



ONGOING JOBLESSNESS IN MISSISSIPPI

Unemployment rate for African Americans ninth in nation, more than double the state's white rate

BY MARY GABLE

Five years after the beginning of the Great Recession, high unemployment rates are still taking a toll on families. In Mississippi, where the overall unemployment rate was 8.7 percent in the fourth quarter of 2012 (compared with a national average of 7.8 percent), African American families continue to bear the brunt of that economic pain.

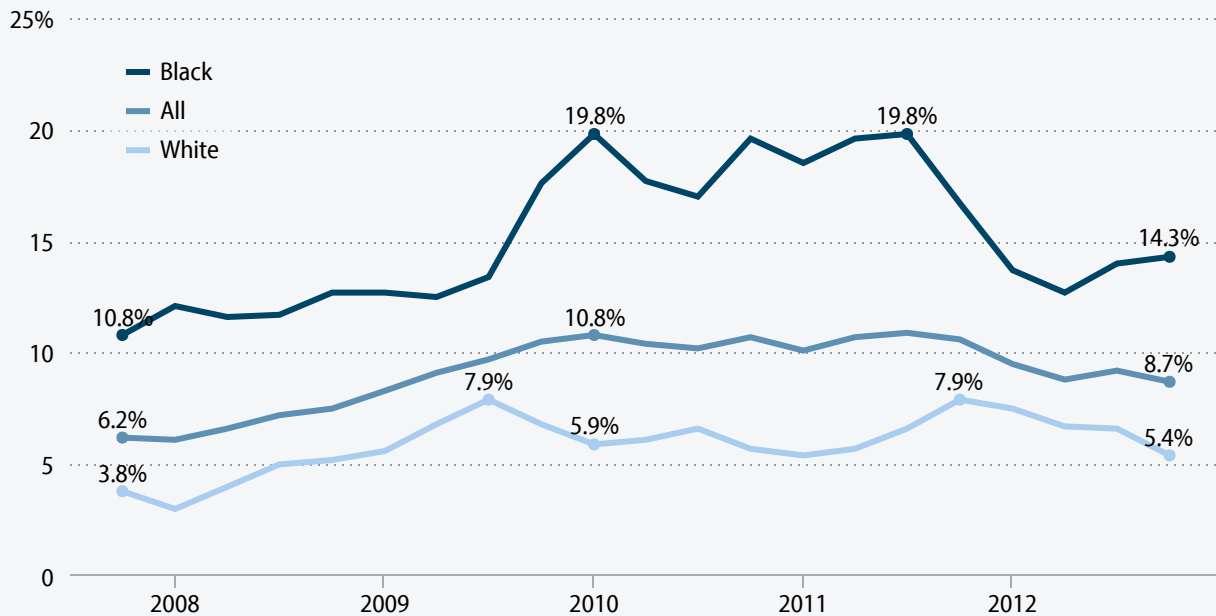
This research brief supplements a recent report by the Economic Policy Institute's Algernon Austin, *Unemployment Rates Are Projected to Remain High for Whites, Latinos, and African Americans throughout 2013*, which documents national trends in unemployment (Austin 2013). Drawing on federal Current Population Survey (CPS) data, this paper focuses on unemployment in Mississippi. It highlights the racial disparities that have prevailed

throughout the recession (defined here as including the official recession from December 2007 through June 2009, and the weak and ongoing recovery through the fourth quarter of 2012):

- The unemployment rate of blacks in Mississippi is 14.3 percent, more than two and a half times that of whites (5.4 percent), and has been at least twice the white rate (and at times triple the white rate) for much of the last five years. In the first quarter of 2008, the black unemployment rate was more than four times the white rate. The greatest percentage-point disparity occurred at the peak of unemployment for black Mississippians, in the first quarter of 2010, when the black unemployment rate was 19.8 percent (more than triple the 5.9 percent white

FIGURE A **INTERACTIVE**

Unemployment rate in Mississippi, all and by race, 2007Q4–2012Q4



Note: Data are quarterly, beginning with 2007 Q4 and ending with 2012 Q4. Races and ethnicities are presented in mutually exclusive categories, i.e., white refers to non-Hispanic whites and black refers to non-Hispanic blacks.

