

Shortchanged and Underpaid: Black Women and the Pay Gap

Black Women Earn Less than White Men across All States* and Won't Reach Pay Equity with White Men Nationally until 2133

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

- In more than one-third of US states, Black women's median annual earnings were less than 60 percent of White men's earnings, and in nearly all states, Black women's median annual earnings were less than 70 percent of White men's earnings.
- Black women in the District of Columbia were paid \$49,247 less than White men in 2019, generating the largest gap in absolute earnings of all states and the District of Columbia.
- Black women in Louisiana were paid just 48 cents for every dollar paid to White men, the worst earnings ratio of all states and the District of Columbia.
- Nationally, the gender wage gap for Black women and White men did not narrow substantially over the decade between 2009 and 2019.



The COVID-19 pandemic and related recession has both highlighted the persistent racial and gendered economic inequalities that Black women face in the labor market and exacerbated them. Black women were overrepresented in low-paying service sector jobs that were at particularly high risk of unemployment¹ and in many low-paying jobs that were recognized as "essential" during the pandemic but had often been dismissed as "low-skilled" before.² Despite this recognition, these jobs continue to be undervalued with low wages and few benefits.³

*Here, all states refer to the 42 states with sample sizes large enough to calculate earnings for Black women. In the remaining states, there were too few Black women to calculate their earnings.

Before the pandemic, Black women were paid just 63.0 percent of White men's median annual earnings—\$24,110 less—even when they were able to obtain full-time year-round work.⁴ That represents a wage gap of 37.0 percent for Black women and White men and is much larger than the 17.7 percent wage gap between all women and all men.⁵ This illustrates the additional impact of race in shaping women's earnings. It also means higher rates of poverty, much lower levels of wealth, and fewer resources to weather economic downturns such as the COVID-19 recession.⁶

If changes in the earnings ratio for Black women and White men continues at the same pace as it has since the mid-1980s, **it will take Black women more than another hundred years—until 2133—to reach pay equity with White men.**⁷ Indeed, pay equity for Black women may have become even more elusive; the gender wage gap between Black women and White men was larger in 2019 (37.0 percent; a gender earnings ratio of 63.0 percent)⁸ than in four of the previous ten years.⁹ The wage gap has not substantially improved even as Black women's rate of college-level education has increased at a faster pace than White men's.¹⁰

BLACK WOMEN'S EARNINGS ARE LOWER THAN WHITE MEN'S ACROSS ALL STATES

Going into the COVID-19 pandemic, Black women's average earnings were lower than White men's in all states and the District of Columbia. In more than one-third of US states with sufficient data (16 out of 42 states), Black women's median annual earnings were less than 60 percent of White men's earnings. In nearly all states with sufficient data (41 out of 42 states), Black women's median annual earnings were less than 70 percent of White men's earnings.

Across states, the size of the pay gap varies substantially (Table 1):

- Black women were paid at least four-fifths of White men's earnings (82.7 percent) in only one state—**Hawaii**—where the annual earnings gap was \$10,361 in 2019.¹¹
- Black women in the **District of Columbia** faced the largest absolute annual earnings inequality, on average making \$49,247 less per year than White men in 2019.
- **Louisiana** has the largest wage gap between Black women and White men— 52.1 percent— with Black women being paid just 47.9 cents for every dollar paid to White men.
- The **District of Columbia** (with an earnings ratio of 52.0 percent and wage gap of 48.0 percent) and **Utah** (with an earnings ratio of 52.6 percent and wage gap of 47.4 percent) are similarly dismal.
- **Mississippi** ranks last for Black women's median annual earnings at just \$28,159. White men's median annual earnings are \$50,061 in the state, generating a pay gap of 43.8 percent.

MULTIPLE FACTORS CONTRIBUTE TO INEQUITY

Black women's lower earnings are due to numerous systemic inequalities, including discrimination in recruitment, hiring, and promotion, the undervaluation of care and service work in low-paid occupations where Black women are overrepresented, and Black women's underrepresentation in the jobs that pay the most.

