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Dr. Fording

PSC 466

Hale County v. Jefferson County

The redominately poor county that I have chosen to conduct my research on is, as defined by the USDA, Hale County, AL. I am from the city of Birmingham, which is located in Jefferson County, AL. An important thing to keep in mind when comparing these two Alabama counties is the dramatic difference in population size: Jefferson County spans over 34 cities and towns, with a population estimate of roughly 658,573 people. Whereas Hale County covers a mere 4 cities with a population estimate of 14,651 people (2019, [*US Census Bureau QuickFacts*](https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/jeffersoncountyalabama,halecountyalabama/PST045219)). Per the 2019 [*US Census City and Town Population Total*](https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/popest/2010s-total-cities-and-towns.html), the largest city in Hale County is Greensboro with an estimated total of 2,268 residents. The largest city in Jefferson County goes to Birmingham, which has an estimated total of 209,403 residents. To put it into perspective: my hometown of Mountain Brook has an estimated total of 20,297 residents (2019, *US Census City and Town Population Total*). Mountain Brook is a suburb located inside Birmingham city limits; while Birmingham stands tall as the largest city in Jefferson County, it still only accounts for one of 34 cities and towns inside Jefferson County. Essentially, it should be taken into account the fact that Jefferson County is roughly 45 times larger than Hale County in population.

First, let’s address the population of those in Hale County who are living in poverty based on race. The race with the highest estimated total of individuals for whom poverty status is determined are those who identify as Black or African American alone with 8,689 and an estimated 2,846 fall below the poverty level, or 32.8%. Not far behind sits those whose race correlates with being White alone, not Hispanic or Latino, with an estimated total of 5,717 and 676, or 11.8%, falling below the poverty level. I found that thre are 64 individuals who identify with two or more races, 33 individuals who identify as Asian alone and 4 who identify as Hispanic or Latino (of any origin)[[1]](#footnote-1).

In comparison, the race with the highest estimated total of individuals for whom poverty status is determined in Jefferson County is flip-flopped in comparison to Hale County, with those who identify as White alone, not Hispanic or Latino, coming in first place with an estimated total of 317,287; with the estimated total of 28,848 below the poverty level. The race with the second highest estimated total of individuals for whom poverty status is determined is Black or African Americans alone with 280,347 and 68,119 falling below the poverty level. As listed in Table 1, those who classify themselves as Hispanic or Latino (of any origin) sits in third place for highest number of individuals for whom poverty status is determined with an estimated total of 26,368 individuals. There are 11,356 Asian alone individuals and 8,953 individuals with two or more races for whom poverty status is determined.

Second, let’s address the educational attainment level of those with a high school degree (or equivalent) to those with a Bachelor’s degree or higher. In Hale County, the population being 25 years and over, there is an estimated total of 4,227 individuals with poverty status who have a high school degree; 1,116 falling below the poverty level. As for those with a Bachelor’s degree or higher, there are 1,397 individuals with poverty status; 25 of them falling below the poverty level. There is a significant decrease in the total amount of individuals with poverty status who have a Bachelor’s degree or higher, as opposed to those with only a high school degree. In Jefferson County, the population of 25 years and over with a high school degree is an estimated total of 118,815; with 21,506 falling below the poverty level. As for those with a Bachelor’s degree or higher, an estimated total of 156,284 individuals hold poverty status; with 7,464 individuals fall below the poverty level. While it may be hard to grasp the idea of a college graduate living below the poverty level, there are a few things to keep in mind: while those with a college degree generally have lower unemployment rates, higher earnings and lower poverty rates, many times people cannot find a job with a decent wage, or a job with a decent wage that also provides benefits. According to an article posted by the AACU (Association of American Colleges & Universities) in 2018, four in ten independent college students (42%) live at or below the poverty line—“independent” meaning financially independent, of which 55% of students qualify as.

