

April 8, 2013

DATA BRIEF: Blacks in Unions: 2012¹

Part I: Introduction

April 4 marked the 45th anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King. He was killed in Memphis as he supported the effort of Black sanitation workers to form a union. His endorsement of unionization as a central strategy to improve the lives of the Black community was not a recent one. From the very beginning of his prominence as a civil rights leader, he viewed the civil rights movement as being deeply intertwined with the struggle of workers to organize for power and dignity on the job.²

In January, the Bureau of Labor Statistics released its annual report on unionization.³ Overall union density – the proportion of the workforce comprised of union members – declined. At the same time, the union premium – the positive differential between wages received by union members relative to non-union members – still existed. In light of the declining presence of unions, the continued benefits of unionization, and Dr. King’s strong support of unions, this Data Brief presents a picture of Blacks in unions that goes beyond the data in the BLS report. Part II examines overall Black unionization disaggregated by gender. Part III presents data on Black unionization disaggregated by gender and region. Part IV examines Black unionization with a focus on the largest 10 metropolitan areas. The Appendix presents the same analysis as the brief, but disaggregates the data by race and ethnicity.

Key findings in this brief include:

- A greater proportion of Black workers were union members compared to the proportion of non-Black workers who were union members. In 2012, 13.1% of all Black workers in the United States were union members; 11.0% of non-Black workers in the United States were union members.

¹ The author wishes to thank the Economic Policy Institute for the use of their data and Sylvia Allegretto (UC Berkeley Center on Wage and Employment Dynamics) for her assistance in obtaining and analyzing the data.

² See King’s speeches on labor in Michael Honey, ed, “All Labor Has Dignity” (Beacon Press; 2011).

³ U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Union Member ---- 2012

(<http://www.bls.gov/news.release/union2.nr0.htm>; accessed March 23, 2013)

- Black workers were disproportionately in unions relative to their share in the overall workforce. In 2012, 13.3% of all union members in the United States were Black; Blacks comprised 11.4% of the overall workforce in the United States.
- These differences were magnified when limiting the analysis to the ten most populous metropolitan areas in the United States. Among U. S. workers, Blacks were 19% more likely to belong to unions than non-Blacks; however, among workers in the largest metropolitan areas, Blacks were 42% more likely to belong to unions compared to non-Blacks.

Part II: Black Unionization

This Brief presents data on the proportion of Black workers who are union members (Black union density); the proportion of all union members that is Black (Black share of union members); and the proportion of the workforce that is Black (Black share of the workforce).⁴ To place this data in a context, the Black union density is compared to the union density among non-Blacks and the Black share of union members will be compared to the Black share of the workforce.

As indicated in Table 1, Black union density is a greater than the union density among non-Blacks: 13.1% of all Black workers are union members compared to 11.0% of all non-Black workers. Black union density exceeded non-Black union density when the data was disaggregated by gender.

Table 1
Union Density –
Proportion of Workforce in Unions

	All	Men	Women
Black	13.1%	14.6%	11.9%
Non-Black	11.0%	11.7%	10.3%

In addition, union membership is disproportionately Black when compared to the entire workforce. 13.3% of all union members were Black; this is larger than the Black share of the entire workforce that was 11.4%. This disproportionality was true for Black men and Black women.

⁴ The data is based on the author’s analysis of the Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group microdata. In contrast to the analysis presented in the BLS report where White, Black, Other, and Latino are not mutually exclusive categories, this brief creates categories that are mutually exclusive. Hence, while the terms Black, non-Black, White, Other will be used for expository clarity, the categories are actually, non-Hispanic Black, non non-Hispanic Black, non-Hispanic White, and non-Hispanic Other. In addition, the weights used in this data set vary somewhat from those used by the BLS; therefore, there are minor variations between data reported here and data reported by the BLS.

Table 2
Black Share –
Proportion of Union/Workforce that is
Black

	All	Men	Women
Union	13.3%	12.1%	14.8%
Workforce	11.4%	10.0%	13.0%

Part III: Black Unionization by Region

Tables 3 - 7 present the same analysis at the regional level. The same pattern exists: Black union density is higher than non-Black union density and the share of union workers that are Black is larger than the share of all workers that are Black.

Table 3
Union Density and Black Share –
By Region

	Union Density		Black Share
Northeast			
Black	23.8%	Union	14.2%
Non-Black	16.5%	Workforce	10.3%
Midwest			
Black	16.1%	Union	11.5%
Non-Black	11.8%	Workforce	8.7%
South			
Black	7.7%	Union	23.9%
Non-Black	5.4%	Workforce	18.0%
West			
Black	22.7%	Union	7.0%
Non-Black	13.9%	Workforce	4.4%

Table 4
Union Density and Black Share –
By Region and Gender: Northeast

Union Density		Black Share	
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Men			
Black	23.2%	Union	11.9%
Non-Black	17.2%	Workforce	9.1%
Women			
Black	24.3%	Union	16.7%
Non-Black	15.7%	Workforce	11.4%

