

# 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 who work full time, year-round are typically paid just 64 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> Overall, women employed full time, year-round are typically paid 83 cents for every dollar paid to men.<sup>3</sup>

**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 48 to 68 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men in those states.<sup>4</sup>
- Of these 25 states, the District of Columbia and Mississippi have the largest shares of Black women working full time, year-round (as a percentage of their state's overall full-time workforce). Black women in the District of Columbia are paid 49 cents and Black women in Mississippi are paid 57 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.<sup>5</sup> Black women face the largest overall cents-on-the-dollar wage gaps

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\* Due to pandemic-related disruptions in data collection, the Census Bureau will not release its standard 1-year estimates for the 2020 American Community Survey. As a result, this fact sheet provides the previous year's data for state- and congressional district-level wage gaps and other ACS-based analyses

in Louisiana (just 48 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men), the District of Columbia (49 cents) and South Carolina and New Jersey (55 cents).<sup>6</sup>

- 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 58 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.<sup>7</sup>
- Among these 25 states, Missouri, Maryland, Kentucky and Tennessee have the smallest cents-on-the-dollar wage gaps, but Black women in those states still face substantial disparities. On average, Black women are paid just 68 cents in Maryland and 67 cents in Missouri, Kentucky and Tennessee for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.<sup>8</sup>

The Wage Gap in the 25 States with the Largest Number of Working Black Women					
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	604,243	\$38,958	\$66,880	\$27,922	\$0.58
Georgia	577,381	\$35,843	\$60,626	\$24,783	\$0.59
Florida	546,000	\$32,148	\$53,601	\$21,453	\$0.60
New York	523,605	\$44,407	\$70,954	\$26,547	\$0.63
North Carolina	372,509	\$34,034	\$54,001	\$19,967	\$0.63
Maryland	357,300	\$51,539	\$75,674	\$24,135	\$0.68
California	333,074	\$47,752	\$80,893	\$33,141	\$0.59
Virginia	290,539	\$39,267	\$66,298	\$27,031	\$0.59
Illinois	270,123	\$40,542	\$66,596	\$26,054	\$0.61
Louisiana	229,863	\$29,216	\$60,441	\$31,225	\$0.48
South Carolina	221,751	\$30,389	\$55,150	\$24,761	\$0.55
Pennsylvania	216,282	\$38,168	\$58,920	\$20,752	\$0.65
Ohio	214,338	\$34,416	\$54,849	\$20,433	\$0.63
New Jersey	211,078	\$44,739	\$81,104	\$36,365	\$0.55
Alabama	204,328	\$31,244	\$53,258	\$22,014	\$0.59
Tennessee	193,657	\$34,166	\$51,163	\$16,997	\$0.67
Michigan	190,653	\$35,506	\$56,321	\$20,815	\$0.63
Mississippi	168,375	\$28,752	\$50,746	\$21,994	\$0.57
Missouri	116,351	\$34,734	\$51,789	\$17,055	\$0.67
Indiana	95,030	\$34,050	\$53,154	\$19,104	\$0.64

Massachusetts	83,504	\$42,715	\$76,744	\$34,029	\$0.56
Arkansas	71,863	\$31,277	\$48,507	\$17,230	\$0.64
Connecticut	62,221	\$43,018	\$75,204	\$32,186	\$0.57
Kentucky	54,789	\$33,555	\$50,236	\$16,681	\$0.67
District of Columbia	52,548	\$51,966	\$105,646	\$53,680	\$0.49

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). *American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2015-2019, Geographies: All States within United States*, Table B20017B: Median Earnings in the Past 12 Months (in 2019 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars) by Sex by Work Experience in the Past 12 Months for the Population 16 Years and Over with Earnings in the Past 12 Months (Black or African American Alone); *American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates 2019, Geographies: All States within United States*, Table B20017H: Median Earnings in the Past 12 Months (in 2019 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars) by Sex by Work Experience in the Past 12 Months for the Population 16 Years and Over with Earnings in the Past 12 Months (White Alone, not Hispanic or Latino); and *American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2015-2019, Geographies: All States within United States*, Table B20005B: Sex by Work Experience in the Past 12 Months by Earnings in the Past 12 Months (in 2019 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars) for the Population 16 Years and Over (Black or African American Alone).

