

A PROFILE OF BLACK WOMEN
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Determining a new direction for the black woman in America is an issue of profound importance to our continued struggle here in America. Recognizing the importance of the issue raises the question how will we act upon the issue? Before a person can determine how to move on an issue, they must fully recognize the importance of the existing situation.

Our purpose is to outline in analysis of the Afrikan-american women's economic educational status in America. This analysis will explore erroneous ideas that exist among the general public, and especially, among our people about the relative status of the black woman in America, so that these ideas can be eradicated. Although our sources might be questioned because they are provided by the power structure (U.S. Department of Labor), they are demographically more representative of black women in the United States than any other source. (Unless otherwise noted, all figures are Department of Labor statistics.)

The idea that Afrikan-american Women are making great educational and economic strides in the U.S. is a common belief among our people and the general public. However, data provided by the U.S. Department of Labor proves that Black Women are at the bottom of the totem pole in educational and economic attainment.

LaFrances Rogers-Rose, a professor of the Afro-American studies at Princeton University, comments that, "The idea that members of this group (approximately 12 million black women) are making great strides is appealing but far from accurate."

Pauline Stone, assistant professor of Political Science at the University of Michigan, gives a more precise description of this myth. "Black Women are said to have an easier time making it in the labor force than the Black male because of greater representation of the black woman in professional categories." (See table #1.) However, as Ms. Stone insightfully points out, "Black Women... have been largely restricted to female professional jobs such as nursing, teaching and social work; few have achieved entry to male professional jobs such as law, dentistry, send, or two public leadership roles."

The high percentage of Afrikan-american Women who are professionals in "traditionally female jobs" supports the illusion that we are making greater strides economically. However, this is not true, and we will explain the fallacy of this illusion further in the profile.

EMPLOYMENT/UNEMPLOYMENT STATUS

The Black Woman is at the bottom of the employment totem pole. Except for the above-mentioned "female professional categories," she is located in low level industrial, technical, and clerical positions. Those of us in low level white collar jobs, such as managerial and administrative work, sales and clerical occupations, only exist in those positions because of changing requirements due to affirmative action - a concession made in the face of the struggles of Black Folk and not a gift to us.

However, affirmative action notwithstanding, because Afrikan-american Women are located in low level, dead-end jobs, their year-round average salary is less than three-fifths (56 percent) of the white male and less than three-fourths (71.5 percent) of the Black Male. (See table #2.) In 1978, for every dollar a white male made at work, a Black Male made seventy-eight cents, a white female made sixty cents and the Black Woman made fifty-six cents. This is what we mean by the bottom of the employment totem pole which is synonymous with the bottom of the economic totem pole.

Next, we will describe the status of the Afrikan-american woman in the realm of unemployment. By January of 1979, according to Alexis Herman, director of the Women's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Labor, unemployment for the Afrikan-american woman was approximately 700,000 or an unemployment rate of 12.5 percent. The Black Woman's unemployment is double the 6.2 percent rate of white females.

Additionally, and often surprisingly, the unemployment rate for minority women (the minority category is 89 percent Black), since 1962, is higher than the unemployment rate for minority men. (See tables #3 and #4.) In 1976 it was 13.6 percent for minority women as compared to 12.7 percent for minority men. So then, not only are Black Women paid less on average but also, Black Women have a higher unemployment rate. Is this economic progress?

In the age of affirmative action and women's liberation, according to Ms. Herman, "The number of Black Women in the labor force has increased substantially since 1970. For Black adult women 20 to 64, the number of workers rose from 3.6 million to 5.1 million in January of 1979. There were some 101,000 young Black Women 16 to 19 joining the labor force during this period." While it is true that more Black Women are in the labor force, it is also true that Black Women remain in the traditional, low level, low paying, dead end jobs.

WHY BLACK WOMEN WORK

Historically black women have always worked. Actually, we have been forced to work as slaves when we were first brought to this country period from post reconstruction to civil rights where two levels of tenancy existed for black women: sharecropping and urban tenancy. Tenancy is wage slavery in which you are forced to

work in below poverty jobs and live in below poverty conditions. During World War Two there was a temporary influx of women into factories in other types of industrial jobs, but it was not until the civil rights era that black women as a whole gained access to industrial and non-domestic type jobs.

Outside of the change in types of jobs, the status of Afrikan-american women has not made a progressive change. Job categories remain defined in correlation to race and sex, that is, white jobs and Black jobs, male jobs, and female jobs. Afrikan-american women continue to be concentrated in jobs which offer restricted access to fringe benefits, such as accident/job insurance coverage, maternity leave, educational benefits. These types of jobs tend to offer little room for promotion. We are located in jobs which are not only the most menial and dead end, but also jobs which have the most hazardous working conditions.

The reason that African American women work is because they are forced to work. During slavery, the master forced us to work. After slavery we had to work if we wanted to survive.

