Fighting Urban Poverty

Is more federal aid needed?

This year’s unrest in Ferguson, Mo., and Baltimore, arising from alleged police misconduct in the deaths of black men, cast a light on impoverished conditions not only in those cities but in urban areas throughout the country. From Philadelphia and New York to Kansas City and Los Angeles, joblessness, poor schools, crime, blight, high incarceration rates and segregated housing patterns have helped drive millions of Americans — many of them minorities — into poverty. In some localities, up to a third of the residents subsist below the federal poverty line. Many experts say economic growth is essential to combat urban poverty. But beyond that, policymakers are divided on how to help the poor, with some advocating a higher minimum wage and more government social programs and others stressing personal responsibility and economic incentives to spur business growth in inner cities. With Congress gridlocked, some states and cities are moving on their own to help the urban poor, including increasing the minimum wage.
**THE ISSUES**

- Would more federal aid reduce poverty in urban areas?
- Do federal housing programs reduce urban poverty?
- Should the business community play a larger role in solving urban poverty?

**BACKGROUND**

**Expanding Slums**

Industrialization led to overcrowding, disease and urban crime.

**Depression Era**

Urban poverty rose sharply in the 1930s.

**“War on Poverty”**

Federal education, housing, health care and job programs aimed to help the poor.

**Recession Takes Root**

Long-term unemployment reached historic levels in 2007-09.

**CURRENT SITUATION**

**Congressional Impasse**

Advocates say a gridlocked Congress probably won’t act on urban poverty.

**Workplace Issues**

Better overtime and job-scheduling policies could help low-wage workers.

**Presidential Candidates**

Some 2016 candidates are discussing crime and poverty.

**OUTLOOK**

**Economy Is Key**

Poverty alleviation depends on economic growth, experts say.

**SIDEBARS AND GRAPHICS**

Poverty Rose Nationwide in Early 2000s

More than one in four Americans are poor.

Black Poverty Rate Twice That of Whites, Asians

More than a quarter of African-Americans lived below the poverty line in 2013.

Earned Income Tax Credit Garners Bipartisan Support

The program aided 28 million low-income workers in 2013.

Number of High-Poverty Neighborhoods Rises

Nearly 40 percent of the urban poor live in “high-poverty” areas.

Chronology

Key events since 1876.

Jobs Program Helps Men Reform Their Lives

“Our core belief is that work works.”

At Issue:

Would raising the minimum wage reduce poverty?

**FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

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Bibliography

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Additional articles.

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Cover: Getty Images/Scott Olson
To begin to understand urban poverty, consider the lives of Tianna Gaines-Turner and her husband. They both have jobs but live in public housing in inner-city Philadelphia, one of the most impoverished big cities in the United States. (See graphic, p. 608.) He earns $8.25 an hour working full time at a grocery deli counter; she earns $10.88 an hour working part-time providing child care. Together they typically bring home about $300 a week.

As Gaines-Turner told the House Budget Committee last year, that’s not enough to cover living expenses for themselves and their three children, all of whom have medical problems. The family must supplement its income with food benefits provided by the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly known as the food stamp program.1

“No one who lives in poverty wants to stay on government assistance programs,” she testified. “We want to be independent. We want to work hard — and believe in the American Dream that if I work every day, get up at 7 in the morning, and my husband gets up, and we work, that we’ll have the same jobs benefits, wages, paid sick leave as everyone else.” 2

That’s long been the dream not only of Gaines-Turner but also of the estimated 45 million Americans throughout the nation who subsist on annual incomes below the federal poverty line, this year defined as $24,250 for a family of four. 3

Yet, 50 years after President Lyndon B. Johnson declared a “war on poverty” and mustered an arsenal of federal programs to wage it, urban poverty — much of it deep, concentrated and seemingly intractable — persists in neighborhoods stretching from New York, Philadelphia, Los Angeles and Seattle to Rust Belt Midwest cities struggling with job losses and blight in the wake of the 2007-09 recession.

According to a study by City Observatory, an urban policy think tank in Portland, Ore., the number of high-poverty urban neighborhoods in the nation’s 51 largest cities tripled — to 3,100 — between 1970 and 2010. 4

Moreover, the number of poor persons living in those areas doubled over the 40 years, the study found. And two-thirds of the tracts defined as high poverty areas in 1970 remained so in 2010. 5

“Poverty rates are still much higher than they should be, inexcusably high,” says Valerie Wilson, director of the Program on Race, Ethnicity and the Economy at the Economic Policy Institute, a liberal think tank in Washington. “That’s partly due to the Great Recession and the slow pace of recovery.”

Sociologists Karl Alexander and Linda Olson of Johns Hopkins University note that “poverty is colorblind” and extends beyond the urban black community. “Many whites live side by side African-Americans in some of the country’s poorest urban neighborhoods,” they said. 6

Still, poverty hits blacks hardest. In 2013, the latest year for which federal figures are available, the poverty level for blacks was 27.2 percent and 23.5 percent for Hispanics — roughly twice the 12.3 percent rate for whites. 7

The federal data also show that black children are four times more likely to be living in poverty than white or Asian children, according to a new study. 8

Overall, the analysis found that 20 percent of U.S. children, or 14.7 million, lived in poverty in 2013. At the same time, the poverty rate declined for Hispanic, white and Asian children. The rate for black children held steady at about 38 percent, making them significantly more likely than other demographic groups to live in poverty. In addition, the total number of impoverished black children (4.2 million)
appears to have surpassed the total number of impoverished white children (4.1 million), even though there are three times as many white children as black children. 9

In the South, 16.1 percent of the population lived under the poverty threshold in 2013. The rate in the West was 14.7 percent; Midwest, 12.9 percent; and Northeast, 12.7 percent. 10

In recent months, urban poverty has made front-page headlines as a backdrop to civil unrest following allegations of police misconduct against African-Americans in Ferguson, Mo., Baltimore, Cleveland, Oakland, Calif., and elsewhere. But what experts define as the underlying causes of poverty — racism, crime, unemployment, poor schools, family breakdown, high incarceration rates among black men, and urban blight, among them — long predate those recent episodes. And solutions offered by advocacy groups, policy analysts and political candidates remain elusive.

Historically, ideas for reducing poverty have broken along partisan and ideological lines, with liberals typically advocating more social programs and federal spending, and conservatives calling for greater personal responsibility and a smaller governmental role. Both sides agree, however, that alleviating urban poverty depends significantly on economic growth and the nation’s ability to provide more, and better-paying, jobs.