- **Discrimination:** Black women are more likely than others to report discrimination,¹² sexual harassment,¹³ and assault.¹⁴ Women with names suggesting that they are Black or African American are also less likely to receive call backs and job interviews.¹⁵
- **Underrepresentation in professional and managerial jobs:** Black women are less likely than White men to work in the highest-paid occupations, in management, business, and financial operations (16.1 percent and 21.5 percent respectively of full-time workers), but even when they do, Black women's median weekly earnings in these jobs are only two-thirds (67.6 percent) that of White men.¹⁶
- **Lower returns to education:** While the racial gender wage gap is partly due to lower levels of educational attainment—slightly over a quarter of Black women have a Bachelor's degree compared to four in ten White men¹⁷—having university-level education does not close the wage gap: The gender earnings ratio between Black women and White men with a Bachelor's degree is 62.5 percent.¹⁸
- **Concentration in undervalued care and service jobs:** More than one-in-five employed Black women (21.6 percent) work in service occupations, the occupational group with the lowest median annual earnings. This is compared with fewer than one in ten White men (9.0 percent). Even in these lower-paid jobs, Black women earn substantially less: Black women's median earnings in service occupations are just 69.1 percent of White men's earnings.¹⁹
- **Lack of access to work-family supports:** Black women are more likely than other women to be single mothers and to be the primary or sole breadwinner for their families.²⁰ Yet, while Black women particularly need reliable access to work-family benefits, they often work in jobs that are not only underpaid but also do not provide basic benefits such as paid sick time, paid family leave, or schedule stability,²¹ and they often lack access to affordable quality child care.²²

EQUITY-FOCUSED POLICIES ARE NEEDED TO ACHIEVE EQUAL PAY

Tackling the gender wage gap will require comprehensive policies that ensure essential service and care work is properly valued, Black women have better access to good-paying trade and technical jobs now dominated by men,²³ discrimination is addressed and prevented, and all workers have access to living wages, paid leave, and quality, affordable child and elder care, including during training and education. This will benefit Black women, strengthen communities, and change lives.

TABLE 1: Black Women Earn Substantially Less than White Men in Every State

Median Annual Wages and Ratio of Black Women's to White Men's Wages, Full-Time Year-Round Workers, Aged 16 and Older				
State	Black Women	White Men	Annual Earnings Gap	Earnings Ratio
Alabama	\$31,288	\$53,268	\$21,980	58.7%
Arizona	\$37,769	\$59,351	\$21,582	63.6%
Arkansas	\$31,000	\$47,871	\$16,871	64.8%
California	\$46,941	\$79,902	\$32,961	58.7%
Colorado	\$39,707	\$63,123	\$23,416	62.9%
Connecticut	\$43,164	\$75,000	\$31,836	57.6%
Delaware	\$40,725	\$59,447	\$18,722	68.5%
District of Columbia	\$53,268	\$102,515	\$49,247	52.0%
Florida	\$32,373	\$52,942	\$20,569	61.1%
Georgia	\$35,634	\$57,361	\$21,727	62.1%
Hawaii	\$49,639	\$60,000	\$10,361	82.7%
Illinois	\$40,484	\$64,746	\$24,262	62.5%
Indiana	\$34,208	\$53,000	\$18,792	64.5%
Iowa	\$30,544	\$52,942	\$22,398	57.7%
Kansas	\$34,092	\$53,955	\$19,863	63.2%
Kentucky	\$33,374	\$49,000	\$15,626	68.1%
Louisiana	\$28,564	\$59,660	\$31,096	47.9%
Maryland	\$51,138	\$75,537	\$24,399	67.7%
Massachusetts	\$42,761	\$74,576	\$31,815	57.3%
Michigan	\$35,460	\$55,399	\$19,939	64.0%
Minnesota	\$36,503	\$61,000	\$24,497	59.8%
Mississippi	\$28,159	\$50,061	\$21,902	56.2%
Missouri	\$34,625	\$50,906	\$16,281	68.0%
Nebraska	\$33,374	\$52,942	\$19,568	63.0%
Nevada	\$37,288	\$58,595	\$21,307	63.6%
New Jersey	\$44,533	\$80,000	\$35,467	55.7%
New Mexico	\$35,023	\$58,595	\$23,572	59.8%
New York	\$44,459	\$69,000	\$24,541	64.4%
North Carolina	\$34,092	\$53,000	\$18,908	64.3%
Ohio	\$34,531	\$53,955	\$19,424	64.0%
Oklahoma	\$30,500	\$52,147	\$21,647	58.5%
Oregon	\$37,670	\$57,015	\$19,345	66.1%
Pennsylvania	\$38,353	\$57,361	\$19,008	66.9%
Rhode Island	\$38,800	\$62,576	\$23,776	62.0%
South Carolina	\$30,000	\$53,000	\$23,000	56.6%
Tennessee	\$33,452	\$50,000	\$16,548	66.9%
Texas	\$38,589	\$66,053	\$27,464	58.4%

