Black Women and the Wage Gap

MARCH 2020

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 62 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.¹ 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.² Overall, women employed full time, year-round are typically paid 82 cents for every dollar paid to men.³

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 47 to 67 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men in those states.⁴
- 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 51 cents and Black women in Mississippi are paid 56 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.⁵ Black women face the largest overall cents-on-the-dollar wage gaps in Louisiana (just 47 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men), the District of Columbia (51 cents) and Mississippi and New Jersey (56 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 58 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.

Among these 25 states, Missouri, Maryland, Pennsylvania 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 67 cents in Maryland and 66 cents in Missouri, Pennsylvania and Tennessee for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.

### Wage Gap for Black Women by State

An analysis of the wage gap in the 25 states with the largest number of Black women who work full time, year-round

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Number of Black Women Working Full Time, Year-Round</th>
<th>Median Wages for Black Women</th>
<th>Median Wages for White, Non-Hispanic Men</th>
<th>Annual Wage Gap</th>
<th>Cents on the Dollar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>581,167</td>
<td>$37,969</td>
<td>$65,965</td>
<td>$27,996</td>
<td>$0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>545,514</td>
<td>$35,192</td>
<td>$57,255</td>
<td>$22,063</td>
<td>$0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>522,507</td>
<td>$31,631</td>
<td>$52,493</td>
<td>$20,862</td>
<td>$0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>513,991</td>
<td>$42,499</td>
<td>$67,434</td>
<td>$24,935</td>
<td>$0.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>357,255</td>
<td>$32,948</td>
<td>$52,148</td>
<td>$19,200</td>
<td>$0.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>352,139</td>
<td>$50,291</td>
<td>$75,630</td>
<td>$25,339</td>
<td>$0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>322,520</td>
<td>$46,858</td>
<td>$80,065</td>
<td>$33,207</td>
<td>$0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>284,040</td>
<td>$38,566</td>
<td>$65,294</td>
<td>$26,728</td>
<td>$0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>260,814</td>
<td>$39,891</td>
<td>$65,350</td>
<td>$25,459</td>
<td>$0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>223,127</td>
<td>$27,555</td>
<td>$59,028</td>
<td>$31,473</td>
<td>$0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>215,017</td>
<td>$29,714</td>
<td>$51,926</td>
<td>$22,212</td>
<td>$0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>208,921</td>
<td>$37,305</td>
<td>$56,403</td>
<td>$19,098</td>
<td>$0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>208,414</td>
<td>$33,710</td>
<td>$53,532</td>
<td>$19,822</td>
<td>$0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>206,527</td>
<td>$43,694</td>
<td>$78,244</td>
<td>$34,550</td>
<td>$0.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>196,445</td>
<td>$30,579</td>
<td>$52,444</td>
<td>$21,865</td>
<td>$0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>184,565</td>
<td>$33,122</td>
<td>$50,557</td>
<td>$17,435</td>
<td>$0.66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Michigan 182,546 $34,287 $55,624 $21,337 $0.62
Mississippi 163,376 $28,284 $50,622 $22,338 $0.56
Missouri 114,578 $33,945 $50,621 $16,676 $0.67
Indiana 90,998 $33,200 $52,156 $18,956 $0.64
Massachusetts 79,709 $41,787 $72,354 $30,567 $0.58
Arkansas 69,051 $30,290 $46,812 $16,522 $0.65
Connecticut 59,672 $42,137 $73,624 $31,487 $0.57
District of Columbia 52,164 $52,095 $102,299 $50,204 $0.51
Kentucky 51,702 $32,455 $50,039 $17,584 $0.65


How Does the Wage Gap Harm Black Women?

Median wages for Black women in the United States are $38,036 per year, compared to median wages of $61,576 annually for white, non-Hispanic men. This amounts to a difference of $23,540 each year. 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:

- Two and a half years of child care;
- 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;
- More than 16 additional months of premiums for employer-based health insurance;
- 156 more weeks of food for her family (three years’ worth);
- Fifteen additional months of mortgage and utilities payments;
- Twenty-two more months of rent;
Nearly 20 additional years of birth control;\textsuperscript{16} or

Enough money to pay off student loan debt in just over one year.\textsuperscript{17}

**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.

- More than 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;\textsuperscript{18}
- Nearly four million family households in the United States are headed by Black women\textsuperscript{19} – and more than 1 in 4 of those households live below the poverty level.\textsuperscript{20}

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.\textsuperscript{21}
- 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.\textsuperscript{22}

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\textsuperscript{3} See note 1.


6 See note 4.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 See note 1.

10 Child Care Awareness of America. (2019). The U.S. and the High Cost of Child Care: An Examination of a Broken System. Retrieved 19 March 2020, from https://info.childcareaware.org/hubfs/2019%20Price%20of%20Child%20Care%20State%20Sheets/Final-TheUSAndtheHighPriceofChildCare-AnExaminationofaBrokenSystem.pdf. Estimate of $9,254 based on the average cost of child care for a four-year-old. This average is not representative of the mean and is an approximation calculated by weighting state child care cost averages by the number of programs by type reported by each state. It is not to be considered a “national average.”


12 Kaiser Family Foundation. (n.d.) Average Annual Single Premium per Enrolled Employee For Employer-Based Health Insurance, 2018. Retrieved 19 March 2020, from https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/single-coverage?currentTimeframe=0&sortModel=%7B%22colId%22:%22Employee%20Contribution%22%2C%22sort%22:%22%22desc%22%7D


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

16 Center for American Progress. (2012, February 15). The High Costs of Birth Control: It’s Not As Affordable As You Think. Retrieved 19 March 2020, from https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/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 Glynn, S. J. (2019, May 10). Breadwinning Mothers Continue To Be the U.S. Norm. Retrieved 19 March 2020 from Center for American Progress website: https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/reports/2019/05/10/469739/breadwinning-mothers-continue-u-s-norm/ “Key breadwinner” means a single mother who heads a household or a married mother who contributes 40 percent or more of the couple’s joint earnings.

19 U.S. Census Bureau. (2019). American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates 2018, Table B11001B: Household Type (Including Living Alone) (Black or African American Alone). Retrieved 19 March 2020, from https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=B11001B&tid=ACSDT1Y2018.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 household, one or more people living in the same household who are related to the householder, and anyone else living in the same household.)

20 U.S. Census Bureau. (2019). American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates 2018, Table S0201: Selected Population Profile in the United States (Black or African American Alone). Retrieved 19 March 2020, from https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=S0201&tid=ACSPPY1Y2018.S0201 (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.)

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.

22 YWCA USA (2018, September). What Women Want 2018. Retrieved 19 March 2020, from 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.)

The National Partnership for Women & Families is a nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy group dedicated to promoting fairness in the workplace, reproductive health and rights, access to quality, affordable health care and policies that help all people meet the dual demands of work and family. More information is available at NationalPartnership.org.

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