Six years after the end of the 2007-09 recession, unemployment remains high in many impoverished urban areas, where, according to one study, 83 percent of the short-term unemployed and 87 percent of the long-term unemployed live. 11

It’s been nearly half a century since a Johnson initiative, the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, commonly known as the Kerner Commission, looked into the causes of violence and civil unrest that had been ravaging cities in the 1960s. 12

That commission made its famous observation that “our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white — separate and unequal.” It offered recommendations for addressing the problems of urban poverty and unrest, but they never gained much political traction. 13

In the years following the Kerner Commission’s report, the nation began a decades-long crackdown on crime that led to longer sentences, often for drug crimes, that fell disproportionately on urban black men. “Blacks are much more likely to be arrested for drugs and other offenses, and they are now about five times more likely to go to prison than whites, a disparity far out of proportion to racial differences in criminal offending,” wrote Bruce Western, a professor of sociology and criminal justice at Harvard University. 14

In a study of the “prison-to-poverty” cycle, University of Washington sociologist Becky Pettit documented how poverty leads to crime and how prisons in turn fuel poverty. The cycle is particularly pronounced among black men. In 1980, some 10 percent of young African-American men who dropped out of high school were in prison or jail, according to the study. By 2008, the rate was 37 percent. 15

“While elected officials talked tough on crime, economic catastrophe unfolded in American cities,” Western said. “Urban employment in manufacturing declined. When the jobs left, people followed, often leaving behind neighborhoods of concentrated poverty. In Baltimore from 1978 to 2014, the population dropped from 815,000 to 620,000. The city lost 90,000 jobs. Four years after the 2008 recession, a third of the city’s population, mostly African American, was on food stamps.”

In Detroit, the city’s poverty rate is 38 percent, but a United Way study found the rate is even higher when the cost of living — for housing, child care, food, transportation and health care — is factored in. Among families in Detroit, which has been hit hard...
by job losses in the auto industry, massive population outflows and grinding urban blight, 67 percent live under the poverty line or are “asset-limited.”

By asset-limited, the United Way study is referring to households like Gaines-Turner’s that have working members who are one missed paycheck from poverty. “The core of the problem is that these jobs do not pay enough to afford the basics of housing, child care, food, health care, and transportation,” the study said.

As economists, politicians and others debate urban poverty, here are some of the questions being asked:

**Would more federal aid reduce poverty in urban areas?**

Ten major anti-poverty programs and tax credits account for about one-sixth of all federal spending, according to the Congressional Budget Office.

During the past 40 years, federal spending for these programs — cash payments for, or assistance in, obtaining health care, food, housing or education — has more than tripled as a share of gross domestic product. Adjusted for inflation, total spending for low-income people rose from $55 billion in 1972 (when just five of the 10 programs existed) to $588 billion in 2012.

The urban poor face problems that differ from those of low-income residents of rural and suburban areas.

“We have yet to win the war on urban poverty, and several challenges persist for poor city residents, including concentrated poverty, crime, affordable-housing shortages, a lack of investment in good public-transit systems, job loss and segregation,” according to Tracey Ross, a senior policy analyst at the Center for American Progress, a liberal Washington think tank.

Although analysts generally agree that government has a role to play in combating urban poverty, they disagree — largely along ideological lines — about what that role should be and how much it should cost.

“While government anti-poverty programs have had many successes, more can clearly be done,” says Arloc Sherman, a senior fellow at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a Washington think tank that analyzes government spending. “This is particularly important because we know poverty affects people’s present well-being and future opportunities to succeed and contribute to society.”

Sherman points to studies that show safety net programs — such as Social Security, housing subsidies, tax credits and food stamps — have lifted millions of Americans above the poverty line.

Michael Tanner, a senior fellow at the libertarian Cato Institute, agrees government has a role but says, “It’s not the one we’re pursuing, of just giving money to people.”

Says Tanner, “We haven’t done a very good job of helping people get out of poverty.” The focus should be on helping people prepare for and find jobs by providing job training, encouraging education, and discouraging pregnancy outside of marriage, he says. That is “not a moral judgment — it’s an economic one,” he adds, because households headed by a single mother are more likely to be poor compared with married-couple families.

Many conservatives make similar arguments, particularly about the need to focus on family structure. Promoting work and restoring marriage “would be a better battle plan for eradicating poverty in America than spending more money on failed programs,” said Robert Rector, a senior research fellow at the conservative Heritage Foundation think tank in Washington.

Even those who agree with that premise believe the government must put its focus on employment. Current policies fail to help people become self-sufficient, says Robert Doar, a fellow in poverty studies at the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative think tank in Washington. “I have become more and more focused on programs that build human capital” — particularly job-training and education programs that help prepare young people for work — “that address not just the symptoms but the causes of poverty,” Doar says.

Liberals point to studies showing that

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**Black Poverty Rate Twice That of Whites, Asians**

More than one in four blacks lived below the poverty line in 2013, more than twice the rate of non-Hispanic whites and Asians, according to a Census Bureau survey. Poverty among Hispanics was nearly as high as for blacks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of People Living Below the Poverty Line, by Race, 2013*</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
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<td>White, non-Hispanic</td>
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* The 2013 poverty line was an annual income of $23,834 or less for a family of four.

We need to be strengthening the safety net. But we also need to be finding ways to make work more rewarding in terms of pay and benefits.

For liberals, that means pursuing policies that boost wages. To boost wage-growth and reduce poverty rates, a policy agenda must include provisions to raise the minimum wage, raise the over-time threshold and strengthen workers' collective-bargaining rights, said a study by the Economic Policy Institute.

Do federal housing programs alleviate urban poverty?

Housing is most Americans' largest monthly expense. According to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), "families who spend more than 30 percent of their income on rent or mortgage payments are considered cost burdened and may have difficultyaffording necessities such as food, clothing, transportation and medical care." The department estimates 12 million households pay more than 50 percent of their annual income for housing.

The federal government's three largest rental assistance programs provide more than 4.5 million units of assisted housing. Of those, the vast majority — 87 percent — are in metro areas.

Sherman, of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, says federal housing programs have a demonstrable effect on poverty rates. "Current housing programs lift a particularly high share of those they serve above the poverty line by our estimates but serve a particularly low share of families poor enough to be eligible," he says.

