

Black Women and the Wage Gap

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Conversations around the wage gap tend to over-focus on the numbers while ignoring the causes. But these numbers are more than facts and figures; they represent the tangible consequences of sexism and white supremacy in the United States and how our country systematically devalues women of color and their labor. While racism and sexism are often thought of as individual bias, history shows us that systemic discrimination in pay and exploitation of workers based on race, class, gender and immigration status can be traced all the way back to this country's horrific past of enslaving Africans and their descendants; colonial attempts to destroy Native communities; and immigration policies, from the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the Immigration Act of 1924, to the Bracero program of the 1940s-1960s, to the Trump administration's Muslim bans and the humanitarian crisis on our Southern border.

Today this means that Black women in the United States are typically paid just 64 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.¹ Even when looking just at people working full time, year-round, Black women are still only paid 67 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men – but that figure does not count more than 3.5 million Black women.² The wages of Black women are driven down by a number of current factors including gender and racial discrimination, workplace harassment, job segregation and a lack of workplace policies that support family caregiving, which is still most often performed by women.³ Overall, women are typically paid 77 cents for every dollar paid to men.⁴

Even in states with large populations of Black women in the workforce, rampant wage disparities persist, with potentially devastating consequences for Black women and families.

- In the 25 states (including the District of Columbia) with the largest numbers of Black women working full time, year-round, pay for Black women ranges from 45 to 64 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men in those states.⁵
- Black women face the largest overall cents-on-the-dollar wage gaps in the District of Columbia (just 45 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men), Louisiana (47 cents) and Massachusetts, New Jersey and South Carolina (52 cents).⁶
- Of these 25 states, Texas and Georgia have the largest populations of Black women working full time, year-round. Black women in Texas are paid 55 cents for every

dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men and Black women in Georgia are paid 59 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.⁷

- Among these 25 states, those with the smallest cents-on-the-dollar gaps between Black women and white, non-Hispanic men are Missouri (64 cents), Kentucky (64 cents), Maryland (63 cents), Tennessee (63 cents) and Arkansas (63 cents).⁸
- Even in the states with the highest median wages for Black women – the District of Columbia (\$54,255), Maryland (\$52,371) and California (\$50,102) – wage gaps are still substantial.⁹

The Wage Gap in the 25 States with the Largest Number of Black Women Working Full Time, Year-Round					
State	Number of Black Women Working Full Time, Year-Round	Median Wages for Black Women	Median Wages for White, Non-Hispanic Men	Annual Wage Gap	Cents on the Dollar
Texas	619,942	\$40,227	\$73,398	\$33,171	\$0.55
Georgia	591,970	\$37,313	\$63,498	\$26,185	\$0.59
Florida	562,031	\$33,643	\$60,488	\$26,845	\$0.56
New York	522,421	\$46,271	\$77,219	\$30,948	\$0.60
North Carolina	384,635	\$34,994	\$60,962	\$25,968	\$0.57
Maryland	360,360	\$52,371	\$83,081	\$30,710	\$0.63
California	338,690	\$50,102	\$90,705	\$40,603	\$0.55
Virginia	292,981	\$40,348	\$72,648	\$32,300	\$0.56
Illinois	275,245	\$41,196	\$73,381	\$32,185	\$0.56
Louisiana	231,413	\$30,318	\$64,370	\$34,052	\$0.47
South Carolina	228,313	\$30,970	\$59,084	\$28,114	\$0.52
Ohio	220,355	\$35,366	\$60,473	\$25,107	\$0.58
Pennsylvania	218,648	\$38,936	\$64,735	\$25,799	\$0.60
New Jersey	214,075	\$46,016	\$87,732	\$41,716	\$0.52
Alabama	207,694	\$31,652	\$59,296	\$27,644	\$0.53
Tennessee	195,379	\$35,242	\$55,645	\$20,403	\$0.63
Michigan	194,353	\$36,996	\$62,236	\$25,240	\$0.59
Mississippi	172,393	\$29,362	\$53,246	\$23,884	\$0.55
Missouri	121,262	\$35,926	\$56,242	\$20,316	\$0.64
Indiana	97,458	\$35,215	\$57,822	\$22,607	\$0.61
Massachusetts	84,672	\$43,837	\$83,929	\$40,092	\$0.52
Arkansas	73,158	\$32,463	\$51,804	\$19,341	\$0.63
Connecticut	65,328	\$43,445	\$81,636	\$38,191	\$0.53

Kentucky	55,501	\$34,533	\$53,958	\$19,425	\$0.64
District of Columbia	53,349	\$54,255	\$121,751	\$67,496	\$0.45

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. (2022). *American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2016-2020 (Tables B20017B, B20017H, and B20005B)*. Median earnings are for full time, year-round workers.