## How Does the Wage Gap Harm Black Women?

Median wages for Black women in the United States are \$43,209 per year, compared to median wages of \$67,629 annually for white, non-Hispanic men. This amounts to a difference of \$24,420 each year.<sup>9</sup> 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 and a half years of child care;<sup>10</sup>
- More than two and a half 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;<sup>11</sup>
- Nearly 16 additional months of premiums for employer-based health insurance;<sup>12</sup>
- 174 more weeks of food for her family (more than three years' worth);<sup>13</sup>
- Fifteen additional months of mortgage and utilities payments;<sup>14</sup>
- More than twenty-two more months of rent;<sup>15</sup>
- More than 20 additional years of birth control;<sup>16</sup> or
- Enough money to pay off the average student loan debt in one and one-half years.<sup>17</sup>

## 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;<sup>18</sup>
- Nearly four million family households in the United States are headed by Black women<sup>19</sup> – and more than 1 in 4 of those households live below the poverty level.<sup>20</sup> This means that more than 1 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. In a recent survey conducted by the YWCA, close to two-thirds of Black women (62 percent) reported experiencing racial discrimination, and half (50 percent) reported experiencing gender discrimination.<sup>21</sup>
- Black women want Congress to act. Nearly 9 in 10 Black women (88 percent) strongly agree that Congress should strengthen equal pay laws, more than 8 in 10 (86 percent) that Congress should pass legislation to end racial profiling, and nearly 8 in 10 (79 percent) that Congress should pass paid family and medical leave legislation.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2021). *Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic (ASEC) Supplement: Table PINC-05: Work Experience in 2020 – People 15 Years Old and Over by Total Money Earnings in 2020, Age, Race, Hispanic Origin, Sex, and Disability Status*. Retrieved 17 November 2021, 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 women and men who worked full time, year-round in 2020; full time is defined as 35 hours a week or more)

<sup>2</sup> Glynn, S. J. (2018, April). *Gender wage inequality: What we know and how we can fix it*. Retrieved 17 November from Washington Center for Equitable Growth website: <https://equitablegrowth.org/research-paper/gender-wage-inequality/?longform=true>

<sup>3</sup> See note 1.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). *American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2015-2019, Geographies: All States within United States, Tables B20017B: Median Earnings in the Past 12 Months (in 2019 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars) by Sex by Work Experience in the Past 12 Months for the Population 16 Years and Over with Earnings in the Past 12 Months*. Retrieved 18 March 2021, from <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=B20017B&tid=ACSDT5Y2019.B20017B>; U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). *American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2015-2019, Geographies: All States within United States, B20017H: Median Earnings in the Past 12 Months (in 2019 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars) by Sex by Work Experience in the Past 12 Months for the Population 16 Years and Over with Earnings in the Past 12 Months*. Retrieved 18 March 2021, from <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=B20017h&tid=ACSDT5Y2019.B20017H> (This calculation is based on a comparison of the median earnings of white, non-Hispanic men working full time, year-round with that of Black women working full time, year-round.); U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). *American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2015-2019, Geographies: All States within United States, Table B20005B: Sex by Work Experience in the Past 12 Months by Earnings in the*

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*Past 12 Months (in 2019 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars) for the Population 16 Years and Over (Black or African American Alone)*. Retrieved 18 March 2021, from <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=B20005B&tid=ACSDT5Y2019.B20005B>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). *American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2015-2019, Geographies: All States within United States, Table B20005: Sex By Work Experience in the Past 12 Months by Earnings in the Past 12 Months (in 2019 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars) for the Population 16 Years and Over*. Retrieved 17 March 2021, from <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=B20005&tid=ACSDT1Y2018.B20005> (Black women comprise 18 percent of the full-time, year-round workforce in the District of Columbia and Mississippi.)

<sup>6</sup> See note 4.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> See note 1.

<sup>10</sup> Child Care Aware of America. (2020). *Picking Up the Pieces: Building a Better Child Care System Post COVID-19*. Retrieved 20 October 2021, from <https://www.childcareaware.org/picking-up-the-pieces/>. The authors note that the price of child care varies significantly across the United States, but estimate that the average price is between \$9,200 and \$9,600. This analysis uses the midpoint of that range, \$9,400, as the average price for child care.

