



# Pathways to Upward Economic Mobility and Wealth Building for Black Women

## Six Policy Areas and Recommendations for Federal Policy Action

*LesLeigh D. Ford, Claire Cusella, Ofronama Biu, Faith Mitchell, Marokey Sawo, and Michael Neal*  
July 2024

It is widely known that wealth helps individuals and families weather economic storms and manage financial responsibilities during periods of hardship and major life events, such as the birth of a child, a job loss, or an illness (Kijakazi et al. 2016). For many Black women in the US, wealth accumulation is still beyond their grasp. In the absence of wealth, it is more difficult for individuals and families to achieve upward economic mobility. This brief explores how federal interventions in six policy areas—workforce, retirement, student debt, homeownership, entrepreneurship and access to capital, and health care—can catalyze and sustain upward economic progress for Black women.

Despite their essential role in the US workforce, Black women continue to face significant racial and gender-based disparities in wages, retirement savings, student loan debt, and in other domains that limit their ability to build wealth. These disparities not only create barriers to upward economic mobility and wealth building but also negatively affects Black women’s health and overall quality of life.

## Disparities Limit Black Women’s Wealth Building

Black women have made significant contributions to the US economy through unpaid and paid labor for centuries. Despite their many economic contributions, Black women have faced racism, discrimination, and exclusionary policies and practices that have limited their ability to reap the full benefits of economic opportunity, including wealth accumulation and the transfer of intergenerational wealth. Despite their many accomplishments in education, entrepreneurship, and the workforce, Black women still face significant racial and gendered disparities relative to other demographic groups in wages,

retirement savings, and student loan debt. Despite their many economic contributions, today, Black women hold 90 percent less wealth than white men in the United States.<sup>1</sup> This lack of wealth has significant negative consequences on Black women's financial security and upward economic mobility, ability to weather unexpected financial setbacks and economic shocks, and efforts to improve their physical and mental health and overall quality of life.

This brief discusses the current racial and gendered disparities that exist for Black women, the policies and interventions that have the most potential to catalyze and sustain upward economic progress for Black women, the proposed policies that require new or additional inquiry, and the actions that, if taken by the federal government, can help to inform a cohesive economic policy framework that will support Black women's financial well-being and economic security with a particular focus on improving Black women's ability to build wealth.

Through a careful analysis of existing research and new primary data collection, we have identified six policy areas of relevance to the financial security, upward economic mobility, and wealth building of Black women in the United States. These policy areas are:

1. workforce
2. retirement savings
3. student debt relief
4. homeownership and housing
5. entrepreneurship and access to capital
6. health care

While each of these policy areas are treated as distinct in this brief, it is important to note that Black women's experiences, day-to-day and over their lifetimes, exemplify how interrelated these policy areas are and how the outcomes associated with each policy are consequential for Black women's economic mobility. This brief primarily focuses on federal policy action because of their tremendous potential for influence on Black women's upward economic mobility and wealth building; however, this not an exhaustive list of policy levers and interventions. We cite specific legislation when possible not to advocate for any policy or bill but rather to provide a better understanding of the current political landscape and potential feasibility of implementing these recommendations. To secure better outcomes, federal policy solutions should be coordinated and implemented alongside the efforts of stakeholders in the state, local, and private sectors to address past and present barriers.

## Study Methodology

Between February 2024 and April 2024, the research team analyzed the results from the National Survey of US Adults, conducted focus groups comprised of Black women, and convened a roundtable of subject matter experts to discuss policy solutions to eliminate barriers to and proactively promote economic mobility for Black women. Findings from these research activities helped to inform the identification and selection of the six policy areas of interest, corresponding policy recommendations, and implementation activities outlined in this brief.

- **The National Survey of US Adults was conducted by a third party on behalf of Goldman Sachs between August and September 2023.**<sup>2</sup> This survey was administered to 2,500 adults across the US, and Black women were overrepresented in the sample relative to their share in the general population. The survey provided an overview of the financial well-being of Black women in the US and in comparison with other demographic groups. The research team’s analysis of the survey data focused mainly on findings related to employment and financial health, health care, and civic engagement.
- **Urban Institute hosted eight focus groups with 28 Black women to learn more about how they think about economic mobility, and what supports or interventions can help Black women improve their financial security and make progress toward closing the racial and gendered wealth gap.**

  - » Focus group recruitment was conducted via email and LinkedIn. Prospective respondents completed an eligibility screener that included questions about their race, ethnicity, gender, age, geographic area, income, employment status, disability status, caregiver status, marital status, homeownership status, educational attainment, and sexual orientation. Responses to these questions helped to ensure that the research team selected Black women from diverse backgrounds to participate in the focus groups.
  - » The research team conducted eight focus groups and each session lasted approximately 90 minutes. The focus groups were led by Black women researchers at Urban Institute with diverse lived experiences and expertise in qualitative research methods. During the focus groups, participants were asked questions about upward economic mobility, their current financial situation, financial aspirations for the future, barriers and challenges to upward economic mobility, and policies that, if implemented, could help to strengthen Black women’s financial security and upward mobility.
- **Urban Institute and the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies hosted an in-person roundtable comprised of subject matter experts in tax policy, entrepreneurship, access to capital, housing and homeownership, health and health care, retirement, student debt, workforce, and wealth building on April 17, 2024.** Participants received an outline of the draft brief before the roundtable with background information about each of the policy areas, potential policy actions identified through the focus groups, and policy recommendations and implementation approaches identified through **a review of existing evidence on Black women and economic mobility**. The subject matter experts spent the day-long session discussing the structural barriers that contribute to inequitable outcomes in each of the six policy areas, focusing on how these issues affect Black women. The roundtable participants then discussed and identified federal policy solutions for each of the areas and **outlined specific steps or actions that could be taken to help make progress on implementation**.

---

## IN THEIR OWN WORDS: FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES

The insights gleaned from the focus groups deeply enriched our research process and our understanding of Black women's experiences with financial security, economic mobility, and wealth building. The participants we talked with painted a clear, compelling picture of their experiences across several domains including employment and entrepreneurship, caregiving responsibilities for children, parents, and elders, experiences with salary negotiations, earnings from primary employment, gig work, and other streams of income, efforts to establish and grow savings, and aspirations for retirement.

Throughout this brief, we use quotes from focus group participants to illustrate their experiences and aspirations related to financial security, upward economic mobility, and wealth building and to make connections between Black women's lived experiences and each policy area.

---

## Overview of Economic Mobility in the United States

In the United States, a land of both perceived opportunity *and* deep racial, social, and income inequity, the likelihood of upward economic mobility is much lower than one might think. *Upward economic mobility* refers to the likelihood that individuals from low-income families reach the top earnings quintile or that individuals improve their relative economic position in terms of earnings or income relative to their parents (Chetty et al. 2020). Researchers find, "An American born to a household in the bottom 20 percent of earnings, for instance, only has a 7.8 percent chance of reaching the top 20 percent when they grow up" (Alesina, Stantcheva, and Teso 2018).

In addition to considering the role of income in economic mobility, it is also important to consider wealth. *Wealth* refers to economic net worth. To be precise, net worth is the amount available after debt (e.g., student loans, mortgages, medical debt) is subtracted from assets (e.g., cash, homes, businesses, retirement savings). Generally, researchers find that wealth mobility is low: "If you are among the wealthiest of your peers in your early thirties, our findings suggest that you are also likely to be among the wealthiest in your late fifties."<sup>3</sup> This suggests that economic opportunity and the chances for upward economic mobility are not evenly distributed across all Americans. This is especially true for Black women who, typically, have lower incomes than white men and white women and persistently lower levels of wealth (Chetty et al. 2015).

---

*"[Economic mobility is] having a job that will actually pay livable wages and allow me to live in alignment with my values without some of the economic anxieties that I grew up with."*

*-Focus group participant*

---

It is well documented that economic mobility varies significantly by many factors including race, geographic region, education, parent's class position, and neighborhood. Despite the abundance of evidence that accounts for racial differences in economic mobility, researchers find that Americans not

only underestimate racial disparities in economic mobility, but they also believe that Black Americans are more likely to improve their economic position than what the data shows is probable (Davidai and Walker 2022). The relationship between race and economic mobility is complex. According to some studies, economically disadvantaged white and Black children in the South have similar odds of becoming adults who struggle economically (Hardy and Logan 2020; Chetty et al. 2015). Though these studies suggest similarities by race in economic mobility for economically disadvantaged people, other studies suggest there are strong racial differences in the likelihood for intergenerational economic mobility (e.g., white Americans as compared with Black Americans).

Overall, Black Americans are less likely to experience upward economic mobility compared with white Americans and more likely to experience downward economic mobility as compared with whites and Asians (Acs 2011; Chetty et al. 2018; Mazumder 2011). Researchers also find that Black Americans, relative to white Americans, have lower rates of upward mobility from the bottom to the top of the income distribution over their lifetimes (Hardaway and McLoyd 2009; Hertz 2005). In fact, Black Americans, including those who grow up in middle-class households, are more likely than whites to move down the income ladder as adults and white Americans are more likely to move up the income ladder (Paige 2022).

Related to but distinct from economic mobility, a portion of the Black/white earnings mobility gap can be explained by wealth inequality between Black Americans and white Americans. Even among Black middle-class Americans, for whom economic progress has been made over the last 50 years, researchers find that “Black children who grow up in middle-class households are less likely than white children who grow up in middle-class households to replicate their parents' socioeconomic status” (Paige 2022; Smith, Johnson, and Muller 2004).

*Lifetime earnings inequality*, which refers to cumulative wage gaps that individuals and families experience over the course of their lifetime, is one factor that contributes to lower upward economic mobility for Americans, especially Black Americans (Daly, Hobijn, and Pedtke 2017).<sup>4</sup> Education in the US varies significantly by race and gender. Even among highly educated individuals, gender wage disparities persist (Biu and Adu-Gyamfi 2024; Black et al. 2008; McCall 2001). Even higher educated Black men, who face a narrower earnings gap when they begin their career, experience an earnings gap that widens over time (Ren 2022). Less well-educated Black men, on the other hand, experience a wider earnings gap when they begin their careers and this gap remains stable over time. Another factor that contributes to earnings inequality for Black Americans is occupational segregation, which refers to how “people of different races and genders are unevenly represented in different kinds of jobs, which have very different wages, benefits and working conditions.”<sup>5, 6</sup> And both Black men and women are disproportionately likely to be employed in low-paying occupations.

---

*“I feel like inflation is crushing us...things are so expensive...things are also shrinking in size. So not only are things becoming more expensive...you're getting less for your buck.”*

*–Focus group participant*

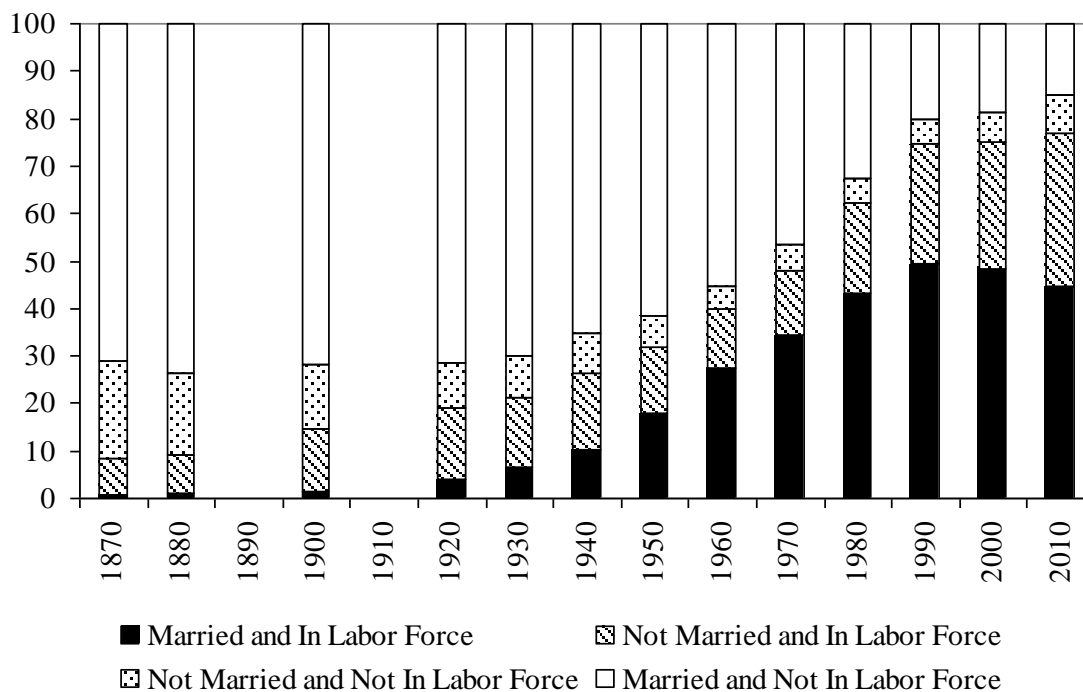
# Black Women’s Experiences in the Labor Market

In comparison with other women in the United States, Black women have historically had the highest levels of labor market participation, regardless of age, marital status, or presence of children at home.<sup>7</sup> In the past, Black women’s higher participation rates extended over their lifetimes, even after marriage, while white women typically left the labor force after marriage.

## Black Women’s Participation in the Workforce, 1860 to Present

In 1860, just before the Emancipation Proclamation, it is estimated that the overall workforce participation rate for Black women (free or enslaved, over age 15) was about 82 percent (Weiss 1999, as cited in Boustan and Collins 2013). Post-emancipation, Black women’s high rate of workforce participation continued. Several factors could account for this. For one thing, working was an economic necessity, given the poverty experienced by Black households and labor market discrimination against Black men which resulted in lower wages and less stable employment compared with white men.<sup>8</sup> Also, norms and expectations about Black women’s work that were established during enslavement remained. Finally, it is an established fact that daughters raised by working mothers are themselves more likely to work (Boustan and Collins 2013).

