

The Failed American Dream

At one point in its history, San Bernardino was named an "All-America" city. Business was booming. Today it is the rated the second in the nation for poverty, right after Detroit. Whatever happened?

By Kim Carter, Contributor

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At one point in its history the Southern Californian city of San Bernardino [was named an "All-America" city](#). Business was booming and people were moving in from across the nation to get a piece of the American Dream. In 2007 however, it was labeled as the [14th poorest city in America](#). Today it is the rated the [second in the nation](#) for poverty, right after Detroit. Whatever happened?

The city that was once thriving with middle-wage earning blue-collar workers is now home to frightening statistics on homeless, joblessness, and poverty. The decline traces back to several events, including the closure of the Norton Air Force Base, which took 10,000 military and civilian jobs in the 1970s. Forty years later to date, San Bernardino is suffering from job-loss in areas like construction, and other related fields.

The numbers provided by the U.S. Census Bureau are eye-opening to say the least. Currently, it is the second poorest large-sized city in the United States. The current figures show that 34.6 percent fall below the poverty line. This means that almost 1/3 of the city residents are classified as poor, an estimate of 72,000 residents.



To make matters worse, home values have plummeted, and unemployment rates are in the double digits. Recent statistics show that [18 percent of the workforce remains jobless](#). Our homelessness statistics aren't any better: the San Bernardino County Homeless Partnership reported [an increase of 66 percent](#) from 2009 to 2011. The conditions are worsening, and there is no end sight.

While the economy as a whole may be out of our control, for those of us within the community, there are new opportunities to serve those in need. If we talk about the investment or allocation of funds that could be put into re-using the foreclosed home stock to provide transitional living programs that include independent living skills, and financial education and money management... Having an increase in stable housing enables a person to focus on other crucial necessities like employment and healthcare. In addition, it would be very advantageous for the local government to establish guidelines for those persons living outside of the area and wishing to contract for our local dollars, that would insist that a certain percentage of those jobs go directly to local talent. I would suggest anybody contracting for a million or more should have this type of stipulation. We have got to invest in our own.

I was recently interviewed on American Public Media's show, *Marketplace*, on the subject of the recent housing boom and bust, and about the worsening conditions of our local economy. Although the City of San Bernardino has one of the highest foreclosure rates in the entire nation, I stated in my interview that society would rather keep facilities closed and abandoned than to provide a place for homeless families to thrive, even though the number of foreclosed properties is staggering. This is an extremely sad situation. The necessity for those in poverty and homelessness to have access to essential resources is greater than ever. The need for programs and supportive services to not only mend broken families, but to restore the fabric of society is monumental. The time for investment in infrastructure, and programs, is now.

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