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2020). *Digest of Education Statistics: 2020* (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 2019-20), Chapter 3. Retrieved 17 November 2021, from [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d20/tables/dt20\\_330.10.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d20/tables/dt20_330.10.asp) (The average total annual cost of undergraduate tuition and required fees is \$9,349 for a four-year public college or university or \$3,377 for a two-year college)

<sup>12</sup> Kaiser Family Foundation. (n.d.) *Average Annual Single Premium per Enrolled Employee For Employer-Based Health Insurance, 2020*. Retrieved 17 November 2021, from <https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/single-coverage/?currentTimeframe=0&sortModel=%7B%22colId%22:%22Employee%20Contribution%22,%22sort%22:%22desc%22%7D>

<sup>13</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2020, September). *Consumer Expenditures - 2019*. Retrieved 16 March 2021, from <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/cesan.pdf> (Calculation uses overall average “food” cost.)

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). *American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates 2019, Table DP04: Selected Housing Characteristics*. Retrieved 15 March 2020, from <https://data.census.gov/> (Calculation uses median monthly owner costs, housing units with a mortgage)

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. (Calculation uses median gross rent, occupied units paying rent)

<sup>16</sup> Center for American Progress. (2012, February 15). *The High Costs of Birth Control: It's Not As Affordable As You Think*. Retrieved 17 November 2021, from [https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/issues/2012/02/pdf/BC\\_costs.pdf](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.)

<sup>17</sup> 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 17 November 2021. (Average dollars outstanding for recipients of direct loans as of Q2 2021, \$37,143.)

<sup>18</sup> 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 2 March 2021 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.)

<sup>19</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). *American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates 2019, Table B11001B: Household Type (Including Living Alone) (Black or African American Alone)*. Retrieved 17 November 2021, from <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=B11001B&tid=ACSDT1Y2019.B11001B&vintage=2018&hidePreview=true> (Calculation uses family households headed by females living in a household with family and no husband. A family household includes a householder, one or more people living in the same household who are related to the householder, and anyone else living in the same household.)

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<sup>20</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). *American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates 2019, Table S0201: Selected Population Profile in the United States (Black or African American alone)*. Retrieved 17 November 2021, from <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=S0201&t=004%20%20Black%20or%20African%20American%20alone&tid=ACSSPP1Y2019.S0201&hidePreview=true> (To determine whether a household falls below the poverty level, the U.S. Census Bureau considers the income of the householder, size of family, number of related children, and, for one- and two-person families, age of householder. The poverty threshold in 2018 was \$20,231 for a single householder and two children under 18.)

<sup>21</sup> YWCA USA (2019, December). *YWomenVote 2020*. Retrieved 17 November 2021, from [https://ywomenvote.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/YWomenVote-Report\\_FNL\\_12-11-19.pdf](https://ywomenvote.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/YWomenVote-Report_FNL_12-11-19.pdf) (Lake Research Partners and American Viewpoint conducted a national survey, commissioned by the YWCA USA, among 1,000 adult women with oversamples of 100 Black women, 100 Latinas, 100 Asian/Pacific Islander women, 100 American Indian/Alaska Native women, 100 Gen Z women (age 18-22), 100 Millennial women (age 23-38), and 100 white non-college rural women . The margin of error for the total sample was +/-3.1% and +/-9.8% for the oversamples.)

<sup>22</sup> YWCA USA (2018, September). *What Women Want 2018*. Retrieved 17 November 2021, from [https://www.ywca.org/wp-content/uploads/WhatWomenWant2018\\_final.pdf](https://www.ywca.org/wp-content/uploads/WhatWomenWant2018_final.pdf) (Lake Research Partners and American Viewpoint conducted a national survey, commissioned by the YWCA USA, among 1,038 adult women with oversamples of 100 Black women, 100 Latinas, 100 Asian/Pacific Islander women, and 100 Native American women. The survey was conducted from Aug. 27 – Sept. 6, 2018. The margin of error for the sample as a whole is plus or minus 3.1 percentage points but was higher for subgroups.)

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