**Median Annual Wages and Ratio of Black Women's to White Men's Wages,
Full-Time Year-Round Workers, Aged 16 and Older**

Utah	\$31,562	\$60,000	\$28,438	52.6%
Virginia	\$38,688	\$64,987	\$26,299	59.5%
Washington	\$41,400	\$66,748	\$25,348	62.0%
West Virginia	\$29,525	\$47,975	\$18,450	61.5%
Wisconsin	\$35,000	\$54,978	\$19,978	63.7%

Note: Insufficient sample size for statistical analysis of data for Alaska, Idaho, Maine, Montana, New Hampshire, North Dakota, South Dakota, Vermont, and Wyoming.

Source: IWPR analysis of 2014-2019 American Community Survey microdata (Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, Version 9.0).

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ENDNOTES

¹ See Ariane Hegewisch and Eve Mefferd, *The Weekly Gender Wage Gap by Race and Ethnicity: 2020*, Fact Sheet, IWPR #C494 (Washington DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2021) <<https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/2021-Weekly-Wage-Gap-Brief-1.pdf>> (accessed June 2021).

² Clare Hammonds, Jasmine Kerrissey, and Donald Tomaskovic-Devey, *Stressed, Unsafe, and Insecure: Essential Workers Need a New Deal* (Amherst, MA: Center for Employment Equity) <<https://www.umass.edu/employmentequity/stressed-unsafe-and-insecure-essential-workers-need-new-new-deal>> (accessed June 2021).

³ See note 2 above. See also Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Table 39: Median Weekly Earnings of Full-Time Wage and Salary Workers by Detailed Occupation and Sex* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, 2021) <<https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat39.htm>> (accessed June 2021).

⁴ Ariane Hegewisch and Halie Mariano, *Same Gap, Different Year: The Gender Wage Gap, 2019 Earnings Differences by Gender, Race, and Ethnicity*, Fact Sheet, IWPR #C495 (Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2020) <<https://iwpr.org/iwpr-issues/employment-and-earnings/same-gap-different-year-the-gender-wage-gap-2019-earnings-differences-by-gender-race-and-ethnicity/>> (accessed June 2021).

⁵ In 2019, the wage gap between Asian women and White men working full-time year-round was 12.9%, between White women and White men 21.3%, and between Hispanic or Latina women and White men 44.6%; these calculations are based on Ariane Hegewisch and Halie Mariano, *Same Gap, Different Year: 2019 Earnings Differences by Gender, Race, and Ethnicity*, Fact Sheet, IWPR #C495 (Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2020) <<https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Gender-Wage-Gap-Fact-Sheet-2.pdf>> (accessed June 2021).

⁶ Elyse Shaw, C. Nicole Mason, Valerie Lacarte, and Erika Jauregui, *Holding Up Half the Sky: Mothers as Workers, Primary Caregivers, and Breadwinners during COVID-19*, Report, IWPR #Q081 (Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2020) <<https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Holding-Up-Half-the-Sky-Mothers-as-Breadwinners.pdf>> (accessed June 2021).

⁷ See Valerie Lacarte and Jeff Hayes, *Women's Median Earnings as a Percent of Men's, 1985–2019 (Full-Time, Year-Round Workers) with Projections for Pay Equity, by Race/Ethnicity*, Quick Figure, IWPR (Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2020) <<https://iwpr.org/iwpr-publications/quick-figure/pay-equity-projection-race-ethnicity-2020/>> (accessed June 2021).

⁸ See note 4 above.

⁹ IWPR calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplements (CPS ASEC), Table P-38. Full-Time, Year-Round Workers by Median Earnings and Sex, <<https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/historical-income-people.html>> (accessed July 2021). The wage gap between Black women and White men was larger than in 2019 than in 2011 (36.0 percent for a gender wage ratio of 64.0 percent), 2012 (35.5 percent for a gender wage ratio of 64.5 percent), 2013 (36.3 percent for a gender wage ratio of 63.7 percent) and 2015 (36.7 percent for a gender wage ratio of 63.3 percent).

