Race, Work, and Opportunity in America

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Background Information

In today’s discussion, panelists will consider the relationship between race and work. What is the experience of Black workers in the United States, and what does it say about the efficacy of the American Dream? What are opportunities to improve equity, diversity, and inclusion through business, legislation, and organizing? Below we present background information to inform the discussion.

Employment

- The average unemployment rate for the 3rd quarter of 2017 was 4.4% overall, 7.5% for Blacks or African Americans and 3.8% for Whites.¹ This is consistent with long-term trends showing that, in recent decades, Black unemployment has generally been twice as high as White unemployment.²
- Black workers are more likely to be unemployed across education levels.³ Black workers are also more likely to be in involuntary part-time work than White workers, even when controlling for education, job skill, and industry of employment.⁴
- A field experiment found that Black applicants were less likely to be called back for a position than White applicants with the same credentials. Black applicants would have to search twice as long as White applicants to receive a callback or job offer. Additionally, a White applicant with a criminal record was more likely to receive a callback or job offer than a Black applicant with no record.⁵

Earnings

- In 2010, the median earnings of Black women were 90% of the median earnings of White women; and the median earnings of Black men were 68% of the median earnings of White men.⁶
- The real median income in 2015 was $62,950 for non-Hispanic White households and $36,898 for Black households.⁷
- Blacks who grew up in the bottom quintile of household income distribution had approximately a 50% chance of moving up during adulthood; compared to Whites, who had a 75% chance.⁸

Learn more at as pn/raceandwork
Occupation

- Black or African Americans are 11.9% of workforce, but overrepresented in occupations that frequently offer low wages. For example, Black or African American workers make up 16.8% of service occupations, which offer median weekly earnings of $523, but only 9.1% of management, professional, and related occupations, which offer median weekly earnings of $1,188.

Employed Persons by Occupational Category, Percent Distribution, 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Black or African American</th>
<th>White</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Management, Professional, and Related</td>
<td>30.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td>25.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sales and Office</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Natural Resources, Construction, and Maintenance</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Production, Transportation, and Material Moving</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
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Occupational Spotlight: Nursing

Notably, more than 30% of LPN/LVNs are Black or African American, compared to only 11.9% of Registered Nurses, and 8.5% of Nurse Practitioners. This also results in earnings disparities, as LPN/LVNs’ average annual wage is $44,840, whereas RNs’ average annual wage is $72,180 and NPs’ average annual wage is $104,610.
Resources from Our Panelists


The National Black Worker Center Project’s Working While Black is an initiative to change the narrative about the causes of and solutions to the Black job crisis by projecting a nuanced view of the nature of Black worker lives: the challenges they face and how to address them through individual efforts and collective action. More information at: nationalblackworkercenters.org/working-while-black/.

References


Learn more at as.pn/raceandwork