In 2010, about 10 million Americans in 5 million low-income households received housing assistance, according to Sherman's research. Although the number of recipients is lower than for other
President Obama has proposed expanding the EITC to include more workers without children, a plan endorsed by Rep. Paul Ryan, R-Wis., chairman of the powerful House Ways and Means Committee which controls tax legislation. Although a bill has not yet been introduced, Congress will have to take action on extending and enlarging key provisions of the EITC, which are set to run out in 2017.

But others question the cost of expanding the EITC and note its high rate of errors, which critics often characterize as fraud.

The Government Accountability Office (GAO), an independent federal agency that provides auditing and investigative services to Congress, found that the EITC program had an “improper payment error rate” of 24 percent, costing $14.5 billion in fiscal 2013. The GAO did not use the term “fraud” but said the error rate represents “duplicate or erroneous payments, payments to ineligible recipients, or payments for ineligible services,” which also would include taxpayer filing errors and IRS processing errors.

At the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative think tank in Washington that studies the economy and social welfare, poverty studies fellow Robert Doar and research fellow Angela Rachidi said Congress must consider the cost and problems associated with the EITC before expanding it.

“It is rare in American politics that lawmakers from both sides of the aisle support a similar policy proposal, let alone one that costs billions of dollars,” they wrote. “But before jumping on board, lawmakers should consider these issues and determine whether the trade-offs are worth the expense.”

— Jane Fullerton Lemons

Civil rights groups applauded the decision, saying a looser interpretation of the law is crucial to fighting housing discrimination, while critics said the ruling makes it too easy to get claims into court.

Richard Rothstein, a research associate at the Economic Policy Institute, has studied how government policies at all levels have contributed to housing segregation and urban poverty. “We have a myth today that the ghettos in metropolitan areas around the country are what the Supreme Court calls ‘de facto’ — just the accident of the fact that people have not enough income to move into middle class neighborhoods or because real estate agents steered black and white families to different neighborhoods or because there.

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Federal safety net programs, the reach is greater: 37 percent of those recipients were lifted above the poverty line because of the housing assistance.

Sherman says housing programs could be strengthened by expanding the number of government-funded vouchers, which provide the poor with financial help to secure housing.

Providing the opportunity to move into better neighborhoods was at the heart of a Supreme Court case this year concerning the 1968 Fair Housing Act, which made it illegal to refuse to sell or rent dwellings to individuals because of their race, religion, sex or national origin. A Texas group that helps lower-income black families find housing in the Dallas suburbs had accused state officials of violating the act: The families rely on housing vouchers, and landlords receiving federal low-income tax credits are required to accept the vouchers. The fair housing group argued that Texas officials violated the Fair Housing Act when they gave a disproportionate share of the tax credits to landlords in minority neighborhoods, which had the effect of concentrating minorities in low-income areas.

The argument before the Supreme Court was whether people suing under the Fair Housing Act must prove intentional discrimination or merely show that the challenged practice had produced a “disparate impact,” as occurred in Texas. In a 5-4 decision, the court ruled June 25 that lawsuits can proceed even if the purported discrimination was unintentional.

“Housing is more than just a house,” Lewis said. “It’s a fulcrum of opportunity because where you live determines where you go to school, who your neighbors are, how safe your streets are, how easy it is to get to your job, how hard it is to exercise and get healthy foods. It even determines the air you’re breathing every day.”

Another challenge facing low-income housing advocates is gentrification because it can force low-income residents out of affordable urban areas when higher-income homeowners move in. Some big-city mayors are seeking to minimize gentrification’s effects. One study, though, says fears of gentrification are overblown and may be obscuring more significant trends in urban poverty, the most important being the concentration of poverty.

“There are certainly examples of neighborhoods where poor residents have been displaced from their homes by rising prices,” wrote economist Joe Cortright of Impresa, an economic consulting firm. He co-authored the City Observatory report, which concluded that the persistence and spread of poverty — not gentrification — are the biggest issues facing cities. “While such instances of neighborhood change are striking, our study shows they are actually quite rare.”

**Should the business community play a larger role in solving urban poverty?**

Many analysts see private efforts as essential to creating jobs, improving wages and benefits and fostering economic growth.

“There are no silver bullets,” says Jeffrey Buchanan, senior domestic policy adviser at Oxfam America, the U.S. branch of an international organization seeking solutions to poverty. “But with all these things, certainly there’s connectivity. There’s a lot of great examples of companies stepping up and making private commitments to increase their wages or to change their benefit structure to support low-wage working families.”

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**Number of High-Poverty Neighborhoods Rose**

The urban poor are increasingly living in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty, according to a 2014 study. In 1970, 28 percent lived in a “high-poverty” area, defined as a neighborhood with a poverty rate of 30 percent or more. In 2010, 39 percent did. Moreover, the number of high-poverty neighborhoods tripled and their populations doubled during the 40-year period.


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<td>Atlanta</td>
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<td>Baltimore</td>
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<td>Cleveland</td>
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<td>Portland, Ore.</td>
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Source: Joe Cortright, “Lost in Place,” City Observatory, Sept. 12, 2014, [http://tinyurl.com/p2v22jg](http://tinyurl.com/p2v22jg)
Buchanan cited Facebook changing its policy to require its service contractors — “the folks cleaning the office at night or working in the cafeteria or the security guards” — to pay a $15 minimum wage. 36

“As more companies do that,” he added, “it’s going to put pressure on other companies that don’t pay their workers well, that pay poverty level wages, to consider increasing their wages to compete.”

A Microsoft official agreed. “More broadly in the country, obviously there’s been more of a discussion about income inequality, wages and benefits,” said Bradford L. Smith, general counsel of Microsoft, which said in March it would require many of its contract workers to receive 15 paid sick and vacation days. “In this area of paid time off, we’ve concluded that it’s not just good for people, but good for business.” 37

Companies that have said they will raise their starting pay above the federal minimum wage include Wal-Mart, Target, McDonald’s, Gap and Ikea. 38

Some analysts say, however, that increasing the minimum wage could, over the long term, harm the very people it is designed to help.

“Unless higher wages translate into higher productivity, the cost of paying higher wages will tend to lead to higher prices in sectors that employ large numbers of low-wage workers,” which could ultimately lead to job losses, said Reihan Salam, executive editor of the National Review, a conservative magazine. 39

But liberals point out that the low minimum wage means workers have to rely on public assistance; one study noted workers in the bottom 20 percent of wage earners receive more than $45 billion in government assistance each year from the six primary means-tested income-support programs.* 40

The private sector can help impoverished urban neighborhoods in other ways, researchers say. They note the importance of “anchor institutions” — large entities that provide goods and services, create jobs and foster community relations in poor neighborhoods. That could mean opening a department store or supermarket, a hospital or other health care facility, or a school or university. 41 In fact, big-box stores — such as Wal-Mart, Target and Home Depot — have begun to locate in poorer urban areas.

