOS – A Metropolitan Organizing Strategy, First Unitarian Church, a local chapter of SURJ – Showing Up for Racial Justice, Des Moines Public Schools, and the United Way of Central Iowa. This indicates potential early partners outside of Black Polk County in building One Economy.

The persistent disparities experienced by Polk County's African American and African communities, outlined here and throughout this report, call us to accountability. Overall economic indicators and prize accolades disguise the deeper reality of life in Polk County, obscuring whole neighborhoods of families and futures behind a narrative that ignores the simple fact: we are not yet one economy.

How do we move forward? How do we inspire participation and investment to begin the shift toward equity? How do we bring the two economies into one? Who can and will lead to bring intentional and strategic action to bear in closing the economic gap between Blacks and Whites? Neither the Black nor the White communities will find success in addressing these deep-seeded disparities without strong common goals and long-term collaboration in this movement.

Together, we can change this. Beyond dreams and visions, beyond community plans that consistently fail to name and assuage the cumulative and compounding effects of historical, structural and systemic racial disadvantage, we can do better. We can create a thriving Polk County for all. We can pull up an extra seat for everyone standing around the table. We can remind our leaders and ourselves that racial inequality is often replicated when racial equity is not consciously addressed. We can be honest. With eyes wide open and with tremendous hope, we can create room in this economy for everyone – you, me, yours and mine. Together, we can create One Economy.

What is your place in One Economy?

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