Source: Author's analysis of Bureau of Labor Statistics Local Area Unemployment Statistics and basic monthly Current Population Survey microdata

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unemployment rate) and again in the fourth quarter of 2010 and the second quarter of 2011 (19.6 percent vs. 5.7 percent in both quarters).

- Of the 24 states with large enough African American populations to track with quarterly CPS unemployment data, Mississippi has the ninth highest African American unemployment rate.
- Mississippi's unemployment rate of 8.7 percent exceeds the national rate of 7.8 percent and its African American unemployment rate (14.3 percent) is statistically equal to the national black unemployment rate (14.0 percent).

White unemployment

Though they escaped the prolonged, deep unemployment plaguing white workers in other states, Mississippi's white workers endured unemployment rates that more than

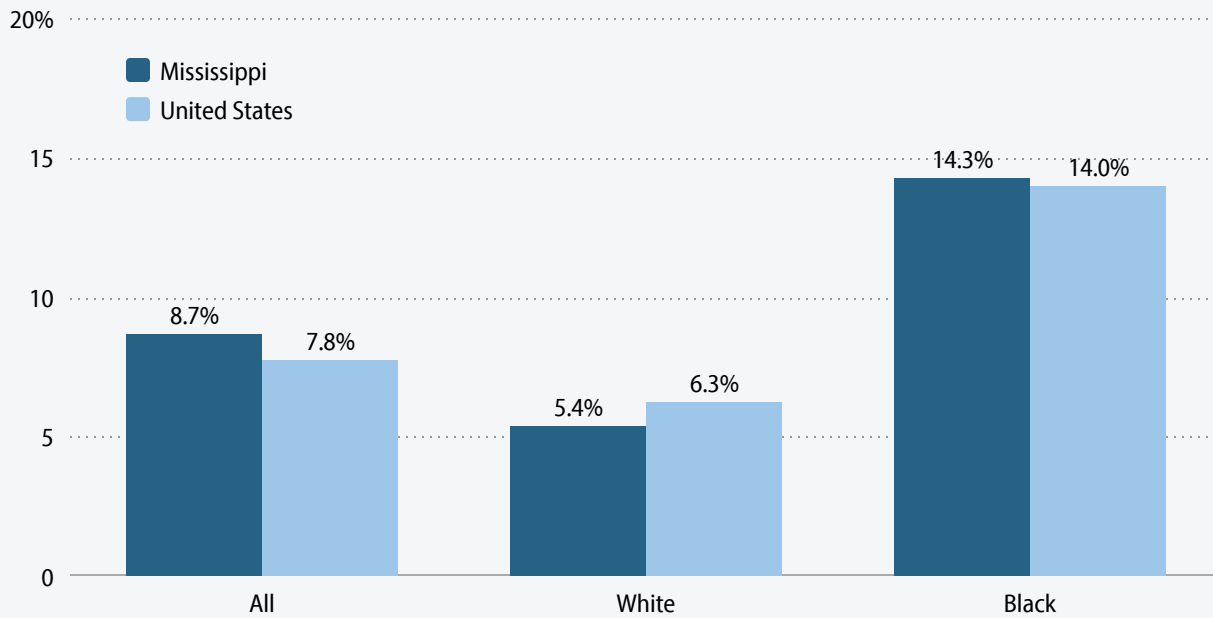
doubled from 3.8 percent in the fourth quarter of 2007 to 7.9 percent in the third quarter of 2009, as seen in **Figure A**. In the three-plus years since, Mississippi's white unemployment rate has declined steadily, though slowly—with a brief bump in the fourth quarter of 2011 to 7.9 percent (matching its previous peak)—to 5.4 percent in the fourth quarter of 2012. Mississippi's white unemployment rate places it among the states with relatively low unemployment rates for white workers.

