

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 63 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 65 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men – but that figure does not count more than 3.7 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 76 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 with the largest numbers of Black women working for pay, the cents-on-the-dollar wage gap for Black women ranges from 46 to 67 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 Louisiana (paid just 46 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men), and in Alabama, Mississippi and Massachusetts (53 cents).⁶
- Of these 25 states, Texas and Georgia have the largest populations of Black women working. Black women in Texas are paid 55 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-

Hispanic men and Black women in Georgia are paid 61 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 Tennessee and Missouri (67 cents), Maryland (64 cents), and North Carolina and New York (63 cents).⁸
- Even in the states with the highest median wages for Black women – Maryland (\$48,502), California (\$42,331) and New York (\$41,399) – wage gaps are still substantial.⁹

The Wage Gap in the 25 States with the Most Black Working Women					
State	Number of Black Women Working	Median Wages for Black Women	Median Wages for White, Non-Hispanic Men	Annual Wage Gap	Cents on the Dollar
Texas	1,467,772	\$36,291	\$66,293	\$30,002	\$0.55
Georgia	1,441,059	\$35,760	\$58,196	\$22,436	\$0.61
Florida	1,373,107	\$32,613	\$53,739	\$21,126	\$0.61
New York	1,278,648	\$41,399	\$65,910	\$24,511	\$0.63
North Carolina	943,112	\$33,871	\$54,158	\$20,287	\$0.63
California	892,851	\$42,331	\$75,137	\$32,806	\$0.56
Maryland	793,266	\$48,502	\$75,959	\$27,457	\$0.64
Illinois	747,598	\$35,240	\$63,393	\$28,153	\$0.56
Virginia	685,003	\$37,014	\$64,813	\$27,799	\$0.57
Louisiana	591,734	\$26,777	\$58,757	\$31,980	\$0.46
Ohio	585,941	\$31,728	\$53,509	\$21,781	\$0.59
Pennsylvania	570,098	\$34,693	\$57,500	\$22,807	\$0.60
Alabama	566,453	\$28,813	\$54,038	\$25,225	\$0.53
South Carolina	565,752	\$30,109	\$53,949	\$23,840	\$0.56
Michigan	561,525	\$31,184	\$53,206	\$22,022	\$0.59
New Jersey	513,437	\$41,161	\$75,985	\$34,824	\$0.54
Tennessee	465,574	\$34,155	\$51,079	\$16,924	\$0.67
Mississippi	456,575	\$26,852	\$50,818	\$23,966	\$0.53
Missouri	285,453	\$34,160	\$51,166	\$17,006	\$0.67
Indiana	250,821	\$31,585	\$53,254	\$21,669	\$0.59
Massachusetts	198,067	\$38,677	\$72,304	\$33,627	\$0.53
Arkansas	185,070	\$29,673	\$47,505	\$17,832	\$0.62
Connecticut	162,630	\$38,283	\$71,064	\$32,781	\$0.54
Kentucky	138,396	\$29,447	\$48,299	\$18,852	\$0.61

Wisconsin	135,391	\$31,595	\$55,619	\$24,024	\$0.57
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Sources: Source: U.S. Census Bureau. (2025). American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2019-2023 (Tables B20017B, B20017H, and B20005B).

How Does the Wage Gap Harm Black Women?

Median wages for Black women in the United States are \$41,990 per year, compared to median wages of \$66,850 annually for white, non-Hispanic men. This amounts to a difference of \$24,860 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 working woman would have enough money for approximately:

- Almost 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
- Almost 14 additional months of premiums for employer-based health insurance;¹³
- About 30 more months of food for her family (two and a half years' worth);¹⁴
- Over one year of mortgage and utilities payments;¹⁵
- Almost 17 more months of rent;¹⁶
- The maximum annual individual 401(k) contribution;¹⁷ or
- Enough money to pay off the average student loan debt in under two years.¹⁸

IF THE WAGE GAP CLOSED FOR ONE YEAR, BLACK WOMEN COULD AFFORD:



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 70 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 1.1 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. Two-thirds of Black women (66 percent) reported experiencing racial discrimination, and half (49 percent) report experiencing gender discrimination.²² Eighty percent of Black women voters surveyed ahead of 2024 elections indicated ensuring workplaces are free from sexual violence, harassment and discrimination was a very important policy concern for them.²³
- Black women want Congress to act. Eight in ten Black women voters say strengthening equal pay laws is a very important policy concern.²⁴ Black women also believe it is very important to provide paid family and medical leave (87 percent), provide paid sick and safe leave to heal from illness or seek safety from gender-based violence (74 percent), of Black women support providing paid leave to welcome a new child or care for a family member, and expand access to affordable, high-quality child care (73 percent).²⁵

¹ U.S. Census Bureau. (2025). *Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic (ASEC) Supplement: Table PINC-05: Work Experience in 2024 – People 15 Years Old and Over by Total Money Earnings in 2024, Age, Race, Hispanic Origin, Sex, and Disability Status*. Retrieved 9 October 2025, 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 2024.)

