

Low-Wage Workers in the South and the Myth of Post-Racialism

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Prior Research

- 5 million hourly workers earned the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 in 2013.
- Almost 2 million more earned less than the federal minimum wage.
- In all 3.3 million hourly workers earned at or below \$7.25.

- Half of the workers were between the age of 16 and 24.
- Nearly one-quarter of workers were teenagers between the ages of 16 and 19.

○ The **top five occupations** for workers earning at or below minimum wage were:

1. food preparation and service related occupations,
2. sales and related occupations,
3. personal care and service occupations,
4. office and administrative support occupations, building and grounds cleaning and
5. maintenance occupations.

Low-wage workers are overrepresented in the South.

- In both the West South Central (**Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas and Louisiana**) and East South Central (**Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi and Tennessee**) regions, 6.3 percent of hourly workers make the federal minimum or less—the highest rates among the nine Census-Bureau-defined regions.

- States like **Mississippi** and **Tennessee** had the largest share of workers earning wages that put them below the federal poverty threshold for a family of four at 33.7 percent and 32.8 percent, respectively.

The Present Study

- American Community Survey (2013)
- Heads of Household
- 25-64
- Blacks and Whites
- South
- Low-wage worker

- About **34 percent** of low-wage **white workers** lived in the South in 2013 compared to nearly **64 percent** of low-wage **black workers**.

- About **44 percent** of low-wage **white workers** in the South were **male** and **56 percent** were white **females**.
- **Forty percent** of low-wage black workers in the South were **male** and **60 percent** were black **females**.

- Nearly **66 percent** of low-wage **white workers** in the South **owned homes** compared to **47 percent** of low-wage **black workers**.

- **Homes owned** by low-wage **white workers** in the South were **worth about \$50,000 more** than homes earned by low-wage **black workers** in the South.

- Low-wage **white workers** reported **interests, dividends, and rental income** of about **\$602** compared to **\$64** for low-wage **black workers**.

Implications of Life at the Bottom

- Limited educational opportunities
- Prison Pipeline
- Accumulation of debt
- Asset poverty

Recommendations

- Address anti-unionism sentiment
- Honest dialogues on race
- Consider income and assets

- Durable economic policies
- Cooperatives
- Adequate enforcement
- End privatization of prisons and public education

- Close the gap between society as it is and society as it should be.