**FIGURE 1**  
**Black Women’s Labor Force Participation, 1870–2010**

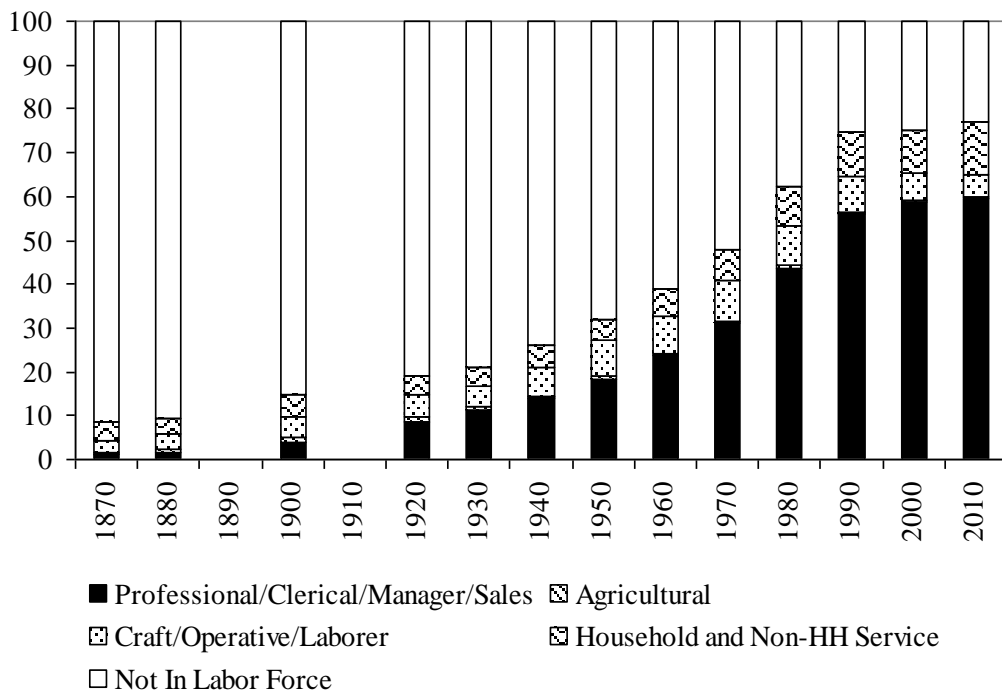


**Source:** Leah Platt Boustan and William J. Collins, “The Origins and Persistence of Black-White Differences in Women’s Labor Force Participation,” NBER Working Paper Series #19040 (Cambridge, MA: NBER, 2013), figure 1A. <https://www.nber.org/papers/w19040>.

From 1870 to 1900, Black women’s workforce participation was around 40 percent (see figure 1). In contrast, the overall white participation rate did not reach 40 percent until 1960, almost a full century later. Since 1920, Black women’s workforce participation has steadily increased. Not only have Black women been far more likely to be in the labor force than white women, but they have also been more likely to hold low-paying manual jobs. This is largely the result of limited educational and employment opportunities resulting from racial and gender discrimination.

After emancipation, the majority of Black women continued to work in agriculture and domestic service—cooking, cleaning, and caregiving (figure 2). Without other employment options, Black women and other women of color were constrained to serve as a cheap source of labor for these roles, not having any other employment options (Glenn 1985). This trend did not change significantly until the 1960s, when increasing numbers of high school educated Black women were able to engage in clerical work. Until then, racial discrimination had prevented them from taking advantage of the rise of the clerical sector that accompanied the growth and increasing complexity of private firms and the federal government (Boustan and Collins 2013). Also, in the 1960s and 1970s, because of Black people’s activism, some corporations and the government agencies expanded employment to Black women and men (Collins 1989).

**FIGURE 2**  
**Black Women’s Labor Force Participation and Occupational Distribution, 1870–2010**



**Source:** Leah Platt Boustan and William J. Collins, “The Origins and Persistence of Black-White Differences in Women’s Labor Force Participation,” NBER Working Paper Series #19040 (Cambridge, MA: NBER, 2013), figure 2A.  
<https://www.nber.org/papers/w19040>.

Even as Black men and women prioritized home and family life, including marriage and women assuming traditional roles as homemakers, the economic conditions for Black people were precarious. Discrimination against Black men required Black women to remain in the labor market (Banks 2006). Yet, Black women did not reap the full benefits of their large presence in the formal labor market.

## Black Women and the Labor Market Today

Today, management, professional, and related positions (40.2 percent) employ the largest share of Black women age 16 years and older (figure 3). These jobs are followed in descending order by sales and office occupations (25.7 percent); service occupations (25.3 percent); production, transportation, and material moving occupations (8.1 percent); and natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations (.7 percent).<sup>9</sup>

FIGURE 3

**Employed Women, by Occupation, Race, and Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity, 2020 Annual Averages**  
by percent distribution

Occupation	White	Black or African American	Asian	Hispanic or Latino ethnicity
Total, 16 years and older (thousands)	52,895	9,481	4,396	11,095
Percent	100.0	100	100	100.0
Management, professional, and related occupations	48.4	40.2	56.6	31.3
Management, business, and financial operations occupations	18.1	14.2	18.8	12.4
Professional and related occupations	30.3	26.0	37.8	19.0
Service occupations	17.6	25.3	17.3	27.9
Sales and office occupations	27.0	25.7	18.8	28.1
Sales and related occupations	10.2	9.2	8.2	11.3
Office and administrative support occupations	16.8	16.5	10.7	16.9
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations	1.2	0.7	0.6	2.2
Farming, fishing, and forestry occupations	0.4	0.1	0.1	1.0
Construction and extraction occupations	0.5	0.3	0.2	0.9
Installation, maintenance, and repair occupations	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3
Production, transportation, and material moving occupations	5.8	8.1	6.7	10.4
Production occupations	2.9	3.5	4.1	5.2
Transportation and material moving occupations	2.9	4.7	2.6	5.2

Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Women in the Labor Force: A Databook*, Report 1097 (Washington, DC: BLS, 2022), 67.

Black women and men attend college at a higher rate than their white counterparts of similar socioeconomic status, and Black women attain higher education at higher rates than Black men (Blalock and Vonshay Sharpe 2012). Nonetheless, this has not translated to the upward mobility and prestige often associated with higher education. Race and gender continue to be significant predictors for occupational segregation and mismatches in the types of jobs and working conditions Black women face and the accompanying wage gaps they experience (Biu and Adu-Gyamfi 2024; Biu et al. 2023; Hanks, Solomon, and Weller 2018). Black women also have persistently faced higher unemployment rates, 5.1 percent according to early 2024 Bureau of Labor Statistics Data, compared with 3.4 percent of white women.



## Evidence of Discrimination for Black Women in the Labor Market

Even though Black women have higher relative labor participation rates compared with white women, Black women have lower lifetime earnings than other racial and gender combinations (Holder 2023). These earnings disparities impact Black women's ability to plan for or save for retirement as retirement plan-participation increases with increases in one's earnings (Smith, Johnson, and Muller 2004). Black women are underrepresented in higher paying occupations when compared with white men, white women, and Black men, Black women also tend to be underrepresented in occupations with higher rates of employer-sponsored health insurance as compared with white men (Biu and Adu-Gyamfi 2024).

## Intersectionality and Wage Gaps for Black Women

The racial and gendered discrimination that Black women experience, commonly referred to as a “double gap,” is not meant to suggest a simple additive relationship between the gender wage gap and the racial wage gap. Rather, it is meant to convey that Black women are subject to at least two distinct types of discrimination in wages, racial and gender (Crenshaw 2013). The combination of these factors reduces wages for Black women. Separately, but relatedly, Black women's experiences in each of the policy areas discussed in this brief are intersectional in nature. Broadly, intersectionality refers to “the multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups.” *Intersectionality*,<sup>10</sup> in the context of this study, is conceptualized as the cumulative discrimination of racism and sexism faced by Black women.

## Black Women and Wealth

---

*“Black wealth is Black power.”*

–Focus group participant

---

Wealth represents safety and opportunity for current and future generations of Black Americans. Several focus group participants described the importance of generational wealth—wealth that is passed down from grandparents or parents to grand children or children and how this intergenerational transfer of wealth is absent in their own families and in the Black community at large. While focus group participants also identified other important forms of wealth, including family, health, and physical and mental safety, all of which are essential, this brief prioritizes a more traditional economic, asset-focused definition.

In the US, Black women continue to face barriers to wealth building. Black households continue to have significantly less wealth than white households (Neal et al. 2023) and Black women have lower wealth than “any other race-gender group in the US” (Rucks-Ahidiana and Kalu 2023). In households headed by women, there are significant wealth divides by race, even when Black women are married, have a college degree, and are older and closer to retirement (Zaw et al. 2017). For instance, single Black women with a college degree have 38 percent less wealth (\$5,000) than single white women without a college degree (\$8,000) (Zaw et al. 2017). Among married women who are heads of the household, Black women with a Bachelor of Arts degree have 62 percent less wealth (\$45,000) than white women without a Bachelor of Arts degree (\$117,200) and 83 percent less wealth than a white woman with a Bachelor of Arts (\$260,000) (Zaw et al. 2017).

**Aside from overall net worth, Black women have limited assets:**

- Black women have **increased home ownership rates over time but these rates are still below that of non-Black women** (Billingsley, Bacon, and Mozee 2023; Neal et al. 2021).<sup>11</sup>
- Black women are **less likely to work in occupations with high retirement rates** (Biu and Adu-Gyamfi 2024) and must overly depend on social security (Viceisza 2022).
- Black women are increasingly **becoming business owners but still lag behind the rates of business ownership of other racial groups and face higher risk** of business closures (Perry, Donoghoe, and Stephens 2023).
- Black women **have outsized debt, including student loan and medical debt**, which further detracts from their ability to build wealth (Rakshit et al. 2024).<sup>12</sup>

In the next section, we detail the evidence on Black women’s economic mobility and wealth and explore the six policy areas and recommendations we identified that can help address and make progress on closing the financial, economic mobility, and wealth inequities for Black women.

## Six Policy Areas and Recommendations to Advance Upward Economic Mobility for Black Women

Black women have experienced significant barriers to upward economic mobility that cannot be sufficiently addressed without sustained economic and public policy reform. In this section, we outline specific federal policy actions and interventions that, if equitably implemented with race and gender conscious plans, have the potential to help strengthen and sustain Black women’s upward economic mobility, through improvements in six policy areas: (1) workforce, (2) retirement, (3) student debt, (4) homeownership, (5) entrepreneurship and access to capital, and (6) health care.

### 1. Workforce

As previously described, Black women continue to face barriers to equitable employment, including higher unemployment rates than their white women counterparts, occupational crowding into lower-quality roles that involve lower, inequitable wages and retirement (Biu and Adu-Gyamfi 2024).<sup>13</sup> These

factors affect Black women and their families' well-being in the short term and have serious implications for their financial security in the long term, specifically in retirement.

Women have and continue to be “primarily responsible for raising children and increasingly sole family heads” (Browne 2000, 3). Since Black workers—including Black women—earn relatively lower wages than other racial groups, any employment-related care earning losses, including child care and elder care, Black mothers experience have the potential to lead to economic hardship. These care related employment losses may also be linked to a higher likelihood of older-age poverty rates that Black adults experience (Johnson, Smith, and Butrica 2023).

---

*“[We need nationwide salary transparency, it] would go a long way to just advancing economic security and equity.”*

*—Focus group participant*

---

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### ***Narrow the Wage Gap and Protect Against Discriminatory Practices***

- **Enforce pay equity and salary transparency laws:** To address Black women’s lower pay, even in the same roles as their white men and women and Black men counterparts, these laws could be a step towards eliminating disparities (Biu 2019). Additionally, **increasing the minimum wage** would lift the floor for all workers and boost family earnings and resources and reduce poverty (Acs et al. 2022).
- **Strengthen unions:** Joining unions would give Black women more bargaining power and access to higher wages and benefits. Black women are more likely than women of other races to be union members and wage disparities are lower among union members membership<sup>14, 15</sup> Buoyed by national support for unions reaching new highs since the 1960s, the **H.R. 842 - Protecting the Right to Organize Act of 2021**<sup>16</sup> passed in the House in 2021 and received some bipartisan support in the Senate.<sup>17</sup>
- **Pay employees well, offer stable employment, and guarantee equitable total compensation:** Findings from existing research and our focus groups suggest a role for policymakers in ensuring Black women equitable access to employment. Some researchers have suggested that the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) take on pro-active audits—rather than just investigations—of employers’ hiring practices (Dixon and Hamilton 2022).
  - » The EEOC received increased funding in recent years and could direct some of these resources to additional proactive audits related to employers hiring practices to determine whether there are specific practices that discriminate against, disadvantage, or otherwise harm Black women.<sup>18</sup> Some researchers have found that Black women are believed less and

receive less remuneration when cases are brought forward (Ponce De Leon and Rosette 2022), which suggests a role of increased staffing, training, and the development of metrics and tracking to ensure employment complaints and cases are handled equitably.

### ***Enact Policies Designed to Reduce Poverty and Strengthen Financial Security***

- **Universal basic income (UBI):** Findings on Black women’s comparatively lower earnings suggest that a UBI program could support women who are on the lower end of the income distribution. UBI provides a given amount of income to adult citizens on a recurring basis with no conditions attached. **UBI as a policy tool is important for Black women as part of a concerted set of efforts to help address the barriers and structural disparities** presented in this brief. UBI is a type of cash transfer program, which exist in many forms around the world, including pilot programs in the US (Marinescu 2018; Moore et al. 2023). UBI programs have been shown to improve outcomes across multiple dimensions, including health and financial standing for marginalized women and children (United Nations Women 2021).
  - » In the US, similar findings emerge from the novel Magnolia Mother’s Trust, a guaranteed income program sharing some core UBI features which began in 2018 and unconditionally provides \$1,000 per month to Black mothers living in subsidized housing in Jackson, Mississippi (Moore et al. 2023). As supplemental income, UBI could help address issues such as living paycheck to paycheck and having some cushion to withstand unexpected expenses.
  - » Currently, no large scale or federal UBI program exists in the US. The universal and unconditional nature of UBI spares its implementation from some of the challenges common to other social insurance programs. Yet, some identified challenges with UBI implementation that are of particular importance to Black women are bottlenecks resulting from maintaining a record of the full population that ought to benefit from the program to ensure full take-up, instituting payment methods to reach all beneficiaries, and designing an effective oversight mechanism without recipient monitoring (Wispelaere and Stirton 2012).
  - » These potential challenges, while addressable, call for particular attention because of their likelihood to amplify existing inequities such as underbanking if left unaddressed. In addition, to serve as a useful tool for addressing racial and gender-based inequities, UBI must be complemented with and not seen as a replacement for other social provisions and public investments such as child care services, labor protections, and redistribution efforts (United Nations Women 2021).
- **Federal jobs guarantee:** Another policy solution to address Black women’s higher unemployment rates, lower wages, and occupational segregation is a federal jobs guarantee, which would **ensure that anyone who wants a good job has access to one**, with the availability of this guarantee serving as competition to induce the private sector to improve the quality of its offerings (Paul, Darity, and Hamilton 2018). There has been historical precedence for this type of policy, with the Employment Act of 1946 and the Full Employment and Balanced Growth Act of 1978. Building on the legacy of these initiatives, US Representative Ayanna Pressley (MA-07) introduced a Federal Jobs Guarantee Resolution in February 2024, which she

cited as an important extension of the civil rights work of Black women in the 1960s.<sup>19</sup> However, these past policies passed but were not funded significantly to ensure “full employment” and Rep. Pressley’s resolution is likely to remain largely symbolic (Paul, Darity, and Hamilton 2018). It is important to acknowledge that resolutions cannot become laws, only bills can. Though the resourcing needed to execute a federal jobs guarantee at scale is unlikely now, the pandemic and resulting job loss did seem to shift political openness to this type of intervention.<sup>20</sup> In 2021, polling indicated that 93 percent of Americans, including 87 percent of Republicans, would “favor a national initiative that creates paid work and job training opportunities.”