¹⁰ Between 2009 and 2019, the share of Black women with a Bachelor's degree increased by 35.4 percent (from 20.6 to 27.9 % of all Black women) while the share of White men with a Bachelor's degree increased by 17.7 percent (from 33.9, to 39.9%); Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Table 104.10: Rates of High School Completion and Bachelor's Degree Attainment among Persons Age 25 and Over, by Race/Ethnicity and Sex: Selected Years, 1910 through 2020*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, 2021) <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d18/tables/dt18_104.10.asp> (accessed June 2021).

¹¹ State-level earnings data are the average of five years of data. 2015-2019 (in 2019 prices); sample size too small to provide data for Alaska, Idaho, Maine, Montana, New Hampshire, North Dakota, South Dakota, Vermont, and Wyoming.

¹² See for example Desta Fekedulegn et al. 2019, "Prevalence of Workplace Discrimination and Mistreatment in a National Sample of Older U.S. Workers: The REGARDS Cohort Study," *SSM - Population Health*, no. 8, (August 2019): 1–9 <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmph.2019.100444>> (accessed June 2021).

¹³ See Amanda Rossie, Jasmine Tucker, and Kayla Patrick, *Out of the Shadows: An Analysis of Sexual Harassment Charges Filed by Working Women* (Washington, DC: National Women's Law Center, 2018) <<https://nwlc.org/resources/out-of-the-shadows-an-analysis-of-sexual-harassment-charges-filed-by-working-women/>> (accessed June 2021); and Ariane Hegewisch, Jessica Forden, and Eve Mefferd, *Paying Today and Tomorrow: Charting the Financial Costs of Workplace Sexual Harassment*, Report (Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research and TIME'S UP Foundation, 2021).

¹⁴ Asha DuMonthier, Chandra Childers, and Jessica Milli, *The Status of Black Women in the States*, Report (Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2017) <<https://iwpr.org/iwpr-issues/race-ethnicity-gender-and-economy/the-status-of-black-women-in-the-united-states/>> (accessed June 2021).

¹⁵ See Michael Gaddis, "Discrimination in the Credential Society: An Audit Study of Race and College Selectivity in the Labor Market," *Social Forces* 93, no. 4 (2015); Sonia Kang et al., "Whitened Résumés: Race and Self-Presentation in the Labor Market," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 61, no. 3 (2016).

¹⁶ Calculated based on Ariane Hegewisch and Eve Mefferd, *The Gender Wage Gap by Occupation, Race, and Ethnicity: 2020*, Fact Sheet, IWPR #C497 (Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2021) <<https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/2021-Occupational-Wage-Gap-Brief-v2.pdf>> (accessed June 2021).

¹⁷ See note 10 above.

¹⁸ IWPR analysis of 2019 data from Steven Ruggles et al., *IPUMS USA: Version 11.0 [dataset]* (Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2021) <<https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V11.0>> (accessed June 2021). Data for full-time year-round workers ages 25 through 64.

¹⁹ Calculated based on Ariane Hegewisch and Eve Mefferd, *The Gender Wage Gap by Occupation, Race, and Ethnicity: 2020*, Fact Sheet, IWPR #C497 (Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2021) <<https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/2021-Occupational-Wage-Gap-Brief-v2.pdf>> (accessed June 2021).

²⁰ See note 6 above.

²¹ Elyse Shaw, Ariane Hegewisch, Emma Williams-Baron, and Barbara Gault, *Undervalued and Underpaid in America: Women in Low-Wage, Female-Dominated Jobs*, Report, IWPR #D508 (Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research) <<https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/D508-Undervalued-and-Underpaid.pdf>> (accessed June 2021).

²² Rasheed Malik and Jamal Hagle, *Black Families Work More, Earn Less, and Face Difficult Child Care Choices*, Washington DC: Center for American Progress (2016) <<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/news/2016/08/05/142296/black-families-work-more-earn-less-and-face-difficult-child-care-choices/>> (accessed June 2021).

²³ See Chandra Childers and Ariane Hegewisch, *Here to Stay: Black, Latina, and Afro-Latina Women in Construction Trades Apprenticeships and Employment*, Briefing Paper, IWPR #C497 (Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2021) <https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Here-to-Stay_revision2.pdf> (accessed June 2021).

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