

OUR DREAMS WON'T BE DEFERRED:

Reclaiming Progress for Black Men and Boys in an Age of Retreat

EMPLOYMENT & WEALTH

Employment and wealth are core to Black men's well-being and sense of belonging.

Structural racism has profoundly shaped disparities in both areas, denying Black men equitable access to economic mobility and security.

From slavery and Black Codes to convict leasing and Jim Crow labor restrictions, Black men have been exploited for their labor while their wealth-building opportunities were systematically stripped away. Generations were excluded from land ownership, union protections, federal benefits, and homeownership programs like Federal Housing Administration (FHA) loans. These forms of state-sanctioned asset stripping inflicted deep economic wounds — wounds that remain visible in today's labor market and racial wealth gap.



Areas of Progress

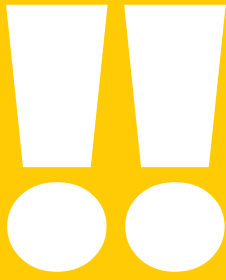
Declining unemployment rates across all age groups, including among Black youth and prime-age men (ages 25–54) indicating some post-pandemic market recovery.

Growth in Black entrepreneurship, with notable gains in revenue and business formation since 2017, driven by both necessity and innovation.

Increased public and philanthropic investment in equity-focused workforce development programs, including youth employment and reentry pathways.

Emergence of local reparations programs and public investments in equity-focused initiatives (e.g., Evanston, Asheville, and regional philanthropic efforts).

Expansion of cooperative economic models (e.g. Black-owned banks, Community Development Financial Institutions, mutual aid networks), supporting wealth building in Black communities.



Areas of Concern

Stagnant wages and widening income gaps with Black men earning less than white men at every education level, and facing limited pathways to economic mobility.

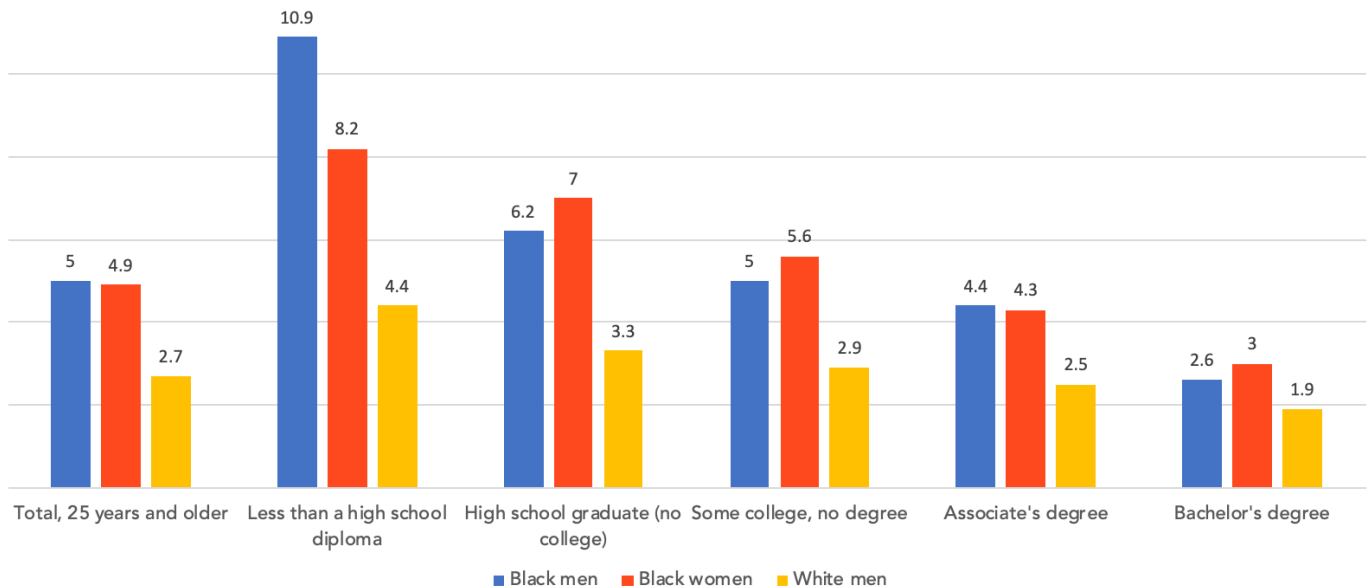
Occupational segregation and concentration in low-wage, low-mobility jobs, including disproportionately high exposure to automation risks and weak job protections.

Retrenchment of DEI efforts and the dismantling of employer equity infrastructure, leadership pipelines, and transparency initiatives.

Rising tensions between performative and structural responses, including “equity fatigue” and the rebranding or defunding of racial justice commitments.

Unemployment Rates by Level of Schooling (Year 2022)

These figures illustrate the enduring penalty of race in the labor market.



Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics Report 1105, November 2023.

A CALL TO ACTION

While education may open doors, systemic racism still determines who gets through them. To eradicate barriers to employment and wealth-building for Black men, we must start with an approach that engages Black youth and provides real pathways to success. We must:

- **Invest in Youth Employment Pathways**
- **Build Equitable Employment Pipelines**
- **Enforce Civil Rights and Labor Protections**
- **Ensure Financial Inclusion and Economic Security**
- **Enact Racially Just Wealth-Building Investments and Policy**

Get Involved.
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This summary has been shortened for brevity. Full citations and expanded analysis are available in the complete report.