According to Governing, a magazine about state and local government, “The country’s largest retailers have oversaturated rural and suburban America, and companies view urban centers as huge, largely untapped markets. Meanwhile, cities are desperate for the property and sales tax revenue the stores can generate, not to mention the jobs they’ll create and the access to fresh food they can provide at a time when the issue of food deserts has become a national concern.” 42

“It’s like having an anchor in a shopping mall,” said Ed McMahon, senior resident fellow with the Urban Land Institute, a research group in Washington that focuses on land use. “It’s bringing people into the neighborhood.” 43

In Baltimore, the importance of CVS pharmacies to impoverished neighborhoods became apparent after two of its stores were badly damaged by rioters following the funeral of Freddie Gray, a black man whose death protesters blamed on police negligence. Residents and city officials worried that CVS would pull out, eliminating jobs and leaving customers with no convenient place to get medicines. Baltimore City Health Commissioner Leana Wen told NBC News “hundreds, if not thousands” of residents had been affected by the closures of the CVS and other neighboring pharmacies. For many individuals it’s a case of life and death.” 44

In May, CVS announced it will reopen the stores and donate $50,000 to the United Way’s Maryland Unites Fund and the Baltimore Community Foundation’s Fund for Rebuilding Baltimore. 44

* The six programs are the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC); the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), also known as food stamps; the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP); the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC); the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program; and the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program (TANF) or equivalent state and/or local cash assistance programs.

Faith Calhoun and her 9-year-old daughter Olivia, waiting for a bus in Denver, have lived for two years at the Crossing, a transitional housing program for families. The poverty rate in the West rose from 11.8 percent in 2010 to 14.7 percent in 2013.
Doar, of the American Enterprise Institute, says businesses can not only provide employment to urban residents but also offer workforce training.

“The businesses that are really interested in developing their workforce — in other words, they’re willing to take a chance on person A, who they will pay, but they’ll also train and nurture and help grow — are very effective in helping alleviate poverty,” Doar says. “And they’re more effective than businesses that just provide a job.”

Obama’s My Brother’s Keeper Alliance, announced in February 2014, seeks to encourage such training. A private effort funded by American Express and other companies, it provides education, job training and mentoring to young men of color.

Robert Woodson, a black conservative and longtime activist who founded the Washington-based Center for Neighborhood Enterprise in 1981, advocates a “third way” of addressing poverty: investing private capital in alliances focused on creating jobs and getting results.

As he explained in a newspaper column, “The most powerful means to accomplish this goal was not through government programs or large-scale associations and organizations but by identifying indigenous groups that live in the low-income communities and linking them to sources of support and recognition.”

Kevin D. Barlow

BACKGROUND

Expanding Slums

In 1890, social reformer Jacob Riis’ landmark exposé of life in New York City tenements, How the Other Half Lives, opened the eyes of many Americans to the appalling conditions overtaking the nation’s cities.

“Today three-fourths of [New York] people live in the tenements, and the nineteenth century drift of the population to the cities is sending ever-increasing multitudes to crowd them,” he wrote. “The fifteen thousand tenant houses that were the despair of the sanitarian in the past generation have swelled into thirty-seven thousand.”

Riis’ book came at a pivotal time in the history of urban America. Industrialization led to rapid population growth in the cities, as rural residents and European immigrants sought better jobs and pay in urban factories.

As Riis and others documented, overcrowding, disease and crime plagued many urban neighborhoods, and slums expanded. But the Progressive era (about 1890 to 1920) led to measures aimed at alleviating urban poverty: Congress passed legislation to improve sanitation, establish the eight-hour workday, ban child labor and require workers’ compensation for federal employees.

However, not all Americans shared equally in these advances. Nine in 10 African-Americans lived in the South at the turn of the century, where Jim Crow laws legalized entrenched segregation. The Supreme Court in 1896 had upheld the power of states to create “separate but equal” societies in its infamous Plessy v. Ferguson ruling.

The South’s racial violence, oppression and lack of jobs spurred the “Great Migration” of about 5 million blacks from the region to Northern and Western states.
1876-1929 Industrialization leads to rapid urban growth, fueling poverty and sparking reform efforts.

1876
Fifteenth Amendment grants suffrage to African-American men. . . . First “Jim Crow” segregation law passed in Tennessee, mandating separation of blacks and whites, a policy upheld by the Supreme Court in Plessy v. Ferguson (1896).

1900
Some 30 million people, or 30 percent of the U.S. population, live in cities, many in slums.

1907
A record 1.25 million immigrants arrive at Ellis Island in New York.

1911
Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in New York City kills 146, mostly young women, propelling movement to improve working conditions.

1915
“Great Migration” of blacks from the South to Northern cities begins.

1929-1964 Great Depression hits; World War II spurs economic recovery, but poverty persists.

1929
Stock market crashes.

1932
Half of black Americans are unemployed.

1933
Franklin D. Roosevelt becomes president and initiates the New Deal.

1938
Fair Labor Standards Act establishes minimum wage and overtime pay.

1941
U.S. entry into World War II leads to creation of 17 million jobs and spurs recovery from the Depression.

1954
Supreme Court overturns “separate but equal” doctrine with landmark Brown v. Board of Education ruling, helping set the stage for the civil rights movement.

1964
President Lyndon B. Johnson declares “war on poverty,” launches Great Society programs.

1964
Food stamp program becomes permanent.

1965
Medicare, a health care program for the elderly, and Medicaid, for the poor, established.

1968
Kerner Commission concludes that America is moving toward racially separate societies. . . . Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy assassinated; widespread unrest follows. . . . Civil Rights and Fair Housing acts passed.

1975-2007 Social programs come under scrutiny.

1975
Earned Income Tax Credit provides alternative to cash welfare.

1981
President Ronald Reagan takes office, calls for welfare cuts.

1993
Bill Clinton becomes president after campaigning “to end welfare as we know it.”

1994
Clinton signs Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, later criticized for fueling mass incarceration.

1996
Clinton signs major welfare overhaul that replaces Aid to Families with Dependent Children with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

2009-Present Massive job losses and plunge in home values occur amid steep recession.

