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Research Update:

***Race and Male Joblessness in
Milwaukee:
2008***

by:

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Briefing Paper
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Overview

Over the past decade, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Center for Economic Development has documented the alarming extent to which joblessness among working-age African American males has grown in Milwaukee since the 1970s.¹ Once one of the nation's most opportunity-filled urban labor markets for black males, by 2000 Milwaukee registered among the highest rates of black male joblessness and largest racial disparities in jobless rates among U.S. cities and metropolitan areas. In our in-depth study, *The Crisis of Black Male Joblessness in Milwaukee*, we analyzed the reasons for the sharp racial disparities in the Milwaukee labor market, examined the shortcomings of existing policies, and recommended a sweeping set of new strategies to meet the challenge – nothing short of a Milwaukee “Marshall Plan” to attack the city's job crisis.²

The tables and chart in this update provide the most recent measures on race and male joblessness, drawn from the just-released 2008 data of the U.S. Bureau of the Census' *American Community Survey (ACS)*. Although the rate of black male joblessness in metropolitan Milwaukee remains unconscionably high, as it does across the country, the percentage of black working-age males not employed (for whatever reason) in Milwaukee fell from 51.1 percent to 47.1 percent between 2007 and 2008 (see Table 1).

Although any decline in the black male joblessness rate is welcome, three caveats are in order. First, even though the rate declined between 2007-2008, at 47.1 percent it remains unacceptably high. Milwaukee registered the fifth highest rate of black male joblessness among 35 of the largest metro areas in the U.S. (see

¹ See Marc V. Levine, *Stealth Depression: Joblessness in the City of Milwaukee Since 1990* (UWM Center for Economic Development, August 2003); Marc V. Levine, *After the Boom: Joblessness in Milwaukee Since 2000* (UWM Center for Economic Development, 2004); Marc V. Levine, *The Crisis of Black Male Joblessness in Milwaukee: Trends, Explanations, and Policy Options* (UWM Center for Economic Development, March 2007); Marc V. Levine, *The Crisis of Black Male Joblessness in Milwaukee: 2006* (UWM Center for Economic Development, October 2007); and Marc V. Levine, *The Crisis Continues: The Crisis of Black Male Joblessness in Milwaukee: 2007* (UWM Center for Economic Development, October 2008).

² See Levine, *The Crisis of Black Male Joblessness in Milwaukee: Trends, Explanations, and Policy Options*, pp. 56-63.

chart below) in 2008, and posted the largest racial disparity in jobless rates of any metropolitan area in the country (see Table 4). The jobless rate for prime working age (25-54) black males living in the city of Milwaukee in 2008 was over 4 times the rate for prime working age white males living in the region's suburbs (see Table 3).

Second, at least some of the decline between 2007-2008 may simply reflect the margin of error in ACS tabulations. There is around a 4% error margin in the reported results for Milwaukee ACS sample for working-age black males (ages 16-64) and black male employment, so at the outer edge of the margin it is possible, though not likely, that the jobless rate was unchanged between 2007 and 2008.

And third, even though some improvement in the joblessness picture may have occurred in 2008, the lag in the data means that these figures do not reflect the serious deterioration in the Milwaukee labor market that has occurred since the Great Recession took full hold in the city in late 2008 and through 2009. Since August 2008, employment in the city of Milwaukee has declined by over 18,000 (6.9 percent).³ If even a small fraction of those job losses were incurred by African American males, as seems highly plausible, then the black male jobless rate will have climbed well north of 50 percent by the time the 2009 data are available next year, perhaps as high as 55-57%, if the black male share of the 2008-09 employment losses was commensurate with the proportion of black males in the Milwaukee labor force.

In short, there is little reason to celebrate the marginal improvements revealed in the 2008 ACS data. The crisis of black male joblessness in Milwaukee continues, the current mix of policies and strategies remains ineffective, and the need for dramatic new directions in policy remains undeniable.

³ Marc V. Levine, *Monthly Employment Watch: Milwaukee and the Nation's Largest Cities* (UWM Center for Economic Development, 2009).

