

Black Unemployment Dips to 7-Year Low

By **Freddie Allen**
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WASHINGTON (NNPA) – The Black unemployment rate tumbled to 9.1 percent in July, the lowest rate for Black workers in seven years, according to the latest jobs report from the U.S. Labor Department.

Even though the Black jobless rate has slowly ticked down to 2008 levels, some economists expressed concerns about the labor force participation rate, the measure of people who are employed or looking for jobs.

The Black labor force participation rate decreased from 61.7 percent in June to 61.5 percent in July, which could indicate that the unemployment rate fell because some people simply gave up looking for work.

By comparison, the White unemployment rate and the labor force participation rate remained unchanged from June levels, 4.6 percent and 62.8 percent, respectively.

Valerie Wilson, an economist at the Eco-

nomics Policy Institute, a Washington, D.C. based think tank focused on low- and middle-income families, found that Tennessee had the lowest Black jobless rate (6.9 percent) in the second quarter of 2015, which was almost the same as the highest White unemployment rate (7 percent in West Virginia).

Wilson also reported

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that the African American unemployment rate “was at or below its pre-recession level in eight states”: Michigan, Indian, Ohio, Tennessee, Mississippi, Texas, Illinois, and Missouri.

In the press release on her analysis of state unemployment rates by race and ethnicity, Wilson said that even though the Black unemployment rate has returned to pre-recession levels in those eight states, the states that are seeing improvements, with the exception of Texas, had the

highest Black unemployment rates in the nation before the recession.

“African Americans are still unemployed at a higher rate than their white counterparts in almost every state,” Wilson said.

“We need policies that look beyond simply reducing unemployment to pre-recession levels as an end goal.”

The national unemployment rate was 5.3 percent and 215,000 jobs were created in July.

Economic indicators for Black male workers over 20 years old followed the same pattern as Black workers in general.

The Black male unemployment rate plunged to 8.8 percent from 9.5 percent the year before, but the participation rate also decreased from 67.6 percent in June to 67 percent in July.

On the other hand, Black female workers

not only saw a slight increase in their month-over-month jobless rate as it edged up from 7.9 percent June to 8 percent in July, their labor force participation rate also increased from 62 percent to 62.1 percent, which could signal that Black women are entering the labor force and finding work.

In a statement about

the jobs report, Rep. Robert C. “Bobby” Scott (D-Va.) said that the report showed that economy is still improving, growing and heading in the right direction.

“With the sixty-fifth consecutive month of private sector job growth, and the unemployment rate holding at 5.3 percent, our nation continues to recover from the 2008 economic recession,” said Scott.

He also said, “While this is excellent news, our efforts to rebuild our economy are not com-



Rep. Bobby Scott was encouraged by new jobless figures.

plete until every person who wants a job is able to find a stable one.”

Connie Razza, the director of Strategic Research for the Center for Popular Democracy (CPD), a group focused on racial justice that describes itself as “pro-worker” and “pro-immigrant,” said that the latest job numbers show that flat wages and a sluggish recovery continue to threaten the livelihood of working families.

“Federal Reserve officials must look beyond the topline employment figures to determine whether the economy has truly recovered,” said Razza in a statement. “Even the state with the lowest rate of Black unemployment still has a rate equivalent to the state with the highest White unemploy-

ment rate.”

Razza continued: “With Black families still out of work and wage growth nowhere to be found, the economy is simply not ready for the Fed to slow it down.”

She warned the Federal Reserve against raising interest rates in 2015.

“While there are reports of the Fed staff suggesting one interest rate hike to 0.35 percent in the fourth quarter, compared to the [Federal Open Market Committee] forecasts of two hikes in the year achieving 0.65 percent, the Fed Up campaign remains convinced that the only humane, inclusive, and economically sound approach from the Fed would be to write off increasing interest rates for 2015, and instead to commit to wage targeting,” said Razza.

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