2009
Congress raises minimum wage to $7.25 an hour. . . . Unemployment peaks at 10 percent, hitting double digits for the first time in 26 years.

2010
Long-term unemployment reaches a historic high of 6.7 million people, or 45 percent of the unemployed.

2014
Fourteen states and the District of Columbia enact minimum wage increases.

2015
President Obama calls for raising the minimum wage from $7.25 to $10.10 an hour and guaranteeing paid sick leave for workers. . . . Supreme Court reaffirms Fair Housing Act, and Obama administration says it will enforce the act by requiring cities to scrutinize their housing patterns for racial bias.
Jobs Program Helps Men Reform Their Lives

“Our core belief is that work works.”

At age 39, Nazerine Griffin recalled, he was using and selling drugs and living in a homeless shelter in New York City. 1

Then Griffin joined the transitional jobs program Ready, Willing & Able (RWA), which mainly helps formerly homeless or incarcerated men. In New York City, the program’s “men in blue,” wearing distinctive uniforms, regularly clean 150 miles of city streets. In Philadelphia, they tend Fairmount and LOVE parks and Rittenhouse Square. 2

Now, after completing the nine- to 12-month program and working his way up at RWA, Griffin is director of the Brooklyn center where he once was a client. 3

“We do all we can to give these men the tools they need to live a better, healthier, a more productive life, one that brings them some happiness,” he said. “Our core belief . . . is that work works. Our men need a job, they need a home, and they need the ability to deal effectively with the changes and challenges that life throws at them.” 4

RWA was founded in 1990 by George and Harriett McDonald's Doe Fund, which provides jobs, housing and food to the needy, coupled with social services, job training and career development. George McDonald was an apparel industry executive when he started the fund during an upturn in homelessness; it now operates three shelters in New York and one in Philadelphia. Participants are barred from using drugs or alcohol, a policy enforced through random drug testing.

RWA also has low-income housing programs as well as programs for youths and veterans. The Doe Fund operates several so-called enterprise projects designed to provide jobs and training. All the programs combined serve more than 1,000 people a day. Funding comes from a variety of sources — 33 percent from private donations, 41 percent from city contracts, 10 percent from government grants and the rest from other sources, including revenue from enterprise projects. 5

Those projects put RWA’s clients in the workforce, provide services and generate income that goes back into the programs’ coffers. The men operate a pest management company, collect leftover cooking oil that is recycled into biodiesel and operate a “one-stop shop” that provides business services such as direct mail, data processing and market research. 6

RWA began by serving the homeless, but it has evolved to take in men recently released from prison who have nowhere to live. A 2010 Harvard University study found the RWA program reduced criminal recidivism by 60 percent. 7

The program is “targeted at the hardest group in America right now, which is men and urban men,” says Robert Doar, a fellow in poverty studies at the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative think tank in Washington.

Doar became familiar with RWA through his previous job as commissioner of New York City’s Human Resources Administration, where he observed many approaches to alleviating poverty. In 2014, Doar called RWA a model for other anti-

Depression Era

The federal government began efforts to alleviate poverty in the 1930s with the onset of the Great Depression. When President Franklin D. Roosevelt took office in 1933, more than 13 million people, nearly 25 percent of the workforce, were unemployed, including about half of African-Americans. He responded with the New Deal — a series of measures designed to reinvigorate the economy. 55

When Roosevelt delivered his second Inaugural Address in 1937 — declaring that “I see one-third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished” — no official measurement existed for what constituted poverty. 56

The Depression led to assisted housing programs to

states between 1915 and 1960; before World War II, the majority moved to Northern cities such as Chicago and Detroit; after World War II, the most popular destinations became Western cities such as Los Angeles and San Francisco. 52

But racial conditions were not much better in the North and West. In his research into state-sponsored residential segregation, Rothstein of the Economic Policy Institute has tallied the barriers people of color faced through the years, including zoning rules that classified white neighborhoods as residential and black neighborhoods as commercial or industrial; segregated public housing projects that replaced integrated low-income areas; and suburban racial homogeneity enforced by the Federal Housing Administration with policies such as denying mortgage insurance to blacks or backing developments with racially restrictive deed covenants. 53

While blacks in the South had long experienced white hostility, they often received similar treatment in the North, both before the Great Migration and for decades thereafter. In Baltimore, when a black lawyer tried to move into a white neighborhood in 1910, the city council and mayor responded to white protests by passing a residential segregation ordinance. Baltimore’s mayor explained: “Blacks should be quarantined in isolated slums in order to reduce the incidence of civil disturbance, to prevent the spread of communicable disease into the nearby White neighborhoods, and to protect property values among the White majority.” 54
July 17, 2015

shelter the needy and to create construction jobs. In addition, the minimum wage, labor standards and the rights of unions to bargain collectively for wages and benefits also appeared.

In 1954, the Supreme Court’s Brown v. Board of Education ruling overturned the “separate but equal” policy in education, paving the way for the 1960s civil rights movement that would coincide with efforts to alleviate urban poverty.

“War on Poverty”

Just months before his assassination in November 1963, President John F. Kennedy directed his Council of Economic Advisers to recommend ways to fight domestic poverty.

His successor, President Johnson, took up the mantle by launching the so-called War on Poverty in his first State of the Union address on Jan. 8, 1964. He called for many of the same programs that advocates push for today: better schools and housing, better health care and job training. “Very often a lack of jobs and money is not the cause of poverty, but the symptom,” Johnson said.

The cornerstone of the war on Poverty was the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, which established Head Start, Job Corps, Community Action, Legal Services and other programs. During this era, Medicare, a federal health care plan for the elderly, and Medicaid, for the poor and disabled, were established, and food stamps became permanent.

Some of the programs took aim at urban poverty, including legislation to build low-income housing and prohibit racial discrimination there. Critics contended the efforts to build public housing exacerbated the problems they sought to alleviate by warehousing urban poor in ghettos.

Charles Murray, a libertarian scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, contended in his 1984 book, Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950-1980 that as spending on the poor increased, progress against poverty decreased. “We tried to provide more for the poor and produced more poor instead,” Murray wrote. “We tried to remove the barriers to escape from poverty, and inadvertently built a trap.”