Large portions of women are not supported by men. Ms. Herman points out that "Black families account for 10 percent of the 57.2 million U.S. families, but they are 4 times as likely as white families to be living in poverty, and 3-1/2 times as likely to be headed by a woman. Approximately 40 percent of all Black families were headed by women in 1978. Slightly over half of these female-headed families lived in poverty, despite the fact that 56 percent of them were in the labor force. The poverty level for nonfarm families was approximately \$6,200 for a family of 4 persons in 1977.

Additionally, nearly two thirds of our women in the labor force in 1977 were single, divorced, or separated. In those cases where there was male support, the combined income of both partners oftentimes was insufficient to meet daily expenses. Many times, it was the woman's income that pulled the family above the poverty level.

As you can see, we Black Women have always worked. Our wages are required to support the black family. We must continue to improve ourselves so that we can in fact make greater economic strides. It is a common belief that in order to make such strides it will be necessary to improve our education.

EDUCATION AND ECONOMICS

Education is supposedly a determining factor of one's income status. 20 Facts on Women, a Department Of Labor - Women's Bureau publication, points out "The more education a woman has the greater likelihood she will seek paid employment." We would expect then that since educated women are likely to seek employment and are also likely to be qualified for better jobs due to their education, we should expect to find

a positive correlation between education and income. But education does not necessarily lead to higher pay for Black Women.

In March of 1976, which are the latest available figures in this category, Black Women who were at least high school graduates had a median income of \$7,781 as compared to \$7,931 for white women who were high school graduates, \$9,340 for Black Men who were high school graduates, and, an unbelievable, \$11,312 median income for white men who had only finished elementary school!

Furthermore, it is a myth that Black Women are significantly more educated than Black Men. Pauline Stone points out that in the 25 to 34 year old age group, "74.1% of Black Men have graduated from high school compared to the 69.0% of Black Women revealing that Black Women are not especially favored by recent educational policy. Further evidence in support of this conclusion is supplied by looking at median years of school completed - 12.6 years and 12.4 years, respectively- for Black Men and women in this age bracket."

Beyond high school attainment at the upper levels of education (postgraduate), Black Women lagged beyond the Black Male. In 1976 Black Women earned only 40 percent of the overall 1,085 doctorate degrees earned by Blacks as a whole. Forty percent of doctoral degrees is a long way from Black Women achieving more education than Black Men. Of 26,000 doctorate degrees earned by women in 1975, only 444 went to Black Women.

However, regardless of level of educational attainment or area of job expertise, Black Women are usually underpaid and overqualified (in terms of education) in comparison to all men.

CONCLUSION

We have shown that, although there are more Black Women in the job market today as compared to the number of Black Women in the job market in the past, Black Women are still at the bottom of the economic totem pole. Economic advancement for Black Women is an illusion.

Pushed into the types of jobs that we are forced to hold and then given a low level of average income, how can we call that economic advancement?

The economic problems of Black Women can be traced to a triple jeopardy to which we are subjected. We are exploited and discriminated against because of our race, our sex, and our class status. We must therefore organize to eliminate sexism, racism, and capitalism.

Education alone is not enough. Even when we get a so-called good education, we still earn less than men of equal or less education. What then will bring about a real advancement for Black Women and what will that advancement be like?

We should not be struggling to emulate our white counterparts or to conform to the system. We should not be struggling just to get a “piece of the rock.” Our struggle is to redefine our goals and our directions. Our purpose should be to develop ourselves as Black Women so that we can better contribute to the development of our people as a whole.

Table #1: Occupational Distribution of Employed Women and Men by Race (March 1976)

Occupational Group	Women		Men	
	Black	White	Black	White
Professional/Technical	13.1	16.5	7.2	16.0
Managerial/Administrative	2.6	6.1	4.4	15.1
Sales	2.3	7.2	1.9	6.5
Clerical	24.4	36.4	7.5	6.2
Craft	1.0	1.5	15.7	21.0
Operatives	16.6	11.4	26.7	16.4
Nonfarm Laborers	1.2	1.1	14.5	6.4
Service Workers (Except Private Household)	27.4	16.6	18.2	8.1
Service Workers (Private Household)	11.0	2.0	0.2	---
Farm & Farm Managers	0.1	0.2	0.8	2.8
Farm Laborers and Supervisors	0.1	0.8	2.9	1.5

The data in this table demonstrate how jobs are dominated by one race or one sex. There are Black jobs, white jobs, female jobs, and male jobs, that is, jobs where Blacks are in the lower paying jobs in comparison to whites, and women are in the lower paying jobs in comparison to men. Thus, the obvious conclusion and reality is that black women are in the lowest paying job categories.

Table #2: Median Annual Income of Men and Women by Race

Group	Median Annual Income
White Men	\$14,508
Black Men	\$11,336
White Women	\$8,684
Black Women	\$8,112

This table demonstrates how the Black Woman has the lowest earnings and how all women's earnings are less than all men's.

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Table #3: Minority Unemployment

	<u>1960</u>	<u>1970</u>	<u>1976</u>
Males			
Amer. Ind./Alask.Nat.	16.4	10.9	12.2
Blacks	8.6	7.1	15.9
Mexican Americans	8.1	6.4	11.1
Japanese Americans	2.4	1.8	2.9
Chinese Americans	3.6	3.7	7.2