



THE INFLUENCE OF *Gendered Racism*

*and Understanding Economic Fragility
for Black Women in the Cincinnati Region*

Summary of report authored by Praxis Matters,
Carolette Norwood, Ph.D., Brandi Blessett, Ph.D.,
and Tia Sherée Gaynor, Ph.D.



WOMEN'S FUND
of the GREATER CINCINNATI FDN.



**PRAXIS
MATTERS**

FOREWARD

In 2020 the Women’s Fund commissioned a multi-phased research project on Black women’s economic mobility to better understand regional opportunities and deterrents. This project provides an in-depth evaluation through three research reports—a historical analysis on Black female labor trends, an economic assessment within the Cincinnati region, and interviews with Black women to understand their economic mobility journeys. This paper is the final report in the series and further highlights the need for the Women’s Fund and other regional leaders to center Black women’s economic mobility.

The final report was designed to explore economic mobility patterns of Black women in Cincinnati over their life and intergenerationally through in-depth, personal interviews. Thirty-two women in our region shared their comprehensive journeys with economic mobility. The findings outlined in this summary and in the full report emphasize the shared experience of women across mobility status—downwardly mobile, immobile and upwardly mobile individuals—and their complicated relationships with economic mobility.

Research Findings:

- Black women are vulnerable to gendered racism in the workplace and at home, and this impacts their economic mobility opportunities.
- Many women report episodic experiences with physical and sexual violence.
- All the women interviewed have too little external and familial support, and many of the participants reported being the person everyone else calls on for help.
- Child support is a huge barrier for Black women’s economic stability, irrespective of their mobility status.
- Interviewees reported a generational wealth deficit due to the lost family home.
- Reproductive injustice is a pronounced component of life for Black women across the three economic mobility categories. Maternal and infant mortality is not the problem of being poor but rather a problem of being Black in America.



The Cincinnati region is a vibrant place to work and live with endless opportunities for economic achievement, and not all our neighbors have equitable access to these opportunities. Through this project, we have better understood the economic mobility experience for Black women in our region and emphasized racist and sexist systems that have led to the group’s economic outcomes. We know achieving Cincinnati’s full potential means we must dismantle systems of oppression, so all neighbors can have equitable access to upward economic mobility.

We invite you to read the full report on our website—cincinnatiwomensfund.org. **Advocate with us.**

GENDERED RACISM FRAMEWORK

<p>To fully appreciate the mobility status of Black women, one must understand how their lived experiences are informed by gendered racism.</p> <p>Gendered racism refers to the ways in which racism manifests differently based on gender and how racism and sexism intertwines. The oppressions of sexism and racism are not discrete, they are often “mutual” and “reciprocal” phenomenon occurring simultaneously and, therefore, impossible to parcel out and/or stratify.</p> <p>The gendered racism Black women encounter occurs daily in both public and private spaces: at work, at home, in their neighborhood, during recreation, in the doctor’s office, at the schools their children attend, at the grocery store, and even while driving their cars.</p>	<p>Two Common Ways Gendered Racism Manifest in Black Women’s Lives:</p> <p>“Strong-Black Woman” (SBW) Trope: Black women are often raised to be SBWs and are expected to attend to others’ needs, to put themselves last, and to sacrifice for others’ comfort and needs.</p> <p>Ordinariness of Violence and Trauma: The violence Black women experience often begins in childhood and can and do reoccur over the life course through interpersonal (sexual, ideological, physical, emotional), spatial (environmental, neighborhood), and structural (policy) violence¹.</p>
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ECONOMIC FRAGILITY STATUS

Mobility status is fluid for downwardly and upwardly mobile, but not so much for the immobile who are most often intergenerationally poor. Though presented as discrete categories, there are overlapping attributes and conditions shared by all women across mobility status. Gendered racism is articulated in the findings to illuminate how Black women experience economic fragility across three categories: downwardly mobile, immobile, and upwardly mobile.

Category	Economic Fragility Status	Attributes
Downwardly Mobile	High	Health and disability, bankruptcy and evictions, generational wealth deficit (family home loss, drug addiction), and low financial literacy
Immobile	Constant	Special needs, no child support, caught up in the system (suspensions, Child Protective Services, state support, non-profit supports, and jail), and low financial literacy
Upwardly Mobile	Less	Terminal degree (parents and self), HBCU education, public sector work, and high financial literacy

¹ Norwood, Carolette. (2018). “Mapping Intersections of Violence on Black Women’s Sexual Health within the Jim Crow Geographies of Cincinnati Neighborhoods.” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women’s Studies*, 39 (2): 97-135.

DOWNWARDLY MOBILE

The downwardly mobile are persons who are on the cusp of making advancements in education, earnings, and trying to meet or surpass their parents' achievement. They (the downwardly mobile) climb the proverbial ladder, they are demoted to the bottom rungs due to a new disability and/or accident, workplace racism and/or sexism, insurmountable medical expenses, or financial mismanagement.