- **Parental leave and child care subsidies:** Lastly, a good job alone is not enough to ensure the stability of Black women’s economic outlook. The disproportionate emotional, financial, and caregiving responsibilities of Black women and mothers has consequences on their potential for upward economic mobility. In a 2015 study, researchers found that more than 66 percent of all Black working mothers are single moms and are thus the primary, and in some cases, the sole financial providers for their families.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, “married Black women with children worked over 200 hours more per year than married white or Hispanic women with children, and 339 hours more than Black single mothers.” As many focus group participants noted, **the United States needs better parental leave policies for parents so that Black women can take care of their children and not be prematurely forced back to work.** Many focus group participants also noted that child care is a costly burden that families face, and the US is severely lacking in affordable and available options for working mothers. This suggests the need for increased child care subsidies (Giannarelli et al. 2019; Adams, Luetmer, and Todd 2022). This also suggests that there is a need for better pay for child care workers—many of whom are Black women.

---

*“Federally mandated parental leave [could help]... We have to drop out of the workforce at alarming rates and for long periods of time... Child care is so unaffordable... [We’re] having these children that they’re forcing us to have, right, and being able to care for them in a way where we didn’t have to worry about how we also care for our family... There wouldn’t be a year (sometimes to three years) of a stunt in you know, our ability to cover our finances.”*

*–Focus group participant*

---

## 2. Retirement

It is well established that adequate retirement savings contributes to greater self-sufficiency in older age. Seniors who lack retirement savings may have to continue working past their desired retirement to afford basic living expenses. In addition, the lack of retirement savings may force some seniors to rely on their kids or other family members. For Black women, their average retirement wealth lags Black men

as well as white women (Viceisza 2022). This finding suggests that Black women may face a gender and racial penalty. The overlap of the two penalties limits the retirement savings of Black women.

---

*“I need to retire. Like, I don't want to think that I'm working forever.”*

*-Focus group participant*

---

The lack of retirement savings in aggregate masks several key racial disparities.<sup>22</sup> Black workers are less likely than white workers to participate in a retirement plan. Black workers are also less likely to have a defined benefit plan, as well as a defined contribution plan, compared with white workers. In addition, even if Black workers have a retirement plan, the median amount of their retirement accounts lags that of white workers. Moreover, women tend to have less retirement savings than men of the same race or ethnicity (Viceisza 2022). The median value of retirement savings for white women lags that of white men. The same gender disparity exists for Black women as well. As a result, across race and gender, Black women, compared with white men, have amassed significantly less retirement savings, if any at all.

Research suggests that there are three related factors behind racial retirement inequity (Viceisza 2022): (1) a history and legacy of race and gender discrimination in employment in the US; (2) the reality that at one time the Social Security Administration excluded domestic and agricultural workers, who were predominantly Black and Hispanic when the program was created in 1935, from receiving coverage (Johnson and Smith 2023); and (3) occupational segregation which has informed labor market outcomes and contributed to the double gap effects on earnings for Black women.

Today, Black Americans are more likely to experience unemployment than their white counterparts, which contributes to having fewer opportunities to build retirement wealth (Neal and McCargo 2020). For people who are employed, Black women continue to be greatly overrepresented in low-wage service-sector jobs such as health care and retail. Occupational segregation thus hurts Black women by entrenching racial and gender gaps, limiting their ability to enter preferred fields of work, and depressing earnings, which constrains Black women's ability to save for retirement.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### ***Reform and Expand Access to Social Security Programs***

- **Use targeted interventions:** A significant proportion of older Black adults primarily depend on Social Security for retirement and Black women have increased need for it as compared with men given their longer lifespans and added caregiver responsibilities. The looming concerns over the solvency of Social Security benefits has prompted federal policymakers across the political spectrum to propose reform measures (Johnson 2020). The effect on Black women in these reform proposals is not always specifically addressed. Considering Black women's reliance on Social Security in retirement and overrepresentation in the following groups,

**interventions targeted at low-income workers, those living in poverty, and those with disabilities may yield the most significant impact.**

- **Increase minimum Social Security benefit:** One approach to addressing the retirement gap experienced by Black women is to increase Social Security’s minimum benefit. The current minimum benefit aims to support retirees who spent many years working at low wages, **but the minimum is too low to help many beneficiaries** (Johnson 2020). Democrats in the House have recently introduced legislation to increase the minimum, including the Social Security Enhancement and Protection Act, the Social Security Expansion Act, and the Social Security 2100 Act<sup>23, 24, 25</sup>. The FY25 Republican Study Committee proposed budget also includes an increase in the minimum benefit but only for those who worked for 40 years or more (Republican Study Committee 2024). While there would be an increase in the minimum Social Security benefit in this proposed budget, other elements of the proposed budget including an increase in retirement age, large budget cuts to the Social Security Administration and the Supplemental Security Income (SSI), along with other key provisions, could have harmful effects on Black women’s economic mobility and wealth building. For example, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities estimates that raising the retirement age to 70 would result in a 20 percent cut in lifetime benefits which would more significantly Black people who have a lower life expectancy, lower lifetime earnings, and are more likely to depend on Social Security as their sole retirement resource (Romig 2023).
- **Expand Supplemental Security Income (SSI):** According to the Social Security Administration, “about 24 percent of African Americans receiving disability insurance benefits also received SSI payments. In the same year, nearly 30 percent of women who received SSI payments were identified as African American (Social Security Administration 2021). Reform measures that include increasing benefits to those with disabilities through expansion of the SSI could significantly improve financial security at older ages for many Black people. Recent research has found that **expansions to SSI would have even more significant impact on poverty reduction than proposals focused on increasing the minimum benefit**. Given that older Black women are disproportionately living in poverty, these interventions could have greater impact on providing retirement benefits to this group. Proposals that better account for the interaction between the more traditional retirement-focused Social Security programs and SSI could help Black women low-income workers significantly.<sup>26</sup> Boosting enrollment by simplifying the application procedure and reaching out to potential participants to promote the program would amplify SSI’s impact.<sup>27</sup> Increasing the asset limit to adjust for inflation and ensuring the expectations of the program are clear so that recipients aren’t punished via “overpayments” would also have significant impact and has had bipartisan support in Congress (Romig, Nuñez, and Sherman 2023).

### ***Provide Guaranteed Retirement Accounts***

- **Increase access to Guaranteed Retirement Accounts (GRA):** To increase private retirement beyond Social Security, these **federally supported GRAs would designate selected individuals who retire at age 62 or later to receive a guaranteed income stream throughout their retirement years**. Individuals that are not offered an employer sponsored retirement plan

would contribute 1.5 percent of their paycheck to a GRA which would then be matched by their employer. Though there has not been significant recent legislation introduced on GRAs, polling has indicated that there is bipartisan support for this program nationally.<sup>28</sup>

---

*“Retirement is my biggest financial aspiration but I am nowhere close.”*

*–Focus group participant*

---

### 3. Student Debt

For decades, education has been called “the great equalizer.” Investments in human capital through higher education is a common path to help increase income. Postsecondary education, in particular, has been a pathway for upward economic mobility for both economically disadvantaged and more economically secure people in the United States. In recent years, however, the costs associated with pursuing an undergraduate, graduate, and professional education have risen significantly making higher education and education as a pathway for upward economic mobility out of reach for many Americans.

The average cost of attending a public college four-year undergraduate degree cost \$1,410 annually in the early 1970s. By 2022, this average cost had risen to \$22,690 for in-state tuition and \$39,510 for out-of-state tuition. The overall student loan debt balance in the US has increased by about 66 percent to \$1.77 trillion dollars over the last 10 years.<sup>29</sup> Federal student loans comprise more than 90 percent of this overall balance (College Board 2022).<sup>30</sup>

On average, Black people have more student loan debt than white people, and the average Black woman with any student loan debt has more than the average Black man.<sup>31</sup> In fact, Black women hold a disproportionate share of the student loan debt relative to other racial and gender demographics. These larger amounts of student loan debt would not be as problematic if they yielded higher returns to educational attainment which include a higher paying job. However, Black women have lower incomes compared with both Black men and white women, making it more difficult for Black women to repay student loan debt.<sup>32</sup>

Scholars have examined the many consequences of the size and scope of the student loan debt crisis in the US. In addition to jeopardizing the short time financial health (Elliot and Nam 2013) and financial well-being (Elliot and Lewis 2016) of Americans, the student loan debt crisis has a disproportionate impact on Black Americans, especially Black women. The National Black Student Debt Study, a survey of approximately 1300 borrowers and interviews with 100 borrowers, found that Black women “have fewer financial resources to pay for a higher education and little choice but to borrow higher amounts.” The lack of resources from previous generations may also reflect instances of historical racism. The survey also found that “a year after completing a bachelor’s degree, Black women hold more student debt than any other group with an average of \$38,800 in federal undergraduate loans.” Black women also hold nearly 99 percent more debt from graduate school than white women one year after graduation.<sup>33</sup>



This disproportionate debt burden has many impacts on Black women’s experiences, including financial stability (Porter, Ward, and Patton 2023), homeownership (Letkiewicz and Heckman 2017), and stress and health outcomes (Martin and Dwyer 2021). Even for middle-class Black Americans, the lack of wealth and assets makes it difficult for many Black Americans to repay student loans. Thus, for many Black women, they are faced with the choice of repaying student loans or saving, investing, and making progress on building wealth for themselves and their families (Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System 2024).

---

*My progress toward my economic goals would have been farther along had my student loan debt been forgiven.”*

*-Focus group participant*

---

## RECOMMENDATIONS

To help advance progress on student loan debt relief for millions of Americans, especially disproportionately overburdened Black women, there are several viable pathways that policymakers have implemented and could pursue in the future.

### ***Mitigate the Accumulation of Future Debt***

- **Federal investments in Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Pell Grants:** In terms of front-end policies that help prevent the accumulation of debt through student loans, **increased investments in HBCUs, federal-state partnerships for free college, and grants that help with nontuition expenses** are all important steps in making college more affordable. Over the past three years, Congress has approved increases in the amount of Pell grants available to students.<sup>34</sup> These investments by federal and state governments could all serve to reduce the amount of loans borrowers are required to take out.
- **Baby Bonds:** Progress had been made at the state and federal level to establish **publicly funded child trust accounts designed to help reduce wealth in equities particularly among children born into lower wealth households**.<sup>35</sup> In practice, a state or the federal government would contribute to savings accounts for children under 18 years of age. The contribution amount generally would be determined by family wealth or income. Once the account recipient turns 18 years of age, the funds can be used to help pay for college, purchase a home, start a business, or invest in retirement.<sup>36</sup>
  - » Researchers have found that baby bonds can have a significant impact on increasing wealth for Black children when examining the wealth that would be available to each child at 18 years of age.<sup>37</sup> In fact, three simulation studies suggest baby bonds help to reduce racial wealth inequities. One wealth focused study demonstrates that, “The median white young adult in the US currently has nearly \$16 for every \$1 the median Black young adult has. If

baby bonds were implemented, [Zewde predicts] the median white young adult would have \$1.40 for every \$1 their Black counterpart has.”<sup>38</sup>

### ***Provide Relief for Debt Accrued***

- **Student loan forgiveness and interest reduction/cancellation:** There are several federal policies that can help reduce the debt people currently have. Having a **federal loan forgiveness or interest reduction program for students and graduates are some ways to make progress on reducing individual’s overall debt burden.** In 2022, the Biden-Harris administration proposed a sweeping \$400 billion debt relief program. In the summer of 2023, the Supreme Court blocked this massive student loan debt relief plan. Since then, the current administration has sought alternative pathways to achieve large scale debt-cancellation for millions of American borrowers. As of April 2024, the Biden-Harris Administration approved nearly \$150 billion dollars in student debt relief.<sup>39</sup> The current administration released new plans to expand federal student loan debt relief to borrowers. If implemented, it is estimated that 25 million Americans will benefit from this plan with 23 million potentially having unpaid interest eliminated.
- **Access to better student loan repayment programs:** Another way to help individuals manage student loans is by improving access to better loan programs including those with forgiveness commitments. **Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) is designed to eliminate federal student loan debt for borrowers after 10 years of employment for qualifying government and nonprofit organizations.** It is well documented that the program has been plagued by reports of challenges related to eligibility requirements, oversight and implementation, and low approval rates (Chingos 2019; Fox and Berkman-Breen 2022; Wu 2021).
  - » In 2023, the Biden-Harris administration implemented two new initiatives to relax PSLF rules to help eligible people access loan forgiveness. The Limited PSLF Waiver, which ended in 2022,<sup>40</sup> allowed hundreds of thousands of borrowers to receive student loan forgiveness. Many elements of the waiver have now been extended by the IDR Account Adjustment, which is ongoing until the end of this year.
  - » The Saving on a Valuable Education (SAVE) Plan, an income-based repayment program which “which cuts undergraduate loan payments in half, ensures borrowers never see their balance grow from unpaid interest, helps drop millions of borrowers’ monthly payments down to \$0, and cancels debt for low-balance borrowers faster.”<sup>41</sup>
  - » The current administration is also working to automatically re-certify enrollment in income-based repayment plans for those who agree to disclose their tax information; this prevents drop-off by eliminating the burden of re-enrollment each year.<sup>42</sup> Some types of loans also create financial burdens for Black women, such as ParentPlus loans and federally guaranteed loans, are often excluded from income-based repayment plans and loan forgiveness policies. Adjusting those exclusions could have a significant impact on Black women borrowers.