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 2025.)

³ Glynn, S. J. (2018, April). *Gender wage inequality: What we know and how we can fix it*. Retrieved 18 November 2025, 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. (2025). *American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2019-2023, Geographies: All States within United States, (Tables B20017B, B20017H, and B20005B)*. Retrieved 17 November 2025, from <http://data.census.gov>. (Calculations are based on a comparison of the median earnings of white, non-Hispanic men with those of Black women.)

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ See note 1.

¹¹ Child Care Aware of America. (2025). *Child Care in America: 2024 Price & Supply*. Retrieved 14 October 2025, from <https://www.childcareaware.org/price-landscape24/#PriceofCare>. 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 national average for center-based care for a four-year-old, \$13,128.

¹² Ma, Jennifer, Matea Pender, and Meghan Oster (2024). *Trends in College Pricing and Student Aid 2024*, New York: College Board. Retrieved 14 October 2024, from <https://research.collegeboard.org/media/pdf/Trends-in-College-Pricing-and-Student-Aid-2024-ADA.pdf>. (The average total annual cost of undergraduate tuition and required fees is \$11,610 for a four-year public college or university or \$4,050 for a two-year college)

¹³ U.S. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. (n.d.) *Medical Expenditure Panel Survey (MEPS) Insurance Component (IC): Average total employee contributions per enrolled employee for single coverage at private-sector establishments that offer health insurance by firm size and selected characteristics, 2024*. Retrieved 25 September 2025, from <https://datatools.ahrq.gov/meps-ic/>

¹⁴ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2024, September 25). Consumer Expenditures - 2023. Retrieved 9 October 2025, from <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/cesan.pdf>. This analysis uses the overall average “food” expenditure which was \$9,985 in 2023.

¹⁵ U.S. Census Bureau. (2025). *American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates 2024, Table DP04: Selected Housing Characteristics*. Retrieved 25 September 2025, from <https://data.census.gov/> (Calculation uses median monthly owner costs, housing units with a mortgage.) Monthly owner costs include the sum of payment for mortgages, real estate taxes, various insurances, utilities, fuels, mobile home costs, and condominium fees.

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

¹⁷ U.S. Internal Revenue Service (2024, November 1). *401(k) limit increases to \$23,500 for 2025, IRA limit remains \$7,000*. Retrieved 15 October 2025, from <https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/401k-limit-increases-to-23500-for-2025-ira-limit-remains-7000>

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 9 October 2025, from <https://studentaid.gov/data-center/student/portfolio>. (Average dollars outstanding for recipients of direct loans as of Q3 2025, \$39,495.)

¹⁹ Andara, K., Estep, S., & Salas-Betsch, I. (2025, May). *Breadwinning Women Are a Lifeline for Their Families and the Economy*. Retrieved 16 October 2025, from <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/breadwinning-women-are-a-lifeline-for-their-families-and-the-economy/> (Breadwinner mothers are defined as single or married mothers who generate at least 50 percent of a household’s income.)

²⁰ U.S. Census Bureau. (2025). *American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates 2024, Table B11001B: Household Type (Including Living Alone) (Black or African American Alone)*. Retrieved 18 November 2025, from <https://data.census.gov> (Calculation uses family households headed women and no spouse present.)

²¹ U.S. Census Bureau. (2025). *American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates 2024, Table S0201: Selected Population Profile in the United States (Black or African American alone)*. Retrieved 18 November 2025, from <https://data.census.gov>

²² YWCA USA and HIT Strategies. (2024). *YWCA YWomenVote 2024 Survey – Spotlight: Black Women*. Retrieved 5 November 2025, from <https://www.ywomenvote.org/results>

²³ YWCA USA and HIT Strategies. (2024). *YWCA YWomenVote 2024 Survey – Executive Summary*. Retrieved 5 November 2025, from <https://www.ywomenvote.org/results>. Respondents from survey were asked, “Of the following issues, which three are the most important to you?”.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ 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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