Characteristics of the downwardly mobile persons

- Experienced or at risk for eviction and housing instability, food insecurity and have challenges meeting other basic needs.
- Likely to have reported experiencing bankruptcy, expressed some lack of financial literacy, been divorced, and/or receive no or inconsistent child support payments.
- Share narrations on generational wealth loss especially in homeownership or referred to having been adversely impacted by the crack epidemic.
- Offer rich narrations about challenges in the workplace environment that forces them out.
- Several interviewees have college degrees but experienced instability causing downward mobility.



“He’s a good dad, I feel like he’s a really good dad and I don’t want to get no courts involved. I mean, if he wasn’t doing anything at all, not even spending time, quality time with the kids, then I would, but...He’ll spend time with his kids, but he don’t make enough. I feel like I make more than him...I feel like I’m selfish if I asked him for child support through the courts.”

—Morgan, 34 years old, college graduate, mother of two

“I have [used food pantry services]. Not because COVID, but the first time that I went, it was really hard because I was used to taking my clients to places like that. I’m sorry. I’ve always been a very proud person and I’m not used to taking from people, and I feel like I’ve always believed my identity and who I was, and I never imagined not working, never.”

—Carmen, 51 years old, college graduate, single mother

“I’ve been paying my rent before I pay my car note. So it’s going to be either I lose the car or where I live. So I refuse to have kids and be evicted. If I had to, I’d reach out to every company out there that’s going to help me out with my rent and stuff. I wouldn’t let myself get evicted.”

—Morgan, 34 years old, college graduate, mother of two

IMMOBILE

The immobile are persons who are what sociologist Patrick Sharkey calls “stuck in place.” While they share many of the challenges as the downwardly mobile, they rarely or never really moved or had a real chance of moving upward. They are generationally immobile and despite best efforts are not able to move up and out of poverty.

Characteristics of the immobile persons

- More likely to have been born and raised in Cincinnati.
- Reside in the Cincinnati neighborhoods with a history of redlining, segregation, and urban public policies that failed Black Cincinnatians.
- Hardworking and ambitious but are besieged with too few opportunities, too little resources, and too little assistance.
- Stressors include lack of child support, care-taking demands for special needs children, and lack financial and emotional stability.
- Likely to be intertwined with the system, for example, school suspensions, Child Protective Services, reliance upon state and nonprofit support to meet necessities (food, clothing, shelter), and experiences with chronic unemployment and untreated trauma.

“And if you sign up for a job, it’s your responsibility to get there one way or the other. So I did tell them, I think when I had to go, I said, you know, I’m not going to be able to do this. It’s just too far for me to come. But I did it for a while, you know? Until I’m like, this is costing me money. And then I worry on top of that, how are my children? It’s dark, they getting ready for school by themselves, and I’m not there, and it’s just too much. I’m walking home in the dark and I don’t know.”

—Allison, 50 years old, Cincinnati, mother of five

“Well, there was one time when I was working at the Grease Shack and I was there, I was doing great. Always on time, drawer never short, everything was great. But then there came a time when the manager said, “Hey, your drawer was short.” And I’m like, “What?” And she said, it was like \$20 or something like that, so they let me go for that. And you know, that was the only time I felt like that they didn’t trust me, or it felt weird to be put in that position to know that I’m a great employee, I’m always there, I do my job the best that I can.”

—Allison, 50 years old, Cincinnati, mother of five

“There was a time when I had left one of the baby’s fathers, I had left him to get away from my own house...He was abusive so I had left. I took my children and we went to a shelter, and then they offered me other housing.”

—Allison, 50 years old, Cincinnati, mother of five

UPWARDLY MOBILE

The upwardly mobile are persons who are or have acquired wealth often at a higher economic position class than their parents. Individuals in this category often had advanced education and steady employment. With increased access to financial education, often from familial influence, their mobility is anchored in their wealth through homeownership. Like the other mobility statuses, upwardly mobile individuals experience violence, trauma and workplace discrimination influenced by gendered racism.

Characteristics of the upwardly mobile persons

- Often have college degrees and many have post-baccalaureate degree(s).
- Many labored in public, rather than the private sector.
- Parents had terminal degrees often from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU's) or a good paying government job (like the post office).
- Offer rich narrations about sexist and racist challenges in the workplace environment.
- Stronger knowledge of financial literacy and wealth building.
- Likely to have relocated to Cincinnati as professionals though some were born and raised in Cincinnati.



“I remember my mom and dad balancing the checkbook. I remember seeing that being done all the time...And so, I grew up in with all this economic stuff, I still balance my checkbook every month.”

—Heather, 52 years old, Cincinnati-native

“Looking at my friends [growing up] who I thought made so much money, their parents were teachers and my father was a healthcare executive. There’s no way that they made the same amount. And that’s when this idea of generational wealth came in. Because how is it that my family has amassed wealth in one generation and my parents are making the amount of money that they’re making and yet my friend’s parents live next door and both of them were teachers...It really was moving to Cincinnati and seeing the state of Black people in Cincinnati.... that I really started examining what my class was and what my class privilege was.”