How Does the Wage Gap Harm Black Women?

Median wages for Black women in the United States are \$36,303 per year, compared to median wages of \$57,005 annually for white, non-Hispanic men. This amounts to a difference of \$20,702 each year.¹⁰ These lost wages mean Black women have less money to support themselves and their families, save and invest for the future, and spend on goods and services. Families, businesses and the economy suffer as a result.

For example, if the wage gap were eliminated, on average, a Black woman working full time, year-round would have enough money for approximately:

- More than two years of child care;¹¹
- More than two additional years of tuition and fees for a four-year public university, or the full cost of tuition and fees for a two-year community college;¹²
- More than 13 additional months of premiums for employer-based health insurance;¹³
- 130 more weeks of food for her family (two and a half years' worth);¹⁴
- One year of mortgage and utilities payments;¹⁵
- Almost 19 more months of rent;¹⁶
- More than 17 additional years of birth control;¹⁷ or
- Enough money to pay off the average student loan debt in under two years.¹⁸

Black Women and Their Families Cannot Afford Discrimination and Lower Wages

- Eliminating the wage gap would provide much-needed income to Black women whose wages sustain their households.
- Nearly 80 percent of Black mothers are key breadwinners for their families, which means their households rely heavily on their wages to make ends meet and get ahead;¹⁹
- Nearly four million family households in the United States are headed by Black women²⁰ – and nearly 30 percent of those households live below the poverty level.²¹ This means that close to 1.2 million family households headed by Black women live in poverty, demonstrating the imperative to eliminate the wage gap.

The Public Overwhelmingly Supports Fair Pay Policies

- Black women experience workplace harassment and discrimination at high rates. Close to two-thirds of Black women (62 percent) reported experiencing racial discrimination, and half (50 percent) report experiencing gender discrimination.²² 84 percent of Black women voters surveyed ahead of the 2022 midterm elections rank ending workplace harassment and discrimination as one of their top policy concerns.
- Black women want Congress to act. More than eight in ten Black women voters say strengthening equal pay laws is either their most important or a very important policy concern.²³ 87 percent of Black women support providing all workers with paid family and medical leave, 86 percent back raising the minimum wage to \$15 per hour, 85 percent want to see all families get access to high-quality, affordable child care and 79 percent support protecting the right of workers to discuss their salaries.²⁴

¹ U.S. Census Bureau. (2022). *Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic (ASEC) Supplement: Table PINC-05: Work Experience in 2021 – People 15 Years Old and Over by Total Money Earnings in 2021, Age, Race, Hispanic Origin, Sex, and Disability Status*. Retrieved 15 September 2022, from <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/cps-pinc/pinc-05.html> (Unpublished calculation based on the median earnings for all Black women and white, non-Hispanic men with earnings in 2021.)

² Ibid. (Unpublished calculation based on the number of Black women with any earnings and the number who worked at full-time jobs for 50 or more weeks per year in 2021.)

³ Glynn, S. J. (2018, April). *Gender wage inequality: What we know and how we can fix it*. Retrieved 6 October 2022, from Washington Center for Equitable Growth website: <https://equitablegrowth.org/research-paper/gender-wage-inequality/?longform=true>

⁴ See note 1.

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau. (2022). *American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2016-2020, Geographies: All States within United States, (Tables B20017B, B20017H, and B20005B)*. Retrieved 6 October 2022, from <http://data.census.gov>. (Calculations are based on a comparison of the median earnings of white, non-Hispanic men working full time, year-round with those of Black women working full time, year-round.)

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ See note 1.