Harvard University sociologist William Julius Wilson offered a different analysis in his 1996 book, When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor, contending the problems are
rooted in society’s structures rather than the poor themselves. Dramatic changes in employment patterns and the globalization of the economy also must be taken into account, he wrote, because the loss of industrial jobs, the movement of jobs overseas, the movement of jobs from inner cities to suburbs and other factors have reduced employment opportunities. 62

Race riots in Chicago, Detroit, Washington and elsewhere that followed the 1968 assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in some ways presaged what happened this year in places such as Ferguson, Mo., where entrenched poverty and a lack of jobs fueled protesters’ rage.

As a June 3, 2015, report by the Baltimore Afro-American stated, “The seeds of disillusionment, hurt and frustration that gave birth to the ’68 riots were in many ways responsible for the unrest that bloomed almost 50 years later.” 63

President Johnson’s War on Poverty continued under Republican President Richard M. Nixon, whose administration created the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program, which provided cash assistance to needy families. In addition, the food stamp program begun during the John F. Kennedy-Johnson era was expanded. 64

High unemployment in the mid-1970s led to the creation of large-scale public service employment programs, the first such government job-creation effort since the Depression-era Civilian Conservation Corps and Works Progress Administration.

In addition, the 1970s saw several other anti-poverty efforts, including:

- The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) for low-wage workers. 65
- Section 8 rental housing assistance for the poor.
- The Supplemental Security Income program, which provides stipends to the needy aged, blind, and disabled.

The anti-poverty programs begun during the Johnson era came under fire in the 1980s from Republican President Ronald Reagan. “My friends, some years ago, the federal government declared war on poverty, and poverty won,” Reagan said in his 1988 State of the Union address. 66

According to a Congressional Research Service report, the 1980s saw rising concerns about an urban “underclass,” defined as a group excluded from the mainstream of society, suffering from “behavioral as well as income deficiencies.” Attention focused on the inner cities, where high rates of poverty, crime, single parenting and welfare use disproportionately affected African-Americans living there. 67

When Democrat Bill Clinton campaigned for president in the early 1990s, he called for changes in the welfare system coupled with greater personal responsibility. In 1996, he signed a sweeping overhaul of the nation’s welfare programs — the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act. The act started the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program, which placed time limits on welfare assistance, and made other changes to the welfare system including stricter conditions for food stamps eligibility, reductions in immigrant welfare assistance, and work requirements for welfare recipients.

But another Clinton-era policy, a major crime bill, contributed to high incarceration rates because it mandated lengthy prison sentences, particularly for drug crimes. As the links between incarceration and poverty have become clearer, Democrats and Republicans alike have called for criminal justice reforms as a key to providing the opportunities needed to alleviate the kind of entrenched urban poverty that is creating unrest. 68
Recession Takes Root

In the first decade of the 21st century, the United States plunged into the most severe economic downturn since the Depression, a recession that lasted from December 2007 to June 2009. 69

During the crisis, housing values plummeted, job losses mounted and unemployment increased. Long-term unemployment — those out of work for more than 27 weeks — reached historical levels, peaking at 6.7 million — or 45.1 percent of the unemployed — in 2010. 70 In response, Congress expanded federal aid for low-income Americans.

But most anti-poverty policies have not been significantly modified since the 1990s. 71

Although the economy is improving, unemployment remains high in cities, where 83 percent of the short-term unemployed and 87 percent of the long-term unemployed live. Since 2010, the share of urban residents who have been unemployed long term has increased, widening the gap between rural and urban unemployment. 72

The problem is acute for black Americans. In 2013, the nation’s overall unemployment rate was 7.4 percent; for African-Americans, 13.1 percent. And blacks had the highest rates among adult men (12.9 percent), adult women (11.3 percent) and teens (38.8 percent).73

The pace of the recovery has been slow, leading to calls from the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s family, Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Rodham Clinton and others for a Cabinet-level “poverty czar” who would coordinate anti-poverty efforts across the government’s various agencies. “As my father often said, ’The time is always right to do what is right,’ ” Martin Luther King III said. 74

CURRENT
SITUATION

Promise Zones

Obama in 2013 introduced “Promise Zones,” a program that awards grants, technical assistance and tax incentives to impoverished communities. Under the program, Obama said, “the federal government will partner with and invest in communities to . . . create jobs, leverage private investment, increase economic activity, expand educational opportunities, and reduce violent crime.” 75

In 2014, the first zones were established in San Antonio, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, southeastern Kentucky and the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma; in April 2015, Obama announced eight more zones.

In Philadelphia, the zone attracted approximately $30 million in federal, state and private funding, according to HUD. The money went to, among other things, career training and placement for youths who have been involved
in the criminal justice system, loans for food-based entrepreneurs and the renovation of 48 homes at Mt. Vernon Manor, a nonprofit affordable housing community, HUD said. 76

Critics, however, deride the Obama effort as inadequately funded and say it’s a pale imitation of former Republican HUD Secretary Jack Kemp’s “enterprise zones.” The 1980s Republican approach offered tax incentives and regulatory relief for businesses that would provide jobs and commerce in impoverished inner-city and rural areas.

In addition to the “Promise Zone” idea, Obama, in his Jan. 20 State of the Union address, called on Congress to pass several measures that advocates say would help the working and urban poor. They include:

• Raising the federal minimum wage from $7.25 to $10.10 an hour.
• Guaranteeing paid sick leave along with expanding paid family and medical leave.
• Eliminating the gender gap in pay for women.

In an analysis by congressional district of how many workers would benefit from a higher minimum wage, Oxfam America found a “remarkably diverse” mix of urban and rural locales. Among the urban areas with the highest concentrations of low-wage workers: East Los Angeles, Dallas-Fort Worth and the Bronx, N.Y. 80

Some metro regions — including Los Angeles, San Francisco and New York — had areas with both the highest and lowest concentrations of low-wage workers.

The U.S. minimum wage ranks third-lowest among the 34 member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), which seeks to stimulate growth among high-income economies. Talking with reporters in October 2014, Labor Secretary Tom Perez called the situation embarrassing. 81

Some states and cities are not waiting for their federal counterparts to act on the minimum wage. Currently, 29 states and the District of Columbia mandate a higher minimum than does the federal government. 82

Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Rhode Island, Vermont, West Virginia and the District of Columbia enacted minimum wage increases during their 2014 legislative sessions.