Table 5
Union Density and Black Share –
By Region and Gender: Midwest

Union Density		Black Share	
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Men			
Black	18.7%	Union	10.1%
Non-Black	13.4%	Workforce	7.5%
Women			
Black	14.1%	Union	13.4%
Non-Black	10.0%	Workforce	9.9%

Table 6
Union Density and Black Share –
By Region and Gender: South

Union Density		Black Share	
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Men			
Black	9.3%	Union	21.6%
Non-Black	6.2%	Workforce	15.5%
Women			
Black	6.5%	Union	27.3%
Non-Black	4.5%	Workforce	20.7%

Table 7
Union Density and Black Share –
By Region and Gender: West

	Union Density		Black Share
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Men			
Black	24.4%	Union	7.1%
Non-Black	13.7%	Workforce	4.1%
Women			
Black	21.0%	Union	6.8%
Non-Black	14.2%	Workforce	4.7%

Part IV: Black Unionization in the Ten Most Populous Metropolitan Areas

Tables 8 and 9 provide data on Black unionization in the ten largest metropolitan areas.⁵ In the largest 10 metropolitan areas, 16.3% of Black workers are in unions in contrast to 11.5% of non-Blacks workers. This pattern of greater union density among Black workers relative to non-Black union density is repeated when the data is disaggregated by gender. In addition, as seen in the analysis for the entire population, the proportion of union members that is Black exceeds the share of the entire workforce that is Black.

Table 8
Union Density –
Largest 10 Metropolitan Areas

	All	Men	Women
Black	16.3%	17.6%	15.3%
Non-Black	11.5%	11.9%	11.0%

Table 9
Black Share –
Largest 10 Metropolitan Areas

	All	Men	Women
Union	20.5%	18.2%	23.3%
Workforce	15.4%	13.1%	18.0%

Table 10 presents the data for the entire U.S. population and largest 10 metropolitan areas and then compares the relative union densities at the two levels of geographies. For the U.S. population, Black workers were 19% more likely to be union members

⁵ The top ten most populous metropolitan areas in 2012 were: New York City; Los Angeles; Chicago; Dallas; Houston; Philadelphia; Washington, DC; Miami; Atlanta; and Boston.

than non-Blacks ($13.1/11.0 = 1.19$). However, when the analysis is restricted to the ten most populous metropolitan areas, Black workers are 42% more likely to be union members than non-Black union members ($16.3/11.5 = 1.42$). This increased probability of being a union member is true when the data is examined by gender.

Table 10
Union Density

U.S. - All			Top 10 Metro Areas -All		
Black	Non-Black	Ratio	Black	Non-Black	Ratio
13.1%	11.0%	1.19	16.3%	11.5%	1.42
U.S. - Men			Top 10 Metro Areas -Men		
Black	Non-Black	Ratio	Black	Non-Black	Ratio
14.6%	11.7%	1.25	17.6%	11.9%	1.48
U.S. - Women			Top 10 Metro Areas - Women		
Black	Non-Black	Ratio	Black	Non-Black	Ratio
11.9%	10.3%	1.16	15.3%	11.0%	1.38

Table 11 provides a measure of disproportionality: Blacks are members of unions at a rate greater than their share of the entire workforce. For the U.S. population, this disproportionality is 16% ($13.3/11.4 = 1.16$). However, this disproportionality increases when examining the largest metropolitan areas. For all Blacks in the largest metropolitan areas, the disproportionality is 33% ($20.5/15.4 = 1.33$).

Table 11
Black Share

U.S. - All			Top 10 Metro Areas -All		
Union	Workforce	Ratio	Union	Workforce	Ratio
13.3%	11.4%	1.16	20.5%	15.4%	1.33
U.S. - Men			Top 10 Metro Areas - Men		
Union	Workforce	Ratio	Union	Workforce	Ratio
12.1%	10.0%	1.22	18.2%	13.1%	1.39
U.S. - Women			Top 10 Metro Areas - Women		
Union	Workforce	Ratio	Union	Workforce	Ratio
14.8%	13.0%	1.13	23.3%	18.0%	1.30

Part V: Conclusion

An analysis of 2012 Current Population Survey data reveals that Black workers have a higher union density compared to non-Black workers and Blacks workers comprise a disproportionate share of the union membership relative to their share of the overall workforce. These patterns exist when the data is disaggregated by gender and region. In addition, the pattern is more pronounced when examining data from the 10 most populous metropolitan areas in the country

The relatively high proportion of Black union members in large metropolitan areas might hold rising importance as the labor movement seeks new ways to improve the conditions facing workers in the United States. In recent years, while union density has been declining, public policy campaigns to raise labor standards have been successful at the state and local level. Local authorities have passed legislation to raise minimum wages, provide paid sick days, and combat wage theft. To the extent Blacks are disproportionately members of unions, a pathway to great public policy success might lie through a stronger relationship with Black communities and their elected officials.