African American unemployment

African American unemployment rates in Mississippi throughout the recession have been devastatingly high, hovering in the 17-to-20-percent range for two years (from the fourth quarter of 2009 to the fourth quarter of 2011). In fact, after peaking at 19.8 percent in the first quarter of 2010, the rate hit 19.8 percent again in

FIGURE B **INTERACTIVE**

Unemployment rate, Mississippi compared with U.S., by race, 4th quarter 2012



Note: Races and ethnicities are presented in mutually exclusive categories, i.e., white refers to non-Hispanic whites and black refers to non-Hispanic blacks.

Source: Author's analysis of Bureau of Labor Statistics Local Area Unemployment Statistics and basic monthly Current Population Survey microdata

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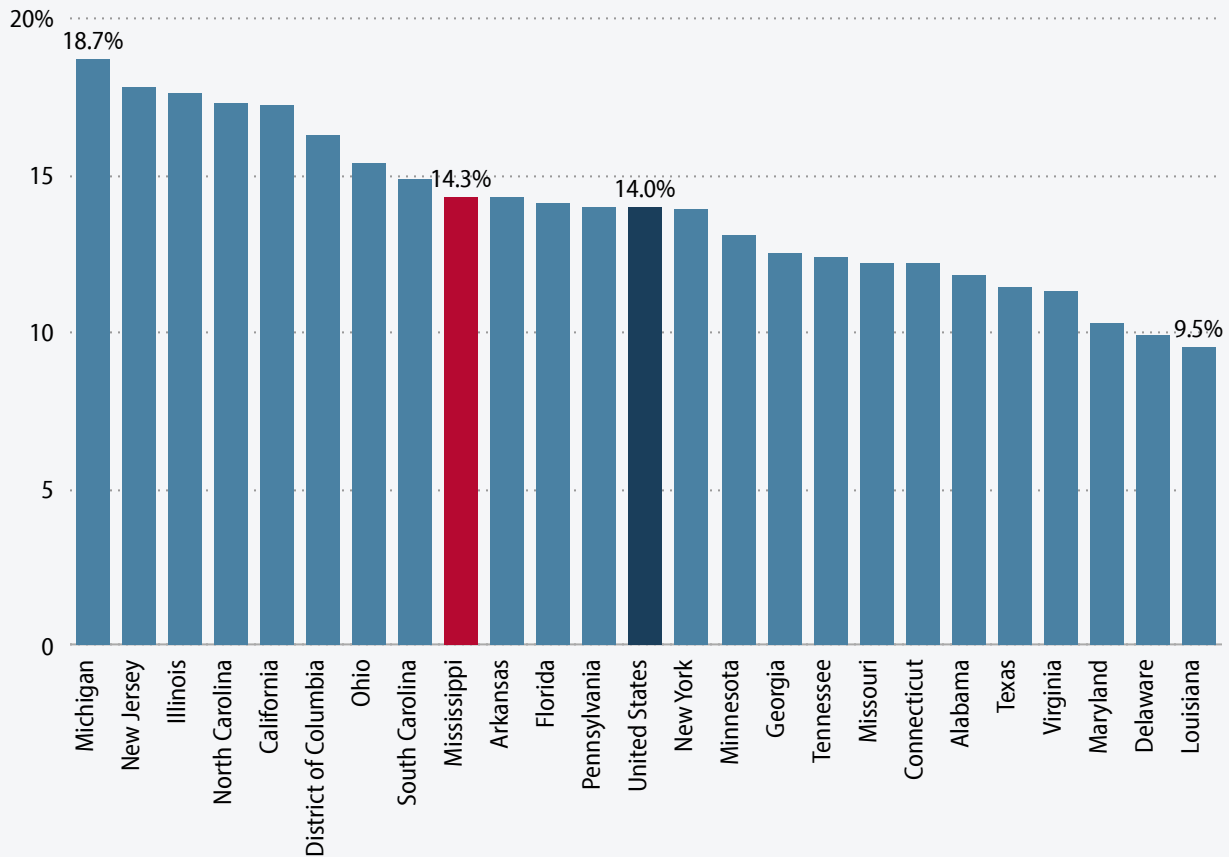
the third quarter of 2011. Even after apparently turning the corner in late 2011 and early 2012 with significant declines, the black unemployment rate in the fourth quarter of 2012 climbed to 14.3 percent, statistically equal to the national black unemployment rate of 14.0 percent (as seen in **Figure B**).