In addition, voters in Alaska, Arkansas, Nebraska and South Dakota approved minimum wage increases through ballot initiatives. 83

Workplace Issues

Other issues with ramifications for urban areas include:

• Reforming the criminal justice system. The House Judiciary Committee has begun looking at ways to improve criminal justice, including changing laws that allegedly over-criminalize certain behaviors, revamping sentencing guidelines, improving prisons and protecting citizens through improved criminal procedures and policing strategies — all issues stemming from the police incidents in Ferguson and Baltimore. 84
• Raising the overtime threshold. Obama recently announced proposed changes to federal regulations on overtime pay. The Labor Department estimates the move could raise the wages

Continued on p. 618
Would raising the minimum wage help alleviate poverty?

The federal minimum wage is one of our country’s basic protections against poverty. It ensures that regular work — regardless of the type of job, the worker’s circumstances or macroeconomic conditions — is a means to a decent quality of life.

But because the federal government sets the minimum wage at a specific amount, its buying power erodes each year as prices increase. This means more workers face falling into poverty unless policymakers raise the minimum wage.

Research has consistently confirmed that raising the minimum wage significantly and sizably reduced the poverty rate. The paper’s empirical analysis concluded that every 10 percent increase in the minimum wage reduced the share of the population living in poverty by 2.9 percent.

The findings suggest that increasing the federal minimum wage from the current $7.25 to $10 or more would reduce the number of people living in poverty by millions.

Critics of raising the minimum wage sometimes contend that it is ineffective at combating poverty because many poor people do not work. This claim is misleading. A significant portion — roughly 42 percent — of those in poverty are either children under age 18 or persons age 65 or older.

Among employable working-age adults — individuals ages 18 to 64 who are not retired, in school or disabled — nearly two-thirds (63 percent) work, and more than 40 percent work full time. For these individuals, raising the minimum wage will directly increase their incomes.

Moreover, because many poor children have a parent who works in a low-wage job, increasing the minimum wage simultaneously reduces both the adult poverty rate and the child poverty rate.

Raising low-wage workers’ pay will also reduce some families’ need for public assistance, freeing up resources that can then be used to strengthen anti-poverty programs, or make investments in public infrastructure, research and education that will help grow the economy over the long term.

Effectively fighting poverty requires a two-pronged approach: social safety net programs that provide resources to those either unable to work or who have fallen on hard times and labor standards like the minimum wage that ensure work remains adequately rewarding.

The academic evidence is pretty clear. A review of more than 100 studies on the minimum wage for the National Bureau of Economic Research in Cambridge, Mass., concluded that 85 percent of studies found raising the minimum wage led to negative employment effects. Neumark and Wascher wrote that the preponderance of evidence shows that a higher wage leads to “disemployment” — fewer jobs — especially for the least-skilled groups.

If we really want to reduce poverty, some more effective things we can do including reduce taxes and regulation to increase job creation, reform education, reduce overcriminalization and incarceration of the poor and stabilize family formation. But raising the minimum wage is simply good intention gone bad.
of nearly 5 million people making up to $50,440 a year who work more than 40 hours a week. 85

Many employees now receiving as little as $455 a week, or $23,660 a year — below the federal poverty line for a family of four — currently don’t receive overtime pay because they are classified as managers. 86 “This is probably the most significant step they can take to raise wages for millions of workers,” said Bill Samuel, director of legislative affairs for the AFL-CIO. 87

• Requiring predictable scheduling. In November 2014, San Francisco became the first jurisdiction to regulate how employers provide schedules for hourly workers. 88

The difficulties of living without a predictable work schedule — such as arranging child care, holding a second job or taking classes — have been documented by studies and by those living in such situations. And those issues can have an impact on earnings. 89

“This variability of work hours contributes to income instability and thus adversely affects not only household consumption but general macroeconomic performance,” concluded a study from the Economic Policy Institute. 90

Other jurisdictions considering following San Francisco’s lead include Delaware, the District of Columbia, Michigan and New York, where the state attorney general has investigated retailers for their “on-call” scheduling practices. 91

Meanwhile, 17 American companies, led by international coffee chain Starbucks and including Microsoft, CVS Health and Walmart, announced plans in July to collectively employ 100,000 more young Americans over the next three years. Companies participating in the so-called 100,000 Opportunities Initiative will create new full-time positions and internship programs and participate in citywide job fairs aimed at Americans ages 16 to 24. 92

A number of participating companies, such as Hilton Worldwide and Walgreen’s, have developed programs to employ thousands of young Americans in their respective sectors. Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz donated $3.4 million from his company and his and his wife’s foundation in 2014 to coffee barista and retail training for at risk youth around the country. 93

“As business leaders, I believe we have a critical role to play in hiring more Opportunity Youth” — those not employed or in school — “and offering these young people excellent training, and the chance to dream big and reach their aspirations,” said Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz. 94

In a separate op-ed, Schultz and his wife, Sheri, highlighted how the successes of former participants from their foundation’s programs showed that teaching workplace skills could enable youth to overcome economic hardships and stay in school. “While some have lost hope in this population, blaming them and their families for creating their own problems, we believe these young people represent a significant untapped resource of productivity and talent,” they wrote. 95

Presidental Candidates

The incendiary incidents involving the deaths of black men in Baltimore, Ferguson and elsewhere have prompted the 2016 presidential candidates to begin discussing crime and poverty, though mostly in general terms. 96

Following the racially motivated shooting deaths of nine people in a South Carolina church in June, Hillary Clinton said, “Despite our best efforts and our highest hopes, America’s long struggle with race is far from finished. We can’t hide from hard truths about race and justice. We have to name them, own them and change them.” 97

Clinton made her remarks in a Missouri church not far from Ferguson, where the police shooting of Michael Brown, an 18-year-old unarmed black man less than a year earlier led to days of sometimes violent protests that sparked a national discussion about police tactics, urban poverty and the relationship between the two.

Democrat Martin O’Malley, a former mayor of Baltimore and governor of Maryland, has defended his tough-on-crime record that some contend contributed to the protests in that city. 98

On the Republican side, former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush so far has focused his poverty message on calling for two-parent families and reforming education. 99

Sen. Marco Rubio of Florida has said he would consolidate federal funding for anti-poverty programs into one agency and turn those funds over to the states. 100

Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky has long advocated criminal justice reforms such as rolling back mandatory sentences and restoring voting rights for felons, along with creating “economic freedom zones” that would lower individual, corporate and payroll tax rates in impoverished areas in an attempt to attract businesses. 101

Issues surrounding poverty and income inequality don’t typically rise to the top of the agenda for presidential candidates, but advocates hope they will during the 2016 election cycle. 102

Says Melissa Boteach, vice president of the Poverty to Prosperity Program at the Center for American Progress, “It’s up to citizens to hold their elected officials accountable to debate these issues and act on these issues as part of the next election cycle.”