APPENDIX

Table A1

UNION DENSITY - Proportion of Workforce in Unions				
ALL				
White	Black	Latino	Other	Total
11.4%	13.1%	9.8%	9.7%	11.2%
MALE				
White	Black	Latino	Other	Total
12.3%	14.6%	10.1%	9.2%	12.0%
FEMALE				
White	Black	Latino	Other	Total
10.4%	11.9%	9.5%	10.2%	10.5%

Table A2

UNION DENSITY - Northeast				
ALL				
White	Black	Latino	Other	Total
17.0%	23.8%	17.1%	9.6%	17.2%
MALE				
17.9%	23.2%	17.7%	9.0%	17.8%
FEMALE				
16.0%	24.3%	16.5%	10.2%	16.7%
UNION DENSITY - Midwest				
ALL				
White	Black	Latino	Other	Total
12.1%	16.1%	10.3%	6.3%	12.2%
MALE				
14.0%	18.7%	11.0%	6.3%	13.8%
FEMALE				
10.2%	14.1%	9.1%	6.3%	10.4%
UNION DENSITY - South				
ALL				
White	Black	Latino	Other	Total
5.9%	7.7%	3.9%	4.1%	5.8%
MALE				
6.8%	9.3%	4.2%	5.0%	6.7%
FEMALE				
4.9%	6.5%	3.5%	3.2%	4.9%
UNION DENSITY - West				
ALL				
White	Black	Latino	Other	Total
14.5%	22.7%	12.9%	13.8%	14.3%
MALE				
14.4%	24.4%	12.8%	12.7%	14.1%
FEMALE				
14.7%	21.0%	13.0%	14.8%	14.6%

Table A3

UNION DENSITY - Top 10 Metro Areas				
ALL				
White	Black	Latino	Other	Total
12.4%	16.3%	10.7%	8.7%	12.2%
MALE				
White	Black	Latino	Other	Total
13.1%	17.60%	11.0%	8.2%	12.6%
FEMALE				
White	Black	Latino	Other	Total
11.6%	15.3%	10.4%	9.3%	11.8%

Table A4

GROUP SHARE - Proportion of Union/Workforce that is of the Group					
ALL					
	White	Black	Latino	Other	Total
Union	67.5%	13.3%	13.8%	5.3%	100.0%
Workforce	66.6%	11.4%	15.8%	6.2%	100.0%
MALE					
Union	68.6%	12.1%	14.6%	4.7%	100.0%
Workforce	66.5%	10.0%	17.3%	6.2%	100.0%
FEMALE					
Union	66.3%	14.8%	12.9%	6.0%	100.0%
Workforce	66.6%	13.0%	14.1%	6.2%	100.0%

Table A5

GROUP SHARE - Northeast					
ALL					
	White	Black	Latino	Other	Total
Union	70.5%	14.2%	11.7%	3.6%	100.0%
Workforce	71.5%	10.3%	11.7%	6.5%	100.0%
MALE					
Union	72.1%	11.9%	12.4%	3.6%	100.0%
Workforce	71.5%	9.1%	12.5%	7.0%	100.0%
FEMALE					
Union	68.8%	16.7%	10.9%	3.6%	100.0%
Workforce	71.6%	11.4%	11.0%	5.9%	100.0%
GROUP SHARE - Midwest					
ALL					
	White	Black	Latino	Other	Total
Union	81.2%	11.5%	5.4%	1.9%	100.0%
Workforce	81.3%	8.7%	6.4%	3.6%	100.0%
MALE					
Union	82.1%	10.1%	6.0%	1.8%	100.0%
Workforce	81.1%	7.5%	7.5%	3.9%	100.0%
FEMALE					
Union	80.0%	13.4%	4.6%	2.1%	100.0%
Workforce	81.5%	9.9%	5.2%	3.4%	100.0%
GROUP SHARE - South					
ALL					
	White	Black	Latino	Other	Total
Union	62.2%	23.9%	11.0%	2.9%	100.0%
Workforce	61.6%	18.0%	16.3%	4.0%	100.0%
MALE					
Union	64.0%	21.6%	11.3%	3.1%	100.0%
Workforce	62.7%	15.5%	17.7%	4.1%	100.0%
FEMALE					
Union	59.7%	27.3%	10.5%	2.6%	100.0%
Workforce	60.5%	20.7%	14.7%	4.0%	100.0%

Table A5, continued

GROUP SHARE - West					
ALL					
	White	Black	Latino	Other	Total
Union	56.6%	7.0%	24.9%	11.6%	100.0%
Workforce	55.9%	4.4%	27.7%	12.1%	100.0%
MALE					
Union	55.7%	7.1%	27.1%	10.0%	100.0%
Workforce	54.9%	4.1%	29.9%	11.1%	100.0%
FEMALE					
Union	57.5%	6.8%	22.4%	13.4%	100.0%
Workforce	57.0%	4.7%	25.2%	13.2%	100.0%

Table A6

GROUP SHARE - Top 10 Metro Areas					
ALL					
	White	Black	Latino	Other	Total
Union	51.7%	20.5%	21.2%	6.6%	100.0%
Workforce	51.1%	15.4%	24.2%	9.2%	100.0%
MALE					
Union	52.9%	18.2%	22.8%	6.2%	100.0%
Workforce	51.1%	13.1%	26.3%	9.5%	100.0%
FEMALE					
¹ Union	50.3%	23.3%	19.4%	7.0%	100.0%
Workforce	51.1%	18.0%	22.1%	8.9%	100.0%