Tables and Charts

Black Male Joblessness In Selected U.S. Metropolitan Areas: 2008

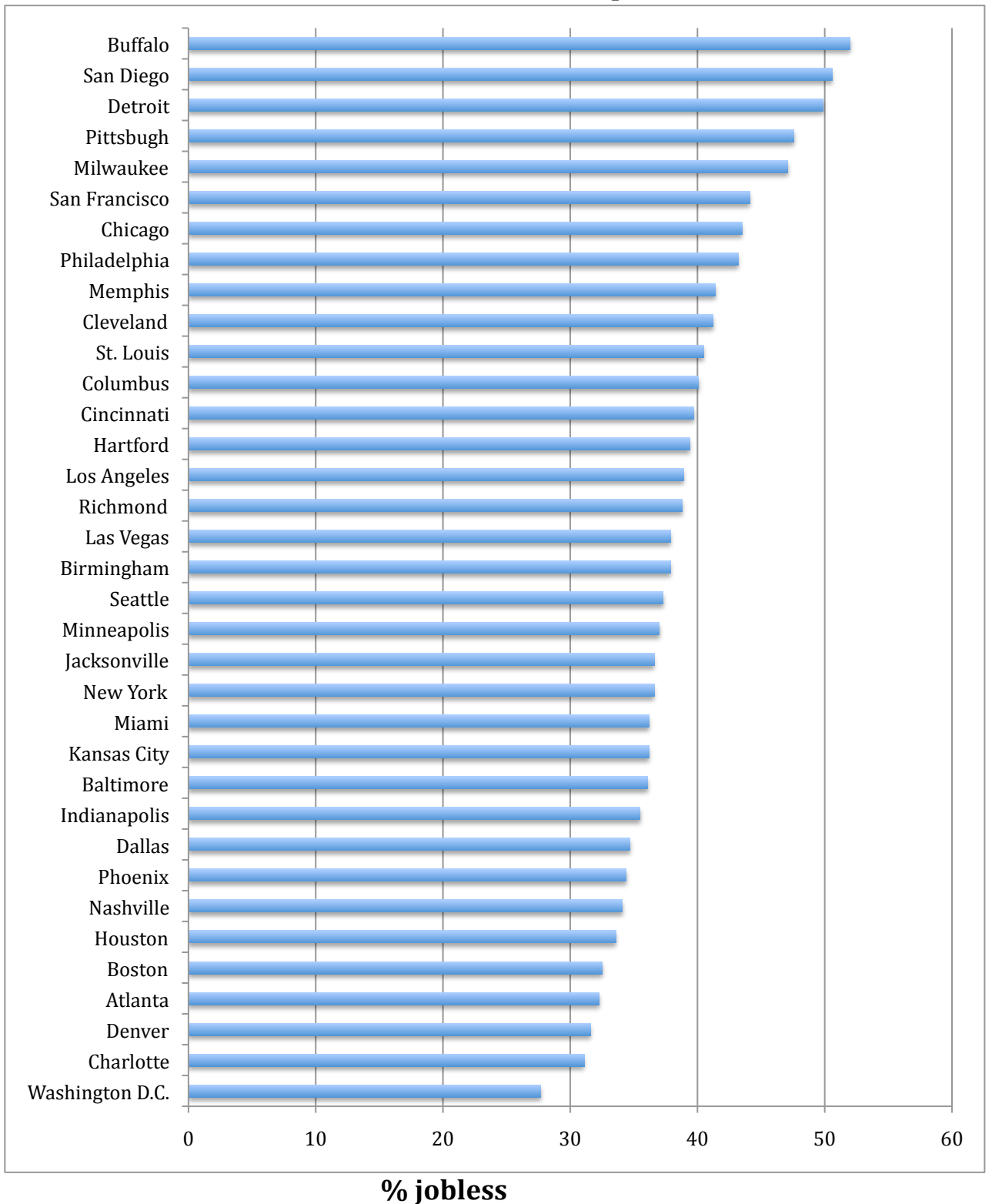


Table 1:

Male Joblessness in Metropolitan Milwaukee, 2000-2008

(percentage of working-age* males unemployed or not in the labor force)

YEAR	BLACK	WHITE	HISPANIC
2000	47.6%	16.0%	34.1%
2006	46.8%	17.9%	22.7%
2007	51.1%	18.6%	22.9%
2008	47.1%	18.1%	22.1%

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population, 2000*; *American Community Survey, 2006, 2007, 2008*

*Working-age = between ages of 16-64

Table 2:

Metropolitan Milwaukee Male Jobless Rates: 2007-2008

By Race, Ethnicity, and Age

AGE CATEGORY	BLACK		WHITE		HISPANIC	
	2007	2008	2007	2008	2007	2008
16-24	64.5%	69.6%	37.8%	35.6%	44.4%	43.2%
25-54	43.2%	36.2%	10.4%	10.9%	15.7%	13.8%
55-64	61.8%	53.2%	28.4%	27.2%	25.6%	33.7%

Source: *American Community Survey, 2007, 2008.*

Table 3:

**City-Suburban Disparities in Male Joblessness in Metropolitan Milwaukee:
2008**

Jobless Rates (%), by Race, Ethnicity, Age, and Place of Residence

AGE	BLACK CITY	BLACK SUBURBS	WHITE CITY	WHITE SUBURBS	HISPANIC CITY	HISPANIC SUBURBS
All Working Age	47.4%	44.7%	23.1%	16.4%	24.2%	17.0%
Young Adults	70.1%	64.0%	36.8%	35.2%	53.0%	23.8%
Prime Working Age	36.2%	36.2%	16.0%	8.2%	14.6%	11.5%

All working age= 16-64; Young adults = 16-24; Prime working age = 25-54

Table 4:**Male Jobless Rates in Selected Metropolitan Areas, By Race: 2008**

Percentage of working-age (16-64) males either
unemployed or out of the labor force

METRO AREA	BLACK JOBLESS %	WHITE JOBLESS %	BLACK/ WHITE RATIO	PCT. GAP IN BLACK/ WHITE RATES
Milwaukee	47.1	17.8	2.60	29.3
Buffalo	52.0	23.8	2.18	28.2
Pittsburgh	47.6	22.8	2.09	24.8
Detroit	49.9	25.5	1.96	24.4
Chicago	43.5	19.2	2.27	24.3
Memphis	41.4	18.1	2.33	23.3
San Diego	50.6	28.2	1.79	22.4
San Francisco	44.1	21.9	2.01	22.2
Philadelphia	43.2	21.3	2.02	21.9
Minneapolis	37.0	16.5	2.24	20.5
St. Louis	40.5	20.8	1.95	19.7
Hartford	39.4	19.8	1.99	19.6
Cleveland	41.2	21.7	1.90	19.5
Richmond	38.8	19.7	1.97	19.1
Columbus	40.1	21.4	1.87	18.7
Kansas City	36.2	18.1	2.00	18.1
Cincinnati	39.7	22.4	1.77	17.3
Dallas	34.7	17.7	1.96	17.0
Baltimore	36.1	19.4	1.86	16.7
Los Angeles	38.9	22.7	1.71	16.2
Seattle	37.3	21.4	1.74	15.9
Birmingham	37.9	22.6	1.68	15.3
Denver	31.6	16.4	1.93	15.2
Houston	33.6	18.5	1.82	15.1
Indianapolis	35.5	20.6	1.72	14.9
New York	36.6	22.0	1.66	14.6
Las Vegas	37.9	23.5	1.61	14.4
Nashville	34.1	19.7	1.73	14.4
Jacksonville	36.6	23.5	1.56	13.1
Charlotte	31.1	18.4	1.69	12.7
Phoenix	34.4	21.9	1.57	12.5
Atlanta	32.3	20.0	1.62	12.3
Boston	32.5	20.6	1.58	11.9
Miami	36.2	24.4	1.48	11.8
Washington, D.C.	27.7	19.2	1.44	8.5