Economy Is Key

Although poverty, particularly urban poverty, has garnered renewed public attention, the outlook ultimately depends on one factor — the economy.

“Poverty alleviation is very dependent on job availability and economic
growth,” says Doar of the conservative American Enterprise Institute.

“When the economy was growing, the wind was at our back and we were able to help a lot more people,” he says. “And when it’s not growing, when jobs are scarce, you can have the nicest program in the world, but if you can’t find people work, they’re going to be struggling.”

Cooper of the liberal Economic Policy Institute agrees that progress depends on how the economy fares as it recovers from the recession. If conditions keep getting better, more jobs and higher wages — key factors needed to combat urban poverty — should follow.

“If the economy continues to stay on course, then we should, in theory, start to see poverty go back down again,” he says.

With Obama and the 2016 candidates discussing urban poverty, Cooper says he expects the political spotlight to remain on poverty and income inequality. 103

“These questions focusing on trying to raise pay, trying to raise incomes for folks, are going to be the primary discussion, absent some other major challenge that the country faces, for the foreseeable future,” he says. “Whoever is elected president in 2016 is still going to be dealing with this question of how do we raise wages, how do we reduce income inequality.”

Woodson, the neighborhood activist, has grown weary of the partisan battles and hopes the country can move beyond them when it comes to helping the urban poor. He has accompanied Rep. Ryan to impoverished areas so the Wisconsin congressman could see firsthand what urban poverty looks like. 104

“I’ve got renewed enthusiasm that change is possible,” Woodson says. “I don’t care about the history of racism, I don’t care about what people’s motivations are,” he says. “It’s essential to move beyond the ideological divide, Woodson said. While that may prove difficult in an election-year climate, he acknowledges, “I’m eternally optimistic. I believe that we can make anything happen that we choose.”

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Notes

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23 Ibid.
26 Sherman and Trisi, op. cit.
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64 Falk and Spar, op. cit.
65 Ibid.
67 Falk and Spar, op. cit.
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72 Schaefer, op. cit.
FOR MORE INFORMATION

Baltimore CASH Campaign, 217 E. Redwood St., Suite 1500, Baltimore, MD 21202; 443-692-9487; www.baltimoresashcampaign.org/. Coalition that provides free tax preparation and financial advice for low-income individuals and families.

Brookings Institution, 1775 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington, DC 20036; 202-797-6000; www.brookings.edu/research/topics/metropolitan-areas. Centrist think tank that conducts research on urban and poverty issues.

Center for American Progress, 1333 H St., N.W., 10th Floor, Washington, DC 20005; 202-682-1611; www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/view. Liberal think tank that studies a wide range of policy topics, including poverty.

Center for Neighborhood Enterprise, 1625 K St., N.W., Suite 1200, Washington, DC 20006; 202-518-6500; www.cneonline.org. A nonprofit that helps residents of low-income neighborhoods address the problems of their communities.


Druid Heights Community Development Corp., 2140 McCulloh St., Baltimore, MD 21201; 410-523-1350; druidheights.com/. Offers housing, educational and other programs in its Baltimore neighborhood.


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Books

A political scientist's landmark study of poverty in post-World War II America helped spur the War on Poverty.

An eminent Harvard University social scientist examines how widening income gaps affect upward mobility.

A Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist chronicles the lives of the working poor as they try to escape poverty.

A Harvard University sociologist rejects both liberal and conservative theories in an examination of the social structures underlying urban ghettos and the convergence of race and poverty.

Articles

The writer contends those looking for solutions to poverty should understand the structural causes and change the language surrounding the discussion.

A journalist explains how workplace technology has created havoc in the private lives of low-wage workers with no set schedules.

The former executive editor of *The New York Times* interviews the creator of HBO’s Baltimore-focused “The Wire” to provide context about the policies, policing and poverty in the city leading up to and following the death of Freddie Gray.

University research illustrates that children who move from poor areas have better chances of escaping poverty than children who stay.

Studies show that the chances for income mobility for poor children in the city of Baltimore are worse than in any large county in America.

Reports and Studies

The nonpartisan research agency examines the impact of raising the minimum wage.

A liberal Washington public policy group evaluates the War on Poverty’s legacy.

Researchers conclude that moving from impoverished areas can have positive outcomes for children later in life.

A scholar with the conservative Washington think tank evaluates the legacy of President Lyndon B. Johnson’s Great Society programs.

A report by the centrist Washington think tank shows that while poverty has spread beyond urban areas, it has become more concentrated in inner-city neighborhoods.

Researchers from an initiative of the Social Science Research Council analyze how “disconnected” youth are faring in impoverished American cities.

A scholar with the liberal Washington think tank contends deliberate segregationist policies were at the root of recent events in Ferguson.
Cities

Detroit's impoverished population is struggling to recover from the 2007-09 economic crisis after cuts to social services.

As young professionals bring wealth and business to city centers, poverty is shifting to inner suburbs, according to a study based on demographic changes in 66 cities.

Seattle, the 23rd-largest city in the United States, has the nation's fourth-largest homeless population.

Federal Aid

During a recent trip to Tennessee, President Obama encouraged states to extend health coverage to more low-income residents.

Five communities, including San Antonio and Philadelphia, will receive comprehensive assistance from federal agencies, with the goals of creating jobs, expanding educational opportunities and increasing access to affordable housing.

Little pay and fluctuating hours force many low-wage workers to seek government assistance, despite their employment status.

Most states were granted waivers from the time limit on food stamps during the recession, but as the economy recovers, many unemployed adults are expected to lose those benefits.

Gentrification

Despite reports of gentrification, census data show that old patterns persist — poverty is concentrated in inner cities and wealth in the suburbs.

Low-income neighborhoods have long-term effects on the economic mobility of residents, particularly young children.

While gentrification is associated with the displacement of poorer residents, it poses less of a problem for cities than high-poverty neighborhoods.

Workforce Training

A program called Year Up offers six months of career training and a paid internship to low-income youths.

A brainchild of President Obama, My Brother’s Keeper Alliance is a private effort funded by American Express and other companies to provide education, job training and mentoring to young men of color.
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- Police Tactics, 12/14
- Campus Sexual Assault, 10/14
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- Racial Profiling, 11/13

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