—Naomi, 31 years old, mother of two children under five

“A guy had been harassing people sexually and otherwise at the office. And eventually, he made his way around to me, but I wasn’t having it, and so I fought him too... And once they looked into it, then they saw it wasn’t necessarily me just running around fighting people. It was that he had actually been bothering others, but others were afraid. So, I just got a nice warning from the man at the top of the [agency] that, “You got to find other ways to solve problems other than fighting and you should’ve let somebody know.” And he’s right and he was right, but I was like, “Whatever.” I was only 21 then. I was like, “I can just go find another job.” I didn’t leave though...”

—Maci, 59 years old, divorced mother of two adult children

RECOMMENDATIONS

Reaching our full potential in our region will take many steps to achieve. This series has offered many policy interventions to start dismantling racist and sexist systems. We encourage you to review the full project for a comprehensive list. We all have a role in this movement, and no matter your position in this region, there are many ways to advocate for change.

Individuals

- Consider enrolling in implicit bias and racial equity trainings. In Cincinnati the Greater Cincinnati Foundation hosts regular, free Racial Equity Matters trainings.
- Read the full paper and series for the Black Women's Economic Mobility project at cincinnatiwomensfund.org.

Non-Profits/ Funders

- Improve access to mental health care in the Black community and prioritize it in support services.
- Increasing funding to organizations focused on preventing violence against women, decreasing the Black maternal and infant mortality rate, financial literacy, and improving access to wealth building opportunities in the Black community.
- Implement programs for eviction prevention and to end homelessness.

Employers

- Evaluate your workplace for racial and gender inequities through an equity audit and work to eliminate these inequities with targeted, focused interventions.
- Host employee feedback sessions and employee surveys and commit to making equitable changes to support all employees.
- Consider reviewing the Women's Fund Employer Toolkit to review 60+ policies to prioritize socio-economic inclusion in workplaces.

Government

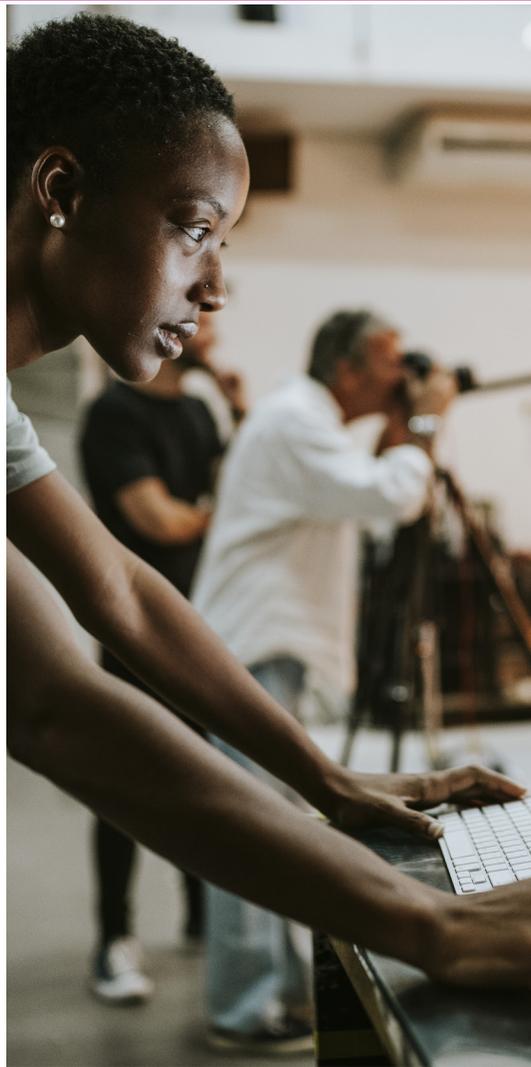
- Encourage financial education courses starting in the school system and with workplace benefits.
- Reform the public benefit system to provide a pathway out of poverty supported by a social safety net to help decrease public assistance reliance and the child poverty rate.
- Address the racial wealth gap through policy interventions in homeownership, student loan forgiveness, baby bonds, entrepreneurship capital access, and much more.
- Adopt pay equity legislation, strengthen unions and implement worker protections to address gender and racial workplace disparities.

METHODOLOGY

This study interviewed 32 self-identified Black or African American women through qualitative, one-on-one, in-depth conversations. Interviews were anonymized, and all interviewees were compensated with a \$50 Visa Gift Card for their participation. Interviews were conducted between December 2020 and January 2021 and lasted between two and four hours each.

Demographics of the interviewees were intentional diverse by age, educational attainment, socio-economic status, sexual and gender diversity, spatial diversity, and longevity in Cincinnati. More information regarding the methodology and interviewee demographics can be found in the full research paper.

Review the full Black Women's Economic Mobility Project at cincinnatiwomensfund.org.



*The Women's Fund of the Greater Cincinnati Foundation
720 E. Pete Rose Way, Suite 120
Cincinnati, OH 45202*

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