¹¹ Child Care Aware of America. (2022). *Demanding Change: Repairing Our Child Care System*. Retrieved 15 September 2022, from <https://www.childcareaware.org/demanding-change-repairing-our-child-care-system>. The authors note that the landscape of child care varies significantly from state to state and computing a single national average is complex. This analysis uses the average of program-weighted averages for center-based care for a four-year-old, \$9,715.

¹² U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2022, January). *Digest of Education Statistics: 2021* (Table 330.10, Average undergraduate tuition and fees and room and board rates charged for full-time students in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by level and control of institution: 1963-64 through 2020-21), Chapter 3. Retrieved 15 September 2022, from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d21/tables/dt21_330.10.asp (The average total annual cost of undergraduate tuition and required fees is \$9,375 for a four-year public college or university or \$3,501 for a two-year college)

¹³ Kaiser Family Foundation. (n.d.) Average Annual Single Premium per Enrolled Employee For Employer-Based Health Insurance, 2020. Retrieved 15 September 2022, from <https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/single-coverage/?currentTimeframe=0&sortModel=%7B%22colId%22:%22Employee%20Contribution%22,%22sort%22:%22desc%22%7D>

¹⁴ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2022, September). *Consumer Expenditures - 2021*. Retrieved 15 September 2022, from <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/cesan.pdf> (Calculation uses overall average "food" cost.)

¹⁵ U.S. Census Bureau. (2022). *American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates 2021, Table DP04: Selected Housing Characteristics*. Retrieved 15 September 2022, from <https://data.census.gov/> (Calculation uses median monthly owner costs, housing units with a mortgage)

¹⁶ Ibid. (Calculation uses median gross rent, occupied units paying rent)

¹⁷ Center for American Progress. (2012, February 15). *The High Costs of Birth Control: It's Not As Affordable As You Think*. Retrieved 15 September 2022, from https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/issues/2012/02/pdf/BC_costs.pdf (Calculated from a survey of retail costs of oral contraceptives for the uninsured and average copays, combined with the average cost of doctor visits to obtain the prescription. While the Affordable Care Act greatly advanced access to birth control by requiring coverage of contraceptives without cost sharing, many women still must pay out of pocket because they lack insurance, because their plan is grandfathered and does not cover contraceptives without a copay, or because their plan only covers generics.)

¹⁸ U.S. Department of Education, Office of Federal Student Aid. (n.d.) *Federal Student Loan Portfolio: Federal Student Aid Portfolio Summary*. National Student Loan Data System Publication. Retrieved 15 September 2022, from <https://studentaid.gov/data-center/student/portfolio>. (Average dollars outstanding for recipients of direct loans as of Q2 2022, \$37,633.)

¹⁹ Shaw, E., Mason, C., Lacarte, V., & Jauregui, E. (2020, May). *Holding Up Half the Sky: Mothers as Workers, Primary Caregivers, & Breadwinners During COVID-19* (Table 1). Retrieved 15 September 2022, from the Institute for Women's Policy Research: <https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Holding-Up-Half-the-Sky-Mothers-as-Breadwinners.pdf> (Breadwinner mothers are defined as single mothers who head a household or married mothers who generate at least 40 percent of a household's joint income.)

²⁰ U.S. Census Bureau. (2022). *American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates 2021, Table B11001B: Household Type (Including Living Alone) (Black or African American Alone)*. Retrieved 6 October 2022, from <https://data.census.gov> (Calculation uses family households headed women and no spouse present.)

²¹ U.S. Census Bureau. (2022). *American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates 2021, Table S0201: Selected Population Profile in the United States (Black or African American alone)*. Retrieved 6 October 2022, from <https://data.census.gov>

²² YWCA USA and FINN Partners. (2022, August 26). *YWWomenVote 2022 – Midterm Election Study*. Retrieved 6 October 2022, from <https://ywomenvote.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/20220826-YWWomenVote-Memo-MidtermElectionStudy.pdf>. (FINN Partners conducted a national survey, commissioned by the YWCA USA, among 3,354 women from June 21 – August 2, 2022.)

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ National Women's Law Center. (2022, August). *Resilient But Not Recovered: Black Women in the COVID-19 Pandemic*. Retrieved 6 October 2022, from https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/nwlc_BlackWomen_RESILIENT_FS.pdf

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