Although not shown in Figure A, the black-white gap in unemployment rates in Mississippi is among the largest in the nation. The figure does show that for much of the last five years, African American unemployment rates have been at least double—and sometimes more than

triple—white unemployment rates. In the first quarter of 2008, the black unemployment rate was more than four times the white rate. The greatest disparity occurred at the peak of unemployment for black Mississippians, in the first quarter of 2010, when the black unemployment rate was 19.8 percent (more than triple the 5.9 percent white unemployment rate) and again in the fourth quarter of 2010 and the second quarter of 2011 (19.6 percent vs. 5.7 percent in both quarters). This disparity has occurred nationwide for the last 50 years (Austin 2012). Several factors, including race, age (the white labor force is older),

A note about EPI's interactive figures: All of the figures in this paper are available in an interactive format on epi.org. With an interactive figure, users can obtain specific data points by hovering a cursor over a line or bar, view the entire figure as a data table, and copy figure data into Excel.

Black unemployment rate in Mississippi compared with 23 other states and U.S., 4th quarter 2012



Note: Black refers to non-Hispanic blacks. This figure includes the 23 states (a total which includes the District of Columbia) with black populations large enough to measure the unemployment rate with Current Population Survey microdata.

Source: Author's analysis of Bureau of Labor Statistics Local Area Unemployment Statistics and basic monthly Current Population Survey microdata

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education, and geography, have likely played a role in the persistence of the black-white unemployment gap.

Figure C depicts the black unemployment rate in Mississippi compared with the black unemployment rate in each of the other 23 states for which the black population is large enough to measure the unemployment rate with CPS data. It shows that Mississippi has the ninth-highest African American unemployment rate among these states.

Conclusion

Mississippi's recovery from the depths of the Great Recession has been slow. Despite significant reductions in overall unemployment, about one in seven African American workers in the state is unemployed. Others have stopped looking for work and have fallen out of the labor force altogether, adding to the human cost of an economic collapse and slow economic recovery that has taken a much greater toll on African Americans than whites. The devastating impact on Mississippi workers of all races

demands strong federal job-creation efforts, as highlighted in *From Free-fall to Stagnation: Five Years after the Start of the Great Recession, Extraordinary Policy Measures Are Still Needed, but Are Not Forthcoming*, by EPI's Josh Bivens, Andrew Fieldhouse, and Heidi Shierholz (February 2013).

Methodology note

Races and ethnicities are presented in mutually exclusive categories, i.e., white refers to non-Hispanic whites and black refers to non-Hispanic blacks. The Bureau of Labor Statistics publishes national annual white, black, and Hispanic unemployment rates; however, its estimates are not based upon mutually exclusive categories and thus will differ slightly from the figures published in this paper.

About the author

Mary Gable joined the Economic Policy Institute in 2006. She coordinates activities of state and local organizations through the Economic Analysis and Research Network (EARN) and analyzes public policies affecting low-income people. She previously directed programs serving people in poverty nationwide and conducted an independent evaluation of New Jersey's welfare program. Her areas of interest include poverty, social services and welfare policy, child care, and low-wage work. She has a B.A. in political science from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and an M.P.A. in social services and welfare policy and in gender and public policy from Columbia University.

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