Third, let’s differentiate between the types of households that qualify for and benefit from food stamps and/or supplemental nutrition assistance program (SNAP). More specifically, I wanted to highlight the amount of households that were labeled as married-couple families with children under 18 years, married-couple families with no children under 18 years, female householders with no spouse present and children under 18 years, and female householders with no spouse present with no children under 18 years. First, let’s address the statistics reported for Hale County; according to the 2019 US Census website, there is an estimated total of 1,443 (25.5%) households that receive food stamps/SNAP. There is an estimated total of 291 (20.2%) married-couple families with children under 18 years that are receiving food stamps/SNAPS; there are 362 (25.1%) households that qualify as female householders with no spouse present and children under 18 years. There are 63 married-couple families with no children under 18 years who receive food stamps/SNAPS; and there are 95 (6.6%) households that qualify as female householders with no spouse present and no children under 18 years. We can conclude that there is a correlation between the amount of female householders with no spouse present who have children under 18 years in both counties—the correlation being that they account for over well over half of the estimated total number of households with children under 18 years who were receiving food stamps/SNAPS[[2]](#footnote-2). Just to reiterate: there is an estimated total of 674 households with children under 18 years who were receiving food stamps/SNAP; 362 of those households qualify as female householder with no spouse present and children under 18 years in Hale County. In comparison, there is an estimated total of 16,534 households with children under 18 years receiving food stamps/SNAP; 10,375 of those households qualify as female householder with no spouse present and children under 18 years. This means that there are far more single mothers with children under 18 years who receive government assistance than any other household category.

As for families with poverty status determined, there is an estimated total of 1,603 households in which the householder worked full-time, year-round, with 5% falling below the poverty level in Hale County. In addition, there is an estimated total of 1,144 married-couple families in which the householder worked full-time, year-round, with 4.2% falling below the poverty level. There are an estimated total of 86,693 familial households in which the householder worked full-time, year-round, with 3.8% falling below the poverty level in Jefferson County. There is an estimated total of 61,034 married-couple families in which the householder worked full-time, year-round, with 1% falling below the poverty level.

According to the 2019 data gathered by *Feeding America*, overall, there were 2,510 food insecure people in Hale County, and a food insecurity rate of 16.9%. As for Jefferson County, there were 94,780 food insecure people in 2019, with the food insecurity rate being 14.4%. The estimated program eligibility among food insecure people who fall below SNAP threshold of 130% poverty in both counties is roughly 54-55%.

In conclusion, I chose to dedicate my research to Hale County largely because it is the home to my family’s hunting camp, which holds an incredibly special place in my heart. The drive to the hunting camp is one of my favorite parts of actually going—passing the green pastures and fields full of animals and corn—it’s beautiful. That being said, among the pretty pastures and beautiful animals, there is an immense amount of poverty that riddles Hale County. My family and I have befriended a family of 12—one mom, her 9 kids, two nieces and one nephew—who live in a trailer home about 4 minutes down the road from us. My dad used to take my two brothers and me to play with the kids while he took the mom grocery shopping. Just last year, my dad and I stopped by to say hello and see how everyone was doing in the midst of COVID-19. All of the kids were beyond excited to get back to school that August. After a minute or two, I noticed that the boys playing basketball weren’t wearing shoes, so I asked if it hurts their feet to play on hot gravel with no shoes—they told me no, that they’ve gotten used to it, plus they had to save their shoes for when they went back to school because they were already falling apart and they couldn’t afford new ones. The craziest part of this interaction was the fact that the boys were telling me this with ease, like it was something that everyone could relate to; meanwhile, I was holding back tears as I noticed none of the kids, not even the two-year-old baby girl had shoes on. Something so small, something most people don’t even think twice about when purchasing, something many of us own multiple pairs of—shoes. Who knew they were a luxury that I, and many others, have taken for granted? I told my dad this story the second we got back into the car, and the very next day we went back to find out the shoe size and age of the 11 kids and their mom. We went to get all of them new shoes that very day and the look on their faces when we brought them their cool new tennis shoes was one I will truly cherish for the rest of my life. I know that this conclusion is not at all part of the assignment, and I am not telling you this to gloat about doing a good deed for a family in need; I am saying this because if anything, it made me feel awful—poverty is awful, unfair and cruel, and it hurt me to my very core that this was all we could do for them; I was even more irate at the fact they are but 12 of 43.96 million people in our country who are living below the poverty line. I hope and pray that one day our government will actually and actively work to improve the quality of life of individuals and families who live in poverty.

Tables and Figures

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| **Label** | **Hale County, AL** | **Jefferson County, AL** |
| Population for whom poverty status is determined | 14,565 | 645,037 |
| Black or African American alone | 8,689 | 280,347 |
| Asian alone | 33 | 11,356 |
| Two or more races | 64 | 8,953 |
| Hispanic or Latino origin (of any race) | 4 | 26,368 |
| White alone, not Hispanic or Latino | 5,717 | 317,287 |

Table 1. Population for whom Poverty Status is determined based on Race in Hale and Jefferson County, Alabama.

Figure 1. Estimated total of households receiving food stamps/SNAP in Jefferson County, AL, by Household Type.

1. See Table 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See Figure 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)