## 4. Homeownership

---

*“I bought a home that is big enough for everyone but I cannot pursue passion projects because I need to pay hefty mortgage. No freedom of choice.”*

*-Focus group participant*

---

Homeownership is frequently cited as a key path to wealth building. It can provide greater housing stability as compared with renting. Through homeownership, households can benefit from home price appreciation as well as the forced savings associated with paying their mortgage. Homeowners with fixed mortgage rates are largely insulated from higher inflation. According to the 2020 Census, Black people represented 7.9 percent of homeowners across the U.S. Black women homebuyers represented roughly a third of the total of Black homebuyers between 2017 and 2018 and that figure is indicative of an increasing rate of homeownership by Black women over the past 30+ years. Between 1990–2019, homeownership among Black Women increased by 5.6 percent, but they still lag behind other demographic groups.

The disparities in homeownership rates are reflective of present and historical structural racism. Redlining and restrictive racial covenants kept Black households from accessing homeownership (Neal, Choi, and Walsh 2020). And while these practices are illegal today, evidence suggests that discrimination in the mortgage market persists. In addition, instances of racial and gender discrimination in the labor market, educational market and elsewhere, has implications for Black women’s homeownership outcomes.

Black women may have more debt relative to their income, owing in part to the presence of student debt and lower returns on their debt-financed educational investment. Lower credit scores and higher debt-to-income ratios are correlated with higher rates of mortgage denial. Women tend to have lower incomes and, historically, Black women mortgage applicants are also more likely to be denied a mortgage than white women mortgage applicants. Financial capacity, a key determinant of obtaining mortgage credit, is informed by structural racism as its reliant on credit, collateral, and capacity which have been presently and historically diminished for Black women as a byproduct of structural racism.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, research indicates that when Black women were denied a purchase mortgage, the denial reason was more likely to be due to credit history compared with white women.

---

*“Student loans are like an evil shadow that prevent me from getting a home.”*

*-Focus group participant*

---

In structuring policies to expand Black women homeownership, policymakers also need to be cognizant of the system-level issues that may make it a more difficult pathway to wealth building for Black people than for white families. For Black households able to own, the median value of those homes is significantly less than for white households due in large part to historical and present-day residential segregation and community disinvestment. Even controlling for financial profiles, Black women were found to be 256 percent more likely to receive a subprime mortgage than white men. Dr. Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor characterized the policy shifts towards Black homeownership as “racist exclusion [giving] way to predatory inclusion.”<sup>44</sup> In addition, instances of racial and gender discrimination in the labor market, educational market, and elsewhere, have implications for Black women’s homeownership outcomes and so policy interventions aimed at other racial and gender disparities may have cascading effects on homeownership.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### ***Increase Affordability: Reduce Mortgage Rates, Increase Down-Payment Assistance, and Increase the Supply of Affordable Housing***

- **Increase mortgage affordability:** In light of higher mortgage rates, policies that improve affordability by reducing rates could be particularly beneficial for lower-income households. Despite federal legislation such as the Fair Housing Act of 1968 and the Equal Credit Opportunity Act of 1974, mortgage interest rates continue to vary by race. For example, in 2019 the rate for white mortgage-holders was 4.13 percent as compared with 4.25 percent for Black *mortgage*-holders. Federal policymakers could take steps to mitigate that by offering **more programs supporting borrowers by paying up-front fees that reduce their rates or expanding adjustable-rate mortgage access**. One local-level example that could be expanded is the Washington DC Open Doors program which offers “below-market interest rates for first-trust mortgages for the purchase of a home in the District of Columbia.”<sup>45</sup>
- **Provide first-generation down payment assistance:** Provide down payment assistance for households of color seeking to achieve homeownership. The Downpayment Toward Equity Act has been introduced in several congressional sessions and gained more traction when mentioned in the 2024 State of the Union Address. **Though not designed exclusively for Black women, it is targeted towards lower-income earners and has additional provisions for “socially disadvantaged individuals” that may more impactfully affect Black women.** With the recent court rulings on affirmative action and Fearless funds decisions, future efforts for race-targeted policies may face legal challenge or be potentially hindered (Patterson Belknap 2024). Thus, some researchers and advocates have suggested the expansion of programs may benefit Black women even if that is not the stated policy’s intention.
  - » For example, there have been calls to expand the eligibility for the Department of Veterans’ Affairs home loan guaranty program. This program would extend access to family members of Black veterans and offer down-payment assistance. Research has indicated that the program would be particularly beneficial to Black people who are not characterized as “low-income” and thus are not eligible for other housing programs but still are unable to afford homeownership due to a lack of wealth. Senator Raphael Warnock (GA) and Representative Seth Moulton (MA-06)’s GI Restoration Act included this expansion, noting

that it would target the historical and systemic inequities that have served as barriers to homeownership for Black families.<sup>46,47</sup>

- **Expand the low-income housing tax credit program:** Expanding this program could **grow the number of affordable rental units**.<sup>48</sup> Lower rent could, in turn, give Black women **a greater opportunity to accumulate the financial resources needed for homeownership**. In addition, federal policies that support manufactured housing could increase the number of affordable homes for sale.

#### ***Redress “Predatory Inclusion” through Federal Oversight and Outreach***

- **Expand the Special Purpose Credit Program (SPCP):** SPCPs are not new programs, but the federal government has recently attempted to encourage their usage through stronger interagency guidance for financial institutions. The programs allow private financial institutions to more favorably consider credit applications from those from socioeconomically disadvantaged groups.<sup>49</sup> Though some have expressed concern that SPCPs may be vulnerable to legal challenges in the wake of the Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. Supreme Court decision, advocates have contended that it will remain constitutionally permissible given its intentionality is to redress past discrimination, and it has significant regulatory requirements aimed at upholding the strict scrutiny.<sup>50</sup> Given the significant role that credit scores and debt-to-income ratios play in securing loans, some of the same policies aimed at growing small businesses may have favorable outcomes for homeownership for Black women. **The expansion of SPCPs to Black people or to predominantly Black communities could allow for more favorable lending arrangements** to those that wouldn’t otherwise be approved and/or to those that have historically received subprime mortgages.
- **Increase greater federal oversight of fair lending and compliance:** Current housing outcomes, including lower rates of homeownership among Black Americans, are connected to a history of discrimination. Redlining and restrictive racial covenants, which are clauses included in property deeds, kept Black households from accessing homeownership. And while these practices are illegal today, evidence suggests that discrimination in the mortgage market persists. Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor argues that predatory inclusion has been so pervasive because the federal government has failed “to aggressively regulate an industry that had employed racial discrimination in its determined pursuit of insatiable profit as a business principle.”<sup>51</sup> To combat this, there can be **greater federal oversight and enforcement in the property valuation system and over financial institutions’ compliance with fair lending laws**. The Federal Financial Institutions Examination Council is the interagency overseeing body on property valuation and issued Interagency Appraisal and Evaluation Guidelines in 2010, but these guidelines can be expanded and improved upon, particularly as the use of automated systems in the mortgage industry evolve and those models both replicate and worsen racial disparities (Zhu, Neal, and Young 2022).<sup>52</sup> Beyond this, The Equal Credit Opportunity Act (ECOA) and the Fair Housing Act can be used to provide an enforcement mechanism against discrimination in home mortgage loans or home improvement loans.<sup>53</sup>

---

*“It’d be awesome if [the federal government] launched a new program or initiative to help support Black women’s economic security or financial situation through housing. It would be awesome to own without a downpayment.”*

*-Focus group participant*

---

## **5. Entrepreneurship and Access to Capital**

---

*“Grants [exist] for people of color and women of color but those go to a particular type of women of color. Certain business loans go to certain people - loans and grants are not going to women like me. We need deliberate, intentional programs that are reparations-based - repairing the harm that was done to those who were enslaved who could not have wills, pass down generational wealth, victims of redlining, gentrification.”*

*-Focus group participant*

---

Entrepreneurship is often cited as a key tool for economic mobility and closing the racial wealth gap, particularly for Black women who are the fastest growing group of entrepreneurs (Bradford 2014). Studies have found that Black entrepreneurs hold higher fractions of wealth as compared with Black workers (Bradford 2014). However, policies focused solely at increasing the rate of Black businesses may unintentionally exacerbate the racial wealth gap, particularly for Black women given their intersectional identities. Ninety-seven percent of Black women-owned businesses last less than five years (Perry, Donoghoe, and Stephens 2023). These business closures come with significant costs that may ultimately hinder any economic progress made, and are the result of the structural drivers that contribute to the racial wealth gap more broadly. “Wealth begets wealth” (Darity et al. 2018) and without comparable access to capital and networks and sustained financing as their white counterparts, these businesses are not set up to be the economic mobilizers that other entrepreneurial ventures might be. Policies aimed at improving both the rate *and* success of Black women entrepreneurship are likely to be the most impactful in driving upward economic mobility.

Expanding and investing community development financial institutions (CDFIs) could also play an instrumental role in growing the rate and success of Black women entrepreneurship given their focus on those that experience economic distress and/or have been underserved by more traditional financial institutions. More than 40 percent of CDFI’s loans and investments are made in majority-minority communities.<sup>54</sup> Additionally, 18 of the 21 Black-owned banks in the US are designated CDFIs and Black

banks are more likely to be headquartered in Black communities and to provide a much more significant percentage of their loans to Black borrowers.

Despite investments in minority-owned businesses, the Small Business Administration (SBA) has continued to give less funding to businesses in neighborhoods with large Black populations as compared with those with higher white and Asian populations. Only 1.9 percent of the SBA-administered PPP loans that were crucial to small business survival during the pandemic went to Black-owned businesses as compared with the 83 percent that went to white-owned ones (Theodos and Su 2023).<sup>55</sup> The SBA under the Biden-Harris administration has vowed to address some of these access to capital disparities. Its 2022 Equity Action Plan was focused on addressing barriers that underserved communities face in accessing capital, procurement, disaster assistance, and contracting opportunities and in providing better business counseling, training, and services to those communities. A 2023 SBA report contends that investments in Black-owned small businesses totaled \$1.45 billion, more than doubling since January 2021, with the Black share of the SBA's lending portfolio rising from 3.5 percent to 7.6 percent.<sup>56</sup> One example program, the Community Navigator Pilot, aims to tackle these barriers in a holistic way via "funding to nonprofits, state and local governments, universities, and tribal entities to partner with SBA at the center of a hub and spoke network."<sup>57</sup> The program has received criticism from the Chairman of the House Subcommittee on Small Business for being duplicative of other SBA programming and yielding too low of a return on investment to be considered effective.<sup>58</sup> For this reason, it is unlikely to be expanded given the current political context.

Seventy-one percent of Black business owners rely on their personal or familial funds for the initial support of their businesses as compared with 66 percent of white business owners. Given that Black people and Black women have less income and less wealth, this makes the startup phase significantly more challenging. A recent evaluation of Atlanta's In Her Hands Program, a guaranteed-basic income program specifically aimed at supporting low-income Black women, found that 45 percent of participants were able to use the \$850/month provided to "catch up/get ahead" on paying bills, 27 percent paid off debts, 16 percent bought "more or better food," and 14 percent improved their credit scores.<sup>59</sup> Thirty percent of the participants were also able to accumulate "rainy day" funds. Though not all women will use this improved credit and savings to launch businesses; it follows that some will be better positioned to do so, since Black women are the largest growing group of entrepreneurs.

---

*"[The federal government could help by] creating more CDFIs...in low-income communities and investing and lending to these communities. Black women are the fastest growing sector of entrepreneurs, this is where some of this is getting stalled as banks can turn them down due to lack of funds, history, structural racism."*

*-Focus group participant*

---

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### *Expand Access to Capital*

- **Expand and invest in CDFIs:** The 2010 State Small Business Credit Initiative had some success in growing CDFIs and so additional iterations and expansions of the program could **provide significant support to the growing number of Black women entrepreneurs**. SSBCI 2.0 was passed by Congress in 2021 and contains elements more specifically targeted at redressing racial inequality. The legislation reserves a pot of \$1 billion for states' to reach "historically excluded entrepreneurs" (O'Grady et al. 2021).
- **Expand targeted SBA Programs:** In implementing the previously mentioned financing programs, policymakers must also consider the reluctance of women and Black business owners to apply for the additional financing they need because of diminished expectations for approval. According to a 2023 Kaufman Foundation report, women and Black business owners are less likely to be debt averse than men and white business owners and thus credit-focused opportunities should appeal (Cosgrove et al. 2023). However, **46 percent of those who chose not to apply for needed financing did so because of concerns that they would be turned down**. Relying on community networks and institutions that have already established trust may increase the take up rates of these programs.
- **Encourage expansion of Special Purpose Credit Programs (SPCPs):** Often cited as a tool to reduce the racial homeownership gap, SPCPs **may also provide greater access to financing for Black women in the entrepreneurship and small business contexts**.<sup>60</sup> People-based SPCPs have been found to be more effective at narrowing racial disparities in access to capital and financing than ones that are merely place-based.
- **Support Universal Basic Income (UBI) or Guaranteed Basic Income (GBI) Programs:** By focusing on mitigating some of the risk associated with entrepreneurship at the beginning, **UBI or GBI programs could encourage and support small business creation** (Urban 2017). Targeted implementation support geared towards Black women and Black entrepreneurs will be crucial. A 2020 study of the Alaska Permanent Dividend Fund program found that the "safety net in the form of a GBI" could modestly increase entrepreneurship (Feinberg and Kuehn 2020). The study did not explore race but did analyze by gender but found that the program exacerbated gender disparities in entrepreneurship with men reaping most of the economic rewards of expanded entrepreneurship.

## 6. Health Care

High health care costs are a problem for many American families and are one of the top issues that voters want to hear presidential candidates talk about during the 2024 election (Lopes et al. 2024). At the intersection of economic disadvantage by gender and race, Black women are especially burdened by these costs. Policies that alleviate this burden will facilitate their ability to build wealth.



A major gap in the health services research literature is that there has been limited analysis of the specific impact of health care costs on Black women. However, using statistics about the burden of health care costs on women as a whole and on Black households, we can extrapolate the challenges facing Black women—and identify policies that could address them.

Numerous studies have documented that women tend to incur greater health care costs than men across their lifetimes. One such analysis indicates that, based on current benefit coverage, women’s out-of-pocket medical costs are disproportionately higher than men’s for every single age grouping from 19 to 64 years, even when excluding pregnancy-related services (Gebreyes et al. 2023). For example, in 2019, average annual health spending for women ages 19 to 34 was \$4,709, more than double men’s spending in the same age range, at \$2,261.<sup>61</sup>

---

*“I am a chronic asthmatic. I keep a job to have insurance because I cannot get insured outside of a company.”*

*–Focus group participant*

---

Also, among Americans with private coverage, Black adults pay on average almost 20 percent of household income to cover health insurance premiums (Taylor 2019). Additionally, Black households—and women—are disproportionately burdened by healthcare debt. About 4 in 10 adults (41 percent) report being in debt because of medical or dental bills, including debts owed to credit cards, collections agencies, family and friends, banks, and other lenders to pay for their healthcare costs, with disproportionate shares of Black and Latinx adults, women, parents, those with low incomes, and uninsured adults reporting this issue (Lopes et al. 2024).

The *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* decision and subsequent state actions around contraception and abortion access will also have an outsized impact on Black women’s reproductive health care and their economic opportunity and mobility. Black women have abortions at five times the rate of white women, and studies have found that abortion expansion in the 1970s led to improved labor and educational outcomes for Black women (Jacobs, Boardman, and Pyati 2022). With the *Dobbs* decision, limitations and bans have extended across 21 states and Black women make up a larger share of the population (16 percent) of these states than in those that have not imposed new restrictions.<sup>62, 63</sup> The Institute for Women’s Policy Research reported that abortion access for Black women under the age of 24 had a significant impact on earnings by up to 75–100 percent per year.<sup>64</sup> A 2020 study found that those who were denied abortions experienced a significant and sustained increase in financial distress (Miller, Wherry, and Green Foster 2023).

Finally, the lack of a national paid family and medical leave program adds to women’s economic burdens, with Black women particularly affected. In an average year, women in America cumulatively lose over \$7 billion because of unpaid or partially paid parental leave and over \$2 billion because of unpaid or partially paid caregiving leave.<sup>65</sup> For Black women, the financial strain of unpaid caregiving to

another adult is especially high: 35 percent of such caregivers reported being financially strained and paying an average of \$6,774 annually on related expenses. As a result, it is common for them to go into debt (Elliott and Walker 2022).

The economic burdens of health care costs, lack of paid leave, lack of health care access and other structural social and economic contributors have adverse effects on Black women's mental health (Walton 2023). Women are twice as likely as men to experience severe depression, Black people are 20 percent more likely to suffer psychological distress than white people, and Black women are significantly less likely to seek treatment (Duncan 2023).<sup>66</sup> This outsized mental health burden has impacted Black women's earnings and their ability to grow and sustain wealth.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Policies that address the burden of out-of-pocket costs, health insurance premiums, unpaid caregiving, and health care-related debt will have broad benefits that improve the financial status not only of Black women but also of other low-income households. These policies include:

### ***Expand Access to Affordable Health Care, Reduce Health Care Costs, and Relieve Medical Debt***

- **Support universal health care:** Federal proposals to enact a universal health care program have failed to gain significant political traction in Congress. The 2010 Affordable Care Act was a compromise towards this goal and had a significant impact on the Black uninsured rate and on health care costs for Black people, particularly with its expansion of Medicaid eligibility (Taylor 2019). However, the Supreme Court ruling in *National Federation of Independent Business v. Sebelius* made this expansion optional for states which has led to concentrated areas of high uninsured rates for Black people, particularly in the South. People of color are most likely to fall within a coverage gap and thus the implications of Medicaid expansion would be significant.<sup>67</sup>
  - » Though **Medicaid expansion** cannot be federally mandated, there has been legislation at the Congressional level to incentivize states and the American Rescue Plan offered up significant financial incentives.<sup>68, 69</sup> A recent study estimated that if the remaining 10 states were to expand Medicaid eligibility, the most impacted group would be Black women of reproductive age who would see a 51.3 percent reduction in uninsurance (Buettgens and Ramchandani 2023).
- **Create new medical debt cancellation programs:** Black women could greatly benefit from programs to cancel medical debt. This year, Senators Sanders, Khanna, Merkley, and Tlaib introduced the Medical Debt Cancellation Act and Rep. Porter introduced a complimentary bill in the House.<sup>70</sup> The bills emphasize the impact that it would have on Black patients, in particular. However, the bills have no Republican cosponsors and have not moved out of committees since being introduced. Medical debt cancellation was built into the American Rescue Plan (ARP) but specifically targeted towards veterans experiencing financial hardship.<sup>71</sup>
  - » The expansion of **the American Rescue Plan** towards similarly low-income, nonveterans, could have a significant impact on Black women. The Biden administration also issued Executive Order 14009 (Strengthening Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act) which directed the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Consumer

Financial Protection Bureau to investigate medical debt collection and ensure providers aren't offering predatory payment plans and/or using harassing collection practices.<sup>72</sup> State and city policymakers in Arizona, California, Connecticut, Illinois, Ohio, and Pennsylvania, have all recently enacted medical debt cancellation programs for those below certain income thresholds.<sup>73</sup> Connecticut, specifically, used funding from the American Rescue Plan to finance their program. Since these medical debt cancellation programs are being implemented across states, there may be political will to replicate and scale successful programs at the federal level.

### ***Mitigate the Impact of the Roe v. Wade Reversal***

- **Legislate access to women's health care and reproductive health services:** Abortion is expected to be one of the key issues in the 2024 presidential election, though most of the legislation is likely to occur at the state level with many states having measures on the ballot to enshrine abortion protections in state constitutions and/or in special circumstances such as immediate danger to the mother's health.<sup>74</sup> The Women's Health Protection Act (WHPA) is federal legislation put forth that would "prohibit governmental restrictions on the provision of, and access to, abortion services."<sup>75</sup> The bill passed in the House in 2021 and 2022 but failed in the Senate along party lines and is not expected to pass through Congress in its current configuration.<sup>76</sup> In anticipation of states moving beyond banning abortion to other types of contraception, House Democrats introduced the Right to Contraception Act with some bipartisan support and it is set to be vote on in the Senate soon.<sup>77, 78, 79</sup> Senate Republicans have also introduced some legislation to expand access to over-the-counter contraception which may be more politically feasible in the current political climate.<sup>80</sup> Executive orders have been seen as the most immediate action that federal policymakers can undertake to preserve abortion access with President Biden signing Executive Order 18116, Securing Access to Reproductive and Other Health Care Services which provided guidance to HHS on navigating abortion access with Medicaid recipients and for those traveling across state lines.<sup>81</sup> President Biden has acknowledged however that administrative action is fairly limited in its reach given the court's ruling.<sup>82</sup>

### ***Expand Family and Medical Leave***

- **Legislate national or state paid family leave:** The United States is one of the only wealthy countries to not have a national paid family and medical leave program. There has been some bipartisan momentum in Congress for paid family leave with the Paid Family Leave Working Groups forming in 2023 and working to develop a framework to guide its legislation development.<sup>83</sup> In 2020, President Trump signed the bipartisan Families First Coronavirus Response Act which provided up to two weeks of paid leave for those affected by the public health emergency.<sup>84</sup> Though this legislation was intentionally temporary, programs such as this one could be expanded to better support Black parents and caregivers. In the absence of a national program, the responsibility for paid family and medical leave programs has largely fallen to states and smaller targeted programs and this has led to more limited access to these programs for Black women (Romig and Bryant 2021).<sup>85</sup> Research has demonstrated that the

state leave programs that have been instituted have had a significant impact, helping millions of workers and families (National Partnership for Women & Families 2023).

#### *Provide Accessible, Quality Mental Health Care*

- **Increase funding for agency programs:** At the administrative level, **increasing the funding for programs** such as the CDC's Prevention's Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) program could be impactful for Black women. Health and Human Services (HHS) can provide added funding for **Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs) which have been particularly effective at serving Black communities** (HHS 2024). Programs aimed at Black women need to be designed in a way that accounts for the overlapping racism and sexism that Black women experience and must be culturally responsive to be effective (Walton 2023). HHS can also expand its grants to organizations that demonstrate effectiveness at supporting Black mental health like its awards targeting Black youth suicide.<sup>86</sup>
- **Expand digital health services:** The COVID-19 pandemic catalyzed several new changes to the health care system including new digital innovations. Recently, there has been some legislation **targeted towards digital health services, particularly services designed to help support individual's behavioral and mental health.** For example, Senators Padilla and Cassidy introduced the bipartisan Health Accelerating Consumers' Care by Expediting Self-Scheduling (ACCESS) Act with companion legislation in the House. Studies have found that digital health care services are favorable among Black women suffering from depression, reducing stigma and increasing access to care and treatment (McCall, Foster, and Schwartz 2023).

---

*"[We need] elder care and caregiver support in general. More benefits to help families access affordable health care. I can imagine that these contributing costs impact decisions [of others] to not have children."*

*-Focus group participant*

---

## Conclusion

We designed this brief to provide researchers and policymakers with a roadmap of evidence and policy actions that have the potential to help boost Black women's economic security and ultimately their ability to build wealth. It prioritizes the historical and present-day lived experiences of Black women in the United States. While this brief does not address every policy area that is consequential for Black women's financial security, economic mobility, and wealth building, it does, highlight six policy areas that were emphasized by Black women during the primary data collection and analysis process and that scholars and researchers have documented through extensive research over many decades. Through this work, we aim to center and amplify the voices and perspectives of Black women and connect these perspectives to longstanding and emerging evidence in housing, health care, workforce, education and student debt, entrepreneurship and access to capital, and retirement.

---

*"[We're] making more money and acquiring more debt but moving the finishing line. We're more tired, more exhausted, more debt. Have to keep going. I want to rest. I don't dream of labor but to be happy, successful person I have to be in this rat race. But you need to stop moving the finish line and let me finish."*

*-Focus group participant*

---

## Appendix A. Roundtable Subject-Matter Experts

- Dr. Fenaba Addo (University of North Carolina- Chapel Hill)
- Professor Jeremy Bearer-Friend (The George Washington University)
- Steven Brown (Aspen Institute)
- Amber Bond (The African American Alliance of CDFI CEOs)
- Melanie Campbell (National Coalition on Black Civic Participation)
- Joi Chaney (J.O.I. Strategies)
- Dr. Chandra Childers (Economic Policy Institute)
- Jason Cohn (Urban Institute)
- Ashley Harrington (Project on Predatory Student Lending)
- Dr. Kim Lutchenberg (American University)
- Dr. Brian Smedley (Urban Institute)
- Dr. Brett Theodos (Urban Institute)
- Dafina Williams (Opportunity Finance Network)
- Dr. Janelle Williams (Atlanta Wealth Building Initiative)
- Dr. Valerie Wilson (Economic Policy Institute)

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Tianna Newton and Elise Colin, "How Policymakers Can Close the Wealth Gap for Black Women," *Urban Wire* (blog), Urban Institute, March 5, 2024, <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/how-policymakers-can-close-wealth-gap-black-women>.
- <sup>2</sup> The National US Survey of 2,500 US adults was conducted by David Binder Research August 23–September 10, 2023. The nationwide survey was conducted by a hybrid of phone and text-to-web.
- <sup>3</sup> Ember Smith, Ariel G. Shiro, Christopher Pulliam, and Richard V. Reeves, "Stuck on the Ladder: Wealth Mobility is Low and Decreases with Age." The Brookings Institution, June 29, 2022, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/stuck-on-the-ladder-wealth-mobility-is-low-and-decreases-with-age/>.
- <sup>4</sup> Richard V. Reeves, "Three factors hindering economic mobility in the workplace," The Brookings Institution, March 12, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/three-factors-hindering-economic-mobility-in-the-workplace/>.
- <sup>5</sup> Mary C. Daly, "Disappointing Facts about the Black-White Wage Gap," Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco, September 5, 2017, <https://www.frbsf.org/research-and-insights/publications/economic-letter/2017/09/disappointing-facts-about-black-white-wage-gap/>.
- <sup>6</sup> Jessica Mason and Gail Zuagar, "Occupational Segregation—A Legacy of Racism, Sexism and Ableism—Is a Major Contributor to the Wage Gap," National Partnership for Women and Families, March 14, 2023, <https://nationalpartnership.org/occupational-segregation-a-legacy-of-racism-sexism-and-ableism-is-a-major-contributor-to-the-wage-gap>.
- <sup>7</sup> Nina Banks, "Black Women's Labor Market History Reveals Deep-Seated Race and Gender Discrimination," *Working Economics* (blog), Economic Policy Institute, February 19, 2019, <https://www.epi.org/blog/black-womens-labor-market-history-reveals-deep-seated-race-and-gender-discrimination/>.
- <sup>8</sup> Nina Banks, "Black Women's Labor Market History Reveals Deep-Seated Race and Gender Discrimination," *Working Economics* (blog), Economic Policy Institute, February 19, 2019, <https://www.epi.org/blog/black-womens-labor-market-history-reveals-deep-seated-race-and-gender-discrimination/>.
- <sup>9</sup> "Women in the Labor Force: a Databook," BLS Report, March 2022, <https://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/womens-databook/2021/home.htm>.
- <sup>10</sup> Merriam Webster definition of *intersectionality*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/intersectionality>.
- <sup>11</sup> Laurie Goodman, Jung Hyun Choi, and Jun Zhu, "More Women Have Become Homeowners and Heads of Household. Could the Pandemic Undo That Progress?," *Urban Wire* (blog), March 16, 2021, <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/more-women-have-become-homeowners-and-heads-household-could-pandemic-undo-progress>.
- <sup>12</sup> Emma Curchin, "Student Loan Debt Is Common Across All Race and Gender Groups, Especially for Black Women," Center for Economic and Policy Research, January 10, 2024, <https://cepr.net/student-loan-debt-is-common-across-all-race-and-gender-groups-especially-for-black-women/>.
- <sup>13</sup> "Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey," US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024, [https://www.bls.gov/web/empsit/cpsee\\_e16.htm](https://www.bls.gov/web/empsit/cpsee_e16.htm).
- <sup>14</sup> Josh Bivens, Celone McNicholas, Kyle K. Moore, and Margaret Poydock, "Unions Promote Racial Equity," Economic Policy Institute, July 31, 2023, <https://www.epi.org/publication/unions-promote-racial-equity/>.
- <sup>15</sup> Celine McNicholas, Margaret Poydock, and Lynn Rhinehart, "How the PRO Act Restores Workers' Right to Unionize," Economic Policy Institute, February 4, 2021, <https://www.epi.org/publication/pro-act-problem-solution-chart/>.
- <sup>16</sup> Protecting the Right to Organize Act of 2021, H.R. 842-117th Congress (2021-2022), [https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/842#:~:text=Passed%20House%20\(03%2F09%2F2021\),-Protecting%20the%20Right&text=This%20bill%20expands%20various%20labor,collectively%20bargain%20in%20the%20workplace](https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/842#:~:text=Passed%20House%20(03%2F09%2F2021),-Protecting%20the%20Right&text=This%20bill%20expands%20various%20labor,collectively%20bargain%20in%20the%20workplace).
- <sup>17</sup> Justin McCarthy, "US Approval of Labor Unions at Highest Point Since 1965." Gallup, August 30, 2022,

<https://news.gallup.com/poll/398303/approval-labor-unions-highest-point-1965.aspx>.

- <sup>18</sup> "EEOC Budget and Staffing History 1980 to Present," EEOC (US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission), accessed June 3, 2024, <https://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc-budget-and-staffing-history-1980-present>.
- <sup>19</sup> "During Black History Month, Pressley Unveils Federal Job Guarantee Resolution," Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley, February 15, 2024, <https://pressley.house.gov/2024/02/15/during-black-history-month-pressley-unveils-federal-job-guarantee-resolution/>.
- <sup>20</sup> Eduardo Porter, "Should the Feds Guarantee You a Job?," *New York Times*, February 18, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/18/business/economy/job-guarantee.html>.
- <sup>21</sup> Valerie Wilson, "African American Women Stand Out as Working Moms Play a Larger Economic Role in Families," *Working Economics* (blog), Economic Policy Institute, May 11, 2017, <https://www.epi.org/blog/african-american-women-stand-out-as-working-moms-play-a-larger-economic-role-in-families/>.
- <sup>22</sup> Derrick Johnson, "Viewing Social Security Through the Civil Rights Lens." *The Crisis*, August 14, 2020, <https://naacp.org/articles/viewing-social-security-through-civil-rights-lens>.
- <sup>23</sup> Congress.gov, "H.R.671—118th Congress (2023-2024): Social Security Enhancement and Protection Act of 2023," January 31, 2023, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/671>.
- <sup>24</sup> Congress.gov, "S.393—2118th Congress (2023-2024): Social Security Expansion Act," February 13, 2023, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/senate-bill/393>.
- <sup>25</sup> Congress.gov, "H.R. 4583—118th Congress (2023-2024): Social Security 2100 Act," July 14, 2023, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/4583>
- <sup>26</sup> Wendell Primus, Jack A. Smalligan, and Chloe Zilkha, "Modifying the Interaction Between the Social Security and SSI Programs Would Benefit Low-income Retired and Disabled Workers," The Brookings Institution, March 6, 2024, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/modifying-the-interaction-between-the-social-security-and-supplemental-security-income-programs-would-benefit-low-income-retired-and-disabled-workers/>.
- <sup>27</sup> Jack A Smalligan, "Increasing SSI Benefits is a More Effective Approach to Reducing Poverty Than an Enhanced Social Security Minimum Benefit," The Brookings Institution, May 14, 2024, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/increasing-ssi-benefits-is-a-more-effective-approach-to-reducing-poverty-than-an-enhanced-social-security-minimum-benefit/>.
- <sup>28</sup> "Breathe Easy—How Guaranteed Retirement Accounts Could Change Your Life," Economic Policy Institute, accessed June 2024, <https://www.epi.org/publication/breathe-easy-how-guaranteed-retirement-accounould-change-your-life-a-primer-on-gras-and-how-they-work/>.
- <sup>29</sup> Rebecca Safier and Ashley Harrison, "Student Loan Debt: Averages and Other Statistics in 2024," USA Today, June 3, 2024, <https://www.usatoday.com/money/blueprint/student-loans/average-student-loan-debt-statistics/>.
- <sup>30</sup> "Consumer Credit— G.19," Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, May 7, 2024, [https://www.federalreserve.gov/releases/g19/HIST/cc\\_hist\\_memo\\_levels.htm](https://www.federalreserve.gov/releases/g19/HIST/cc_hist_memo_levels.htm).
- <sup>31</sup> Chabell Carrazana and Jasmine Mithani, "How Student Loan Debt Has Fueled the Pay Gap for Black Women," *Business & Economy*, The 19th News Network, July 27, 2023, <https://19thnews.org/2023/07/student-loan-debt-pay-gap-black-women/>.
- <sup>32</sup> Robin Bleiweis, Jocelyn Frye, and Rose Khattar, "Women of Color and the Wage Gap," Center for American Progress, November 17, 2021, <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/women-of-color-and-the-wage-gap/>.
- <sup>33</sup> Deiondria Lee-Sanders, "How the Supreme Court Decision Blocking Student Loan Forgiveness Affects Black Women Like Mem," The Education Trust, August 7, 2023, <https://edtrust.org/the-equity-line/how-the-supreme-court-decision-blocking-student-loan-forgiveness-affects-black-women-like-me/>.
- <sup>34</sup> Katherine Knott, "Biden Seeks Another Pell Grant Increase, but Shortfall Looms," *Inside Higher Ed*, March 12, 2024.
- <sup>35</sup> Madeline Brown, Marokey Sawo, and Ofronama Biu, "Baby Bonds Would Reduce Racial Wealth Inequities. Here's What Policymakers Need to Know," *Urban Wire* (blog), Urban Institute, October 4, 2023, <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/baby-bonds-would-reduce-racial-wealth-inequities-heres-what->



policy-makers-need-know.

- <sup>36</sup> Abridgale Johnson, "Baby Bonds: A Path Toward Prosperity for Future Generations," American Civil Liberties Union, October 13, 2023, <https://www.aclu.org/news/racial-justice/baby-bonds-a-path-toward-prosperity-for-future-generations>.
- <sup>37</sup> "Baby Bonds Around the US," Institute on Race, Power, and Political Economy, accessed June 2024, <https://racepowerpolicy.org/baby-bonds/baby-bonds-around-the-us/#:~:text=Baby%20Bonds%20at%20the%20State%20Level&text=In%202020%2C%20New%20Jersey%20was,the%20Connecticut%20Baby%20Bonds%20Trust>.
- <sup>38</sup> Madeline Brown, Marokey Sawo, and Ofranama Biu, "Baby Bonds Would Reduce Racial Wealth Inequities. Here's What Policymakers Need to Know," *Urban Wire* (blog), Urban Institute, October 4, 2023, <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/baby-bonds-would-reduce-racial-wealth-inequities-heres-what-policy-makers-need-know>.
- <sup>39</sup> "President Joe Biden Outlines New Plans to Deliver Student Debt Relief to Over 30 Million Americans Under the Biden-Harris Administration," The White House, April 8, 2024, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2024/04/08/president-joe-biden-outlines-new-plans-to-deliver-student-debt-relief-to-over-30-million-americans-under-the-biden-harris-administration/>.
- <sup>40</sup> "The Limited PSLF Waiver Opportunity Ended on Oct. 31, 2022," Federal Student Aid, US Department of Education, <https://studentaid.gov/announcements-events/pslf-limited-waiver>.
- <sup>41</sup> "The Saving on a Valuable Education (SAVE) Plan Offers Lower Monthly Loan Payments," Federal Student Aid, US Department of Education, <https://studentaid.gov/announcements-events/save-plan>.
- <sup>42</sup> "Fact Sheet: President Biden Takes New Steps to Lower Prescription Drug and Health Care Costs, Expand Access to Health Care, and Protect Consumers," The White House, March 6, 2024, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2024/03/06/fact-sheet-president-biden-takes-new-steps-to-lower-prescription-drug-and-health-care-costs-expand-access-to-health-care-and-protect-consumers/#:~:text=The%20President%20continues%20to%20build,costs%20and%20health%20insurance%20premiums/>.
- <sup>43</sup> Liam Reynolds, Vanessa G. Perry, and Jung Hyun Choi, "Closing the Homeownership Gap Will Require Rooting Systemic Racism Out of Mortgage Underwriting," *Urban Wire* (blog), Urban Institute, October 13, 2021, <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/closing-homeownership-gap-will-require-rooting-systemic-racism-out-mortgage-underwriting>.
- <sup>44</sup> Natasha Hicks, Anne E. Price, Rakeen Mabud, and Aisha Nyandoro, "Solutions Centering Black Women in Housing," *Non-Profit Quarterly*, November 17, 2022, <https://nonprofitquarterly.org/solutions-centering-black-women-housing/>.
- <sup>45</sup> "DC Open Doors," DCHFA (DC Housing Finance Authority), accessed June 2023, <https://www.dchfa.org/homeownership/dc-open-doors/>.
- <sup>46</sup> Congress.gov, "H.R.1255—118th Congress (2023-2024): Sgt. Isaac Woodard, Jr. and Sgt. Joseph H. Maddox GI Bill Restoration Act of 2023," March 23, 2023, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/1255>.
- <sup>47</sup> Congress.gov, "S.3257—118th Congress (2023-2024): Sgt. Isaac Woodard, Jr. and Sgt. Joseph H. Maddox GI Bill Restoration Act of 2023," November 8, 2023, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/senate-bill/3257>.
- <sup>48</sup> Howard Gleckman, "Congress May Expand The Low-Income Housing Tax Credit. But Why?," Tax Policy Center, February 5, 2024, <https://www.taxpolicycenter.org/taxvox/congress-may-expand-low-income-housing-tax-credit-why>.
- <sup>49</sup> "Fair Lending: Interagency Statement on Special Purpose Credit Programs," Office of the Comptroller of the Currency, US Department of the Treasury, February 22, 2022, <https://www.occ.treas.gov/news-issuances/bulletins/2022/bulletin-2022-3.html>.
- <sup>50</sup> Brad Blower, "Special Purpose Credit Programs Remain On Solid Legal Ground Despite Supreme Court's Affirmative Action Decision," National Community Reinvestment Coalition, September 11, 2023, <https://ncrc.org/special-purpose-credit-programs-remain-on-solid-legal-ground-despite-supreme-courts-affirmative-action-decision/>.
- <sup>51</sup> Ben Holtzman, "The Age of Predatory Inclusion," Shelterforce, June 11, 2020,

[https://shelterforce.org/2020/06/11/the\\_age\\_of\\_predatory\\_inclusion/](https://shelterforce.org/2020/06/11/the_age_of_predatory_inclusion/).

- <sup>52</sup> "Navigating the Real Estate Valuation Process," FDIC (Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation), May 10, 2023, <https://www.fdic.gov/regulations/examinations/supervisory/insights/siwin11/siwinter2011-article01.html>.
- <sup>53</sup> "The Equal Credit Opportunity Act," Department of Justice, January 25, 2024, <https://www.justice.gov/crt/equal-credit-opportunity-act-3>.
- <sup>54</sup> Annie Nova and Darla Mercado, "Where You Bank Can Make a Big Difference for Racial Justice," CNBC, July 13, 2020, <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/07/04/upset-about-racial-injustice-where-you-bank-can-make-a-difference.html>.
- <sup>55</sup> Patrick T. Harker, "Supporting Small Business Owners of Color," Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia, June 2, 2021, <https://www.philadelphiafed.org/community-development/workforce-and-economic-development/210602-racism-and-the-economy>.
- <sup>56</sup> "Biden-Harris Administration Announces Significant Increase in Lending to Black-Owned Small Businesses," SBA (US Small Business Administration), October 24, 2023, <https://www.sba.gov/article/2023/10/24/biden-harris-administration-announces-significant-increase-lending-black-owned-small-businesses>.
- <sup>57</sup> "SBA Administrator Guzman, Biden-Harris Administration Announce Community Navigator Pilot Program Grantees," Small Business Administration, October 29, 2021, <https://www.sba.gov/article/2021/oct/28/sba-administrator-guzman-biden-harris-administration-announce-community-navigator-pilot-program>.
- <sup>58</sup> "Chairman Williams Launches Investigation into the SBA's Community Navigator Pilot Program," House Committee on Small Business, accessed June 14, 2024, <https://smallbusiness.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=405481>.
- <sup>59</sup> Kenneth Neimeyer, "A Georgia Basic Income Program Is Giving Black Women \$850 a Month. They Say It Helps Them Pay Bills and Reduce Debt," *Business Insider*, April 1, 2024, <https://www.businessinsider.com/georgia-basic-income-program-low-income-black-women-debt-bills-2024-3>.
- <sup>60</sup> Liam Reynolds, Vanessa G. Perry, and Jung Hyun Choi, "Closing the Homeownership Gap Will Require Rooting Systemic Racism Out of Mortgage Underwriting," Urban Wire (blog), Urban Institute, October 13, 2021, <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/closing-homeownership-gap-will-require-rooting-systemic-racism-outmortgage-underwriting>
- <sup>61</sup> Juli Adhikari, Jessica Milli, and Maggie Jo Buchanan, "The Economic, Educational, and Health-Related Costs of Being a Woman," The Center for American Progress, March 30, 2022, <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/the-economic-educational-and-health-related-costs-of-being-a-woman/>.
- <sup>62</sup> Weiyi Cai, Taylor Johnston, Allison McCann, and Amy Schoenfeld Walker, "Half of US Women Risk Losing Abortion Access Without Roe," *The New York Times*, May 7, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/05/07/us/abortion-access-roe-v-wade.html>.
- <sup>63</sup> Allison McCann, Amy Schoenfeld Walker, Ava Sasani, Taylor Johnston, Larry Buchanan, Jon Huang, Margot Sanger-Katz and Kate Zernike, "Tracking Abortion Bans Across the Country," *The New York Times*, May 4, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2024/us/abortion-laws-roe-v-wade.html>.
- <sup>64</sup> Salma Elakbawy and Emme Rogers, "The Economic Fallout of Reproductive Rights Restrictions on Women's Futures," Center for the Economics of Reproductive Health, Institute for Women's Policy Research, March 1, 2024, <https://iwpr.org/the-economic-fallout-of-reproductive-rights-restrictions-on-womens-futures/>.
- <sup>65</sup> Juli Adhikari, Jessica Mill, and Maggie Jo Buchanan, "The Economic, Educational, and Health-Related Costs of Being a Woman."
- <sup>66</sup> Erica Martin Richards, "Mental Health Among African American Women," Johns Hopkins Medicine, n.d., accessed April 17, 2024, <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/wellness-and-prevention/mental-health-among-african-american-women>.
- <sup>67</sup> Patrick Drake, Jennifer Tolbert, Robin Rudowitz, and Anthony Damico, "How Many Uninsured Are in the Coverage Gap and How Many Could be Eligible if All States Adopted the Medicaid Expansion?," KFF, February 26, 2024, <https://www.kff.org/medicaid/issue-brief/how-many-uninsured-are-in-the-coverage-gap-and-how-many-could-be-eligible-if-all-states-adopted-the-medicaid-expansion/#:~:text=People%20in%20the%20coverage%20gap%20are%20disproportionately%20people%20of>

%20color,46%25)%20(Figure%205).

- <sup>68</sup> “Rep. Veasey Co-Sponsors Bill to Create Medicaid-Style Program for Americans in Non-Expansion States like Texas,” Office of Congressman Marc Veasey, July 22, 2021, <https://veasey.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/rep-veasey-co-sponsors-bill-to-create-medicaid-style-program-for>.
- <sup>69</sup> Laura Harker and Breanna Sharer, “Medicaid Expansion: Frequently Asked Questions.” Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, March 18, 2024, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/health/medicaid-expansion-frequently-asked-questions-0#:~:text=The%202021%20American%20Rescue%20Plan,for%20their%20non%2Dexpansion%20enrollees.>
- <sup>70</sup> “Sanders, Merkley, Khanna, Tlaib Introduce Legislation to Eliminate Medical Debt for Millions of Working Class Americans,” Office of Senator Bernie Sanders, May 8, 2024, <https://www.sanders.senate.gov/press-releases/news-sanders-merkley-khanna-tlaib-introduce-legislation-to-eliminate-medical-debt-for-millions-of-working-class-americans/#:~:text=If%20enacted%2C%20the%20Medical%20Debt,right%20of%20action%20for%20patients.>
- <sup>71</sup> “Fact Sheet: The Biden Administration Announces New Actions to Lessen the Burden of Medical Debt and Increase Consumer Protection,” The White House, April 11, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/04/11/fact-sheet-the-biden-administration-announces-new-actions-to-lessen-the-burden-of-medical-debt-and-increase-consumer-protection/>.
- <sup>72</sup> “Executive Order on Securing Access to Reproductive and Other Healthcare Services,” The White House, August 3, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2022/08/03/executive-order-on-securing-access-to-reproductive-and-other-healthcare-services/>.
- <sup>73</sup> Imari Daniels, “Medical Debt is a Crisis. Is Debt Forgiveness the Answer?,” Lown Institute, April 9, 2024, <https://lowninstitute.org/medical-debt-is-a-crisis-is-debt-forgiveness-the-answer/>.
- <sup>74</sup> Sareen Habeshian, “Where Abortion Is On the Ballot in November,” Axios, May 23, 2024, <https://www.axios.com/2024/04/06/abortion-amendment-november-2024-elections-states-map>.
- <sup>75</sup> Congress.gov, “S.701—118th Congress (2023-2024): Women’s Health Protection Act of 2023,” March 9, 2023, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/senate-bill/701>.
- <sup>76</sup> “Women’s Health Protection Act (WHPA),” Center for Reproductive Rights, June 23, 2023, <https://reproductiverights.org/the-womens-health-protection-act-federal-legislation-to-protect-the-right-to-access-abortion-care/>.
- <sup>77</sup> Rhea Farberman, “Black History Month 2022: Policy Action to Support Black Health and Wellness,” Trust for America’s Health, February 2022, <https://www.tfah.org/story/black-history-month-2022/>.
- <sup>78</sup> Oriana González, “House Passes Bill to Protect Birth Control Access,” Axios, July 21, 2022, <https://www.axios.com/2022/07/21/birth-control-access-abortion/>.
- <sup>79</sup> Rebecca Falconer, “Schumer: Senate to Vote on ‘Right to Contraception’ This Wednesday,” Axios, June 2, 2024, <https://www.axios.com/2024/06/02/schumer-contraception-vote-birth-control>.
- <sup>80</sup> Congress.gov, “Titles–S.4638—117th Congress (2021-2022): Allowing Greater Access to Safe and Effective Contraception Act,” July 27, 2022., <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/4638/titles>.
- <sup>81</sup> “Executive Order on Securing Access to Reproductive and Other Healthcare Services,” The White House, accessed June 14, 2024, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2022/08/03/executive-order-on-securing-access-to-reproductive-and-other-healthcare-services/#:~:text=18116%20%E2%80%94%20to%20ensure%20equal%20access,women%20who%20are%20experiencing%20miscarriages.>
- <sup>82</sup> Donald Judd and Kate Sullivan, “Biden Signs New Executive Order on Abortion Rights: ‘Women’s Health and Lives Are On the Line,’” CNN, August 3, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/08/03/politics/joe-biden-abortion-executive-order/index.html>.
- <sup>83</sup> Justis Antonioli, “Bipartisan Momentum on Paid Family Leave Policy in the 118th Congress,” Bipartisan Policy Center, April 23, 2024, <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/blog/bipartisan-momentum-on-paid-family-leave-policy-in-the-118th-congress/>.
- <sup>84</sup> Kellie Moss, Lindsey Dawson, Michelle Long, Jennifer Kates, MaryBeth Musumeci, Juliette Cubanski, and Kate Pollitz, “The Families First Coronavirus Response Act: Summary of Key Provisions,” KFF, March 23, 2020,

<https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/the-families-first-coronavirus-response-act-summary-of-key-provisions/>.

<sup>85</sup> "Paid Family Leave Across OECD Countries," Bipartisan Policy Center, March 1, 2022, <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/explainer/paid-family-leave-across-oecd-countries/>.

<sup>86</sup> "HHS Awards \$3 Million for Initiative to Promote Black Youth Mental Health," HHS (Department of Health and Human Services), September 19, 2022, <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2022/09/19/hhs-awards-3-million-for-initiative-to-promote-black-youth-mental-health.html>.

## References

- Acs, Gregory. 2011. *Downward Mobility from the Middle Class: Waking Up from the American Dream*. Washington, DC: The Pew Charitable Trusts.
- Acs, Gregory, Linda Giannarelli, Kevin Werner, and Ofronama Biu. 2022. "Exploring the Effects of a \$15 an Hour Federal Minimum Wage on Poverty, Earnings, and Net Family Resources." Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
- Adams, Gina, Grace Luetmer, and Margaret Todd. 2022. "Five Steps Child Care Subsidy Agencies Could Take to Expand the Supply of Child Care." Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
- Alesina, Alberto, Stefanie Stantcheva, and Edoardo Teso. 2018. "Intergenerational Mobility and Preferences for Redistribution." *American Economic Review* 108 (2): 521–54.
- Banks, Nina. 2006. "Uplifting the Race Through Domesticity: Capitalism, African-American Migration, and the Household Economy in the Great Migration Era of 1916–1930." *Feminist Economics* 12 (4): 599–624.
- Billingsley, Gloria J., Sheryl Bacon, and Sam Mozee Jr. 2023. *Home Mortgage Approval and the Wealth Gap for Black Women in Mississippi*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
- Blalock, Sacha D. and Rhonda Vonshay Sharpe. 2012. "You Go Girl!: Trends in Educational Attainment of Black Women." *Diversity in Higher Education* 12:1–41.
- Biu, Ofronama. 2019. *Race to Lead: Women of Color in the Nonprofit Sector*. New York: Building Movement Project.
- Biu, Ofronama, and Afia Adu-Gyamfi. 2024. *Black Women and Vulnerable Work*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
- Biu, Ofronama, Batia Katz, Afia Adu-Gyamfi, and Molly M. Scott. 2023. *Job Quality and Race and Gender Equity*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
- Black, Dan A., Amelia Haviland., Seth G. Sanders, and Lowell J. Taylor. 2008. "Gender Wage Disparities among the Highly Educated." *The Journal of Human Resources* 43 (3): 630. <https://doi.org/10.3368/jhr.43.3.630>.
- Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System. 2024. *Economic Well-Being of US Households in 2023*. Washington, DC: Board of Governors.
- Boustan, Leah Platt, and William J. Collins. 2013. "The Origins and Persistence of Black-White Differences in Women's Labor Force Participation." NBER Working Paper Series #19040. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economics Research.
- Bradford, William D. 2014. "The 'Myth' That Black Entrepreneurship Can Reduce the Gap in Wealth Between Black and White Families." *Economic Development Quarterly* 28 (3).
- Brown, Irene, ed. 2000. *Latinas and African American Women at Work: Race, Gender, and Economic Inequality*. New York: Russel Sage Foundation.
- Buettgens, Matthew, and Urmi Ramchandani. 2023. *2.3 Million People Would Gain Health Coverage in 2024 if 10 States Were to Expand Medicaid Eligibility*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
- Chetty, Raj, John N. Friedman, Nathaniel Hendren, Maggie R. Jones, and Sonya R. Porter. 2018. "The Opportunity Atlas: Mapping the Childhood Roots of Social Mobility." Working Paper 25147. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.
- Chetty, Raj, Nathaniel Hendren, Maggie R. Jones, and Sonya R. Porter. 2020. "Race and Economic Opportunity in the United States: An Intergenerational Perspective." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 135 (2): 711–83.

- Chetty, Raj, Nathaniel Hendren, Patrick Kline, and Emmanuel Saez. 2015 "Economic Mobility." The Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality. Stanford, CA: The Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality.
- Chingos, Matthew M. 2019. "Broken Promises: Examining the Failed Implementation of the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program." Statement before the US House of Representatives Committee on Education and Labor, Washington, DC, September 19.
- Choi, Jung Hyun, Laurie Goodman, and Jun Zhu. 2021. *A Three-Decade Decline in the Homeownership Gender Gap What Drove the Change, and Where Do We Go from Here?* Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
- Collins, Sharon M. 1989. "The Marginalization of Black Executives." *Social Problems* 36 (4): 317–31.
- Cosgrove, Brendan, Philip Gaskin, Thom Goff, Erin Kenney, Jessica Milli, and Hyacinth Vassell. 2023. *Access to Capital for Entrepreneurs: Removing Barriers: 2023 Update*. Kansas City, KS: Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé Williams. 2013. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color." In *The Public Nature of Private Violence*, 93–118. Oxfordshire, England, UK: Routledge.
- Daly, Mary, Bart Hobijn, and Joseph H. Pedtke. 2017. "Disappointing Facts About the Black-White Wage Gap." FRBSF Economic Letter 2017-16. San Francisco: Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco.
- Darity, William, Darrick Hamilton, Mark Paul, Alan Aja, and Anne Price. 2018. *What We Get Wrong About Closing the Racial Wealth Gap*. Durham, NC: Samuel DuBois Cook Center on Social Equity.
- Davidai, Shai and Jesse Walker. 2022. "Americans Misperceive Racial Disparities in Economic Mobility." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 48 (5): 793–806.
- Dixon, Rebecca, and Darrick Hamilton. 2022. *Using Audit Testing to Proactively Root Out Workplace Discrimination*. New York: National Employment Law Project.
- Duncan, Gina Newsome. 2023. "African American Women & Mental Health: Strengths, Challenges, and Opportunities for Growth." Presentation given at the Central East Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network/SAMSHA, Webinar, May 18.
- Elliott, Diana, and Fay Walker. 2022. "Centering Black Women in Income and Wealth Policymaking." Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
- Elliot, William, and Ilsung Nam. 2013. "Is Student Debt Jeopardizing the Short-Term Financial Health of U.S. Households?." *Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis Review* 95( 5): 405–24.
- Elliot, William, and Melinda Lewis. 2016. "Student Debt Effects on Financial Well-Being: Research and Policy Implications." In *A Collection of Surveys on Savings and Wealth Accumulation*, edited by Edda Claus and Iris Claus, 33–58. West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Feinberg, Robert M. and Daniel Kuehn. 2020. "Does a Guaranteed Basic Income Encourage Entrepreneurship? Evidence from Alaska." *Review of Industrial Organization* 57:607–26.
- Fox, Jane, and Winston Berkman-Breen. 2022. "Public Service Loan Forgiveness? How Improvements to a Student Debt Cancellation Program Can Help to Deliver Gideon's Promise." *Journal and Law Policy* 31: (2).
- Gebreyes, Kulleni, Andy Davis, Mariellel Farina, Thuong Broaden, and Stefani (Klapperich) Smilanich. 2023. *Hiding in Plain Sight: The Health Care Gender Toll*. New York: Deloitte.
- Giannarelli, Linda Gina Adams, Sarah Minton, and Kelly Dwyer. 2019. *What if We Expanded Child Care Subsidies*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
- Glenn, Evelyn Nakano. 1985. "Racial Ethnic Women's Labor: The Intersection of Race, Gender and Class Oppression." *Review of Radical Political Economics* 17 (3): 86–108.
- Hanks, Angela, Danyelle Solomon, and Christian E. Weller. 2018. *Systematic Inequality: How America's Structural Racism Helped Create the Black-White Wealth Gap*. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress.
- Hardaway, Cecily R. & Vonnie McLoyd. 2009. "Escaping Poverty and Securing Middle Class Status: How Race and Socioeconomic Status Shape Mobility Prospects for African Americans during the Transition to Adulthood." *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 38(2): 242–56.

- Hardy, Bradley, and Trevon Logan. 2020. *Race and the Lack of Intergenerational Economic Mobility in the United States*. Washington, DC: Washington Center for Equitable Growth.
- Hertz, Thomas. 2005. "Rags, Riches, and Race: The Intergenerational Economic Mobility of Black and White Families in the United States." In *Unequal Chances*, edited by Samuel Bowles, Herbert Gintis, and Melissa Osborne Groves, 165–91. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- HHS (US Department of Health and Human Services). 2024. "HHS Fact Sheet: Advancing Health Equity for Black Americans."
- Holder, Michelle. 2023 "How Do Wage Gaps Affect Black Women's Wealth Attainment, and Where Do Expenditures Fit In?" Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
- Jacobs, Elisabeth, Andrew Boardman, and Archana Pyati. 2022. "Roe v. Wade's Reversal Poses a Disproportionate Threat to Black Women's Economic Mobility." Washington, DC: WorkRise.
- Johnson, Richard W. 2020. *How Can Policymakers Close the Racial Gap in Retirement Security?* Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
- Johnson, Richard W. and Karen E. Smith. 2023. *Limitations on Social Security Benefits for Black Retirees*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
- Johnson, Richard W., Karen E. Smith, and Barbara A. Butrica. 2023. *Lifetime Employment-Related Costs to Women of Providing Family Care*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
- Kijakazi, Kilolo, Rachel Atkins, Mark Paul, Anne Price, and Darrick Hamilton. 2016. *2016 The Color of Wealth in the Nation's Capital*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
- Letkiewicz, Jodi C., and Stuart J. Heckman. 2017. "Homeownership among Young Americans: A Look at Student Loan Debt and Behavioral Factors." *The Journal of Consumer Affairs* 52 (1):88-114.
- Lopes, Lunna, Alex Montero, Marley Presiado, and Liz Hamel. 2024. "Americans' Challenges with Health Care Costs." San Francisco: KFF.
- Ma, Jennifer, and Matea Pender. 2022. *Trends in College Pricing and Student Aid 2022*. College Board. New York: College Board.
- Marinescu, Ioana. 2018. "No Strings Attached: The Behavioral Effects of U.S. Unconditional Cash Transfer Programs." Working Paper w24337. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.
- Martin, Elizabeth C., and Rachel E. Dwyer. 2021. "Financial Stress, Race, and Student Debt during the Great Recession." *Social Currents* 8 (5): 424.
- Mazumder, Bhashkar. 2011. "Black-White Differences in Intergenerational Economic Mobility in the U.S." Working Paper CES-11-40. Washington, DC: United States Census Bureau.
- McCall, Leslie. 2001. "Sources of Racial Wage Inequality in Metropolitan Labor Markets: Racial, Ethnic, and Gender Differences." *American Sociological Review* 66 (4): 520–41.
- McCall, Terika, Megan Foster, and Todd A. Schwartz. 2023. "Attitudes Toward Seeking Mental Health Services and Mobile Technology to Support the Management of Depression Among Black American Women: Cross-Sectional Survey Study." *Journal of Medical Internet Research* 25: e45766.
- Miller, Sarah, Laura R. Wherry, and Diana Green Foster. 2023. "The Economic Consequences of Being Denied an Abortion." Working Paper 26662. Washington, DC: National Bureau of Economic Research.
- Moore, Asia, Christyl Wilson Ebba, Nidal Karim, Sashana Rowe-Harriott, and Stephanie Campos. 2023. *Magnolia Mother's Trust Alumni Study Report: A Dual-Generational Examination of the Long-Term Impacts of Guaranteed Income*. Jackson, MS: Springboard to Opportunities.
- Morillas, Juan Rafael. 2007. "Assets, Earnings Mobility and the Black/White Gap." *Social Science Research* Volume 36 (2): 808–33.
- National Partnership for Women & Families. 2023. "Paid Leave Works: Evidence from State Programs." National Partnership for Women & Families. Washington, DC: National partnership for Women & Families. November 2023.

- Neal, Michael, and Alanna McCargo. 2020 *How Economic Crises and Sudden Disasters Increase Racial Disparities in Homeownership*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
- Neal, Michael, Amalie Zinn, Marokey Sawo, and Linna Zhu. 2023. *Intergenerational Wealth Transfers: Do Expectations of Leaving an Inheritance Differ Between Black and White Families?* Washington, DC: Urban Institute
- Neal, Michael, Jung Hyun Choi, and John Walsh. 2020. *Before the Pandemic, Homeowners of Color Faced Structural Barriers to the Benefits of Homeownership*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
- Neal, Michael, Jung Hyun Choi, Kathryn Reynolds, Joseph Schilling, and Gideon Berger. 2021. *Why Do Households of Color Own Only a Quarter of the Nation's Housing Wealth When They Compose a Third of the Nation's Households?*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
- O'Grady, Ian, Colin Higgins, and Bruce Katz. 2021. "Localizing the State Small Business Credit Initiative." Philadelphia: Drexel University Nowak Metro Finance Lab, Lindy Institute for Urban Innovation.
- Paige, Jessica Welburn. 2022. *Examining the Loss of Wealth and Downward Mobility of African Americans: A Review of Challenges for the Black Middle Class*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.
- Patterson Belknap. 2024. "Fearless Fund Decision May Impact Race-Based Grantmaking." New York: Patterson Belknap, Webb & Tyler.
- Paul, Mark, William Darity, and Darrick Hamilton. 2018. *The Federal Job Guarantee - A Policy to Achieve Permanent Full Employment*. Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.
- Perry, Andre M., Manann Donoghoe, and Hannah Stephens. 2023. *Who Is Driving Black Business Growth? Insights from the Latest Data on Black-owned Businesses*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.
- Ponce De Leon, Rebecca, and Ashleigh Shelby Rosette. 2022. "'Invisible' Discrimination: Divergent Outcomes for the Nonprototypicality of Black Women." *Academy of Management Journal* Vol. 65 (3).
- Porter, Christa J., Lawanda Ward, and Lori D. Patton. 2023. "Toward Understanding COVID-19's Economic Impact on Black Women in U.S. Higher Education." *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 60 (1): 66–80.
- Raginal, Travis. 2023. "Equity Action Plan Digest: Small Business Administration." Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
- Rakshit, Shameek, Matthew Rae, Gary Claxton, Krutika Amin, and Cynthia Cox. 2024. "The Burden of Medical Debt in the United States." Health System Tracker. NY: Peterson Center on Healthcare and San Francisco: KFF.
- Ren, Chunhui. 2022. "A Dynamic Framework for Earnings Inequality Between Black and White Men." *Social Forces* 100 (4): 1449–78.
- Republican Study Committee. 2024. *Fiscal Sanity to Save America*. Washington, DC: US House of Representatives, Republican Study Committee. [https://hern.house.gov/uploadedfiles/final\\_budget\\_including\\_letter\\_web\\_version.pdf](https://hern.house.gov/uploadedfiles/final_budget_including_letter_web_version.pdf).
- Romig, Kathleen. 2023. *Raising Social Security's Retirement Age Would Cut Benefits for All New Retirees*. Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.
- Romig, Kathleen, Luis Nuñez, and Arloe Sherman. 2023. *The Case for Updating SSI Asset Limits: Raising or Eliminating Limits Would Reduce Administrative Burdens Without Dramatically Increasing Enrollment*. Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Priorities.
- Romig, Kathleen, and Kathleen Bryant. 2021. *A National Paid Leave Program Would Help Workers, Families*. Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.
- Rucks-Ahidiana, Zawadi, and Ola Kalu. 2023. "Deconstructing the Intergenerational, Structural, and Cultural Factors Contributing to Black Women's Wealth." Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
- Social Security Administration 2021. "Fact Sheet: Social Security: African Americans Receiving Social Security Disability Insurance Benefits." Washington, DC: SSA. <https://www.ssa.gov/news/press/factsheets/ss-customer/aa-dib.pdf>.
- Smith, Karen E., Richard W. Johnson, and Leslie A. Muller. 2004. "Deferring Income in Employer-Sponsored Retirement Plans: The Dynamics of Participant Contributions." *National Tax Journal* 57 (3): 639–70.
- Taylor, Jamila. 2019. *Racism, Inequality, and Health Care for African Americans*. Washington, DC: The Century Foundation.

- Theodos, Brett, and Dennis Su. 2023 "Small Business Ownership and Finance." Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
- United Nations Women. 2021. "Universal Basic Income: Potential and Limitations From a Gender Perspective." Working Paper. New York: United Nations Women.
- Urban, Michael C. 2017. *Basic Impact: Examining the Potential Impact of a Basic Income on Social Entrepreneurs*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto.
- Viceisza, Angelino. 2022. "Black Women's Retirement Preparedness and Wealth." Washington, DC: Urban Institute
- Walton, Quenette L. 2023. "Improving Mental Health Care for Middle Class Black Women." Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
- Wispelaere, Jurgen, and Lindsay Stirton. 2012. "A Disarmingly Simple Idea? Practical Bottlenecks in Implementing a Universal Basic Income." *International Social Security Review* 65 (2): 103–12.
- Wu, Robert. 2021. "America's Unforgiving Forgiveness Program: Problems and Solutions for Public Service Loan Forgiveness." *UC Law Journal* 72 (3): 959.
- Zaw, Khaing, Jhumpa Bhattacharya, Anne Price, Darrick Hamilton, and William Darity. 2017. "Women, Race & Wealth." Van Nuys, CA: Insight Center for Community Economic Development and The Samuel Dubois Cook Center on Social Equity at Duke University.
- Zhu, Linna, Michael Neal, and Caitlin Young. 2022. "Revisiting Automated Valuation Model Disparities in Majority-Black Neighborhoods." Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

## About the Authors

**LesLeigh D. Ford** is an associate director in the Office of Race and Equity Research (ORER), where she leads and contributes to research and policy advising projects that explore sources of and solutions to racial inequities. Ford has led research in ORER on topics such as diversifying the health care workforce, expanding the Black maternal health workforce, and improving access to leadership development programs for racial equity–focused leaders of color. She currently leads an ORER initiative that focuses on advancing wealth equity for Black Americans. Her previous work includes evaluations of philanthropic and government-funded grant programs and research and advising to inform funder decisionmaking and practice. Ford earned a bachelor's degree in political science and English from the University of Michigan, a master's degree in education policy and management from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and a doctoral degree in sociology from Duke University.

**Claire Cusella** is a senior policy program manager in the Office of Race and Equity Research, where she contributes to the overall strategy and management of the Office while managing a portfolio of projects focused on racial equity. She contributes to research and policy projects exploring the root causes of structural racism and working to determine solutions to disrupt the underlying sources of disparities and mechanisms that hamper racial equity. She has a BA in political science and sociology from the State University of New York at Geneseo and a master's degree in public administration from the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University.

**Ofronama Biu** is a principal research associate in the Income and Benefits Policy Center, where she is affiliated with the Office of Race and Equity Research. Biu has spent the past five years in senior research roles, using both quantitative and qualitative methods to explore racial and gender stratification in the economy, including occupational crowding and alternative work among Black women and Black men, race and gender disparities in workplace experiences, workforce development,



and wealth equity. Before joining Urban, Biu was a senior researcher at the City University of New York and the Building Movement Project. Biu has a bachelor's degree in psychology from New York University, a Master of Public Administration degree in public and nonprofit management and policy from New York University, and a doctorate in public and urban policy from the New School.

**Faith Mitchell** is an Institute fellow, working with the Center on Nonprofits and Philanthropy and the Health Policy Center. She oversees Urban's American Transformation project, which looks at the implications and possibilities of this country's racial and ethnic evolution. Over several decades, her career has bridged research, practice, and social and health policy. Previously, Mitchell was president and CEO of Grantmakers In Health, a DC-based national organization that advises, informs, and supports the work of health foundations and corporate giving programs. Mitchell has a doctorate in medical anthropology from the University of California-Berkeley.

**Marokey Sawo** is a research associate in the Office of Race and Equity Research. Her research centers on questions of income and wealth distribution as they relate to gender, race, and economic policy. Before joining Urban, Sawo was an economic analyst at the Economic Policy Institute, where she conducted research at the national and state levels on the economic consequences of racism and misogyny. As a member of the Economic Analysis and Research Network (EARN) team at the Economic Policy Institute, she contributed to advancing progressive policies by producing research on systemic inequities and providing technical assistance to the state-focused organizations within EARN. Sawo was also previously a researcher at the Groundwork Collaborative, where she focused on the economics of anti-austerity at the federal level, varying unemployment insurance issues, and broader labor market conditions. Sawo holds a BA in economics from Vassar College and an MSc in economic theory and policy from the Levy Economics Institute of Bard College.

**Michael Neal** is a senior fellow in the Housing Finance Policy Center and a former equity scholar at the Urban Institute. Previously, he worked at Fannie Mae, where he was a director of economics in the Economic and Strategic Research Group. Before his service at Fannie Mae, Neal was the assistant vice president at the National Association of Home Builders' Economic and Housing Policy department. As a housing economist, Neal has an in-depth knowledge of housing market trends and has provided expert analysis and commentary on housing to media outlets around the country. Previously, he worked at Congress's Joint Economic Committee, the Federal Reserve System, the Congressional Budget Office, and Goldman Sachs. Neal has a bachelor's degree in economics from Morehouse College and a master's degree in public administration from the University of Pennsylvania. He also studied economics at St. Catherine's College, University of Oxford, and finance at Princeton University.

# Acknowledgments

The views expressed are those of the authors and should not be attributed to the Urban Institute, its trustees, or its funders. Funders do not determine research findings or the insights and recommendations of Urban experts. Further information on the Urban Institute's funding principles is available at [urban.org/fundingprinciples](https://urban.org/fundingprinciples).

This report was informed by research activities that took place between August 2023 and April 2024, including a national survey, focus groups, and an expert roundtable. We are deeply grateful for the focus group participants' invaluable contributions to this study. This report would not have been possible without the Urban Institute team who generously provided expertise, guidance, feedback, and support on the project.

The authors would also like to express our sincere gratitude to the expert roundtable participants:

Dr. Fenaba Addo (University of North Carolina- Chapel Hill), Prof. Jeremy Bearer-Friend (The George Washington University), Steven Brown (Aspen Institute), Amber Bond (The African American Alliance of CDFI CEOs), Melanie Campbell (National Coalition on Black Civic Participation), Joi Chaney (J.O.I. Strategies), Dr. Chandra Childers (Economic Policy Institute), Jason Cohn (Urban Institute), Ashley Harrington (Project on Predatory Student Lending), Dr. Kim Lutchenberg (American University), Dr. Brian Smedley (Urban Institute), Dr. Brett Theodos (Urban Institute), Dafina Williams (Opportunity Finance Network), Dr. Janelle Williams (Atlanta Wealth Building Initiative), and Dr. Valerie Wilson (Economic Policy Institute).

The authors would like to extend a special thanks to Celina Barrios-Millner and Justine Davenport for their careful reviews and thoughtful feedback; Madeline Baxter and Elise Colin for assistance with research design, data collection, data analysis, and project management; and the Urban Institute communications team for project management and copyediting support.



500 L'Enfant Plaza SW  
Washington, DC 20024  
[www.urban.org](https://www.urban.org)

## ABOUT THE URBAN INSTITUTE

The Urban Institute is a nonprofit research organization that provides data and evidence to help advance upward mobility and equity. We are a trusted source for changemakers who seek to strengthen decisionmaking, create inclusive economic growth, and improve the well-being of families and communities. For more than 50 years, Urban has delivered facts that inspire solutions—and this remains our charge today.

Copyright © July 2024. Urban Institute. Permission is granted for reproduction of this file, with attribution to the Urban Institute.