

Before the Governor's Working Group on Justice Policy Reform  
October 15, 2015

Statement of Former Iowa State Representative Wayne W. Ford, Des Moines, Iowa

My name is Wayne Ford. As an Iowa State Representative, I was responsible for Iowa becoming the first state to enact what is known as Minority Impact legislation, H.F. 2393 which was passed in the 2008 legislative session. This law requires that every criminal justice bill going through the Iowa legislature be evaluated with respect to whether or not it will have a disproportionate effect on specified minority groups – blacks, Hispanics, Pacific Islanders, Native Americans, women, and the disabled. Similar legislation has since been enacted in Connecticut and Oregon and is being considered by other states, including Washington, Arkansas, New York, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Mississippi, Florida, and Alabama. Both the NAACP and the National Black Caucus of State Legislators have adopted resolutions in support of this legislation. Milwaukee County, Wisconsin is the first county in America to enact similar legislation.

In a 2015 report, the Associated Press reported Iowa's law was having a modest effect and that this finding was in line with a 2013 study by researchers at Simpson College, who had concluded Iowa's law has had a neutral effect on the current prison population but it may have a greater effect in coming years.

In September, 2013, I presented written testimony before the United States Senate Judiciary Committee in conjunction with its assessment of mandatory minimum sentences in which I talked about how other states could follow Iowa's lead and how it could make a positive difference with respect to achieving the goal of equal justice for all. Accordingly, I urge the committee to consider expanding the scope of Iowa's law to include more subject areas, such as education and economic development.


Sincerely,

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The Des Moines Register

# 'Worst Cities for Black Americans' shames Midwest

 [Kyle Munson](#), [kmunson@dmreg.com](mailto:kmunson@dmreg.com) 7:21 p.m. CDT October 6, 2015

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At first glance, the list of "[The Worst Cities for Black Americans](#)" published Tuesday makes it look as if the Midwest is a bad home for African Americans.

To see us singled out as having such dim prospects for black America makes me feel ashamed. The eight-year-old Delaware-based financial news and opinion source called [24/7 Wall St.](#) that published the list emphasized socio-economic disparities as it determined which cities are the worst ones for African Americans.

Milwaukee is perched at No. 1.

Illinois has the unfortunate distinction of landing the most cities, three, on the list — including Chicago, where America's first black president cut his political teeth.

Iowa rounds out the lineup with Des Moines (No. 9) and Waterloo-Cedar Falls (No. 10).

Covering the latest list from a company angling for press coverage can feel like journalistic ambulance chasing. But we (whether my newsroom or all Iowans) should pay close attention to the serious, underlying issues raised by this particular list. The Register also happens to be in the middle of an ambitious series, "[Black Iowa – Still Unequal?](#)," that sets out to examine the "realities of the black experience in Iowa." I wrote the [first installment on Waterloo](#), where the accidental shooting of a 4-year-old boy triggered a more urgent conversation among residents about their city's troubled century of racial segregation and inequality, as well as the recent rise in gun violence.

No matter how harsh or unflattering these realities, we can't ignore them.

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24/7 Wall St.'s list is introduced with a reference to last year's protests in Ferguson, Mo., and then pivots on this sentence: "Fatal police shootings involving black citizens, however, are only one of the consequences of racial inequality."

Douglas McIntyre, editor-in-chief of 24/7, used nine measures to assess racial gaps in American cities whose populations were at least 5 percent black.

From the Census' 2014 American Community Survey he pulled: median household income, educational attainment rates, home ownership rates, unemployment rates and the percentage of people without health insurance. That was combined with incarceration rates from the the Sentencing Project and mortality rates from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

That's only seven criteria: Two more measures, or what McIntyre called "the way that we cut the data," are proprietary.

Valerie Wilson, director of the program on race, ethnicity and the economy at the Economic Policy Institute, agreed that the list will surprise many Americans because it falls so far north of the Mason-Dixon line.

"Most of them aren't cities you'd think about at all when you think about cities where the African-American population of the country is concentrated," she said.

But then "worst" also might be a bit of a misnomer. Both Wilson and McIntyre emphasized that the list focuses on cities where blacks face the worst *gap* in quality of life compared to whites, not where the overall quality may be worse but less disparate among races.

Many working-class jobs "have gone away in states like Wisconsin," Wilson added. "For example, we've seen union busting and attacks against public sector workers that also disproportionately employ African Americans."

What's more, Iowa has long been singled out as having some of the worst incarceration rates for black men nationwide.

Just last week, State Rep. Helen Miller from Fort Dodge organized an Iowa Criminal Justice Summit in Cedar Falls where officials and experts recommended revising the state's mandatory minimum sentences.

"African Americans to me in Iowa," Miller said Tuesday, "are in many ways invisible."

Wayne Ford, a former state lawmaker who runs the Urban Dreams social services agency in Des Moines and has worked on racial issues for decades, also participated in the summit. He said that more cities need to strive to support a "mobile, progressive black middle class." The Midwestern cities on this list also are some of the cities that had been more racially homogeneous but now are seeing a more dramatic racial demographic shift.

Demographics change, Ford said, and communities that don't deal with these new challenges are "setting themselves up not to be the all-American city but to be the un-American city."

## The top 10:

1. Milwaukee, Wis.
2. Rockford, Ill.
3. Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minn.
4. Chicago, Ill.
5. Grand Rapids, Mich.
6. Peoria, Ill.
7. Lima, Ohio
8. Kankakee, Ill.
9. **Des Moines**
10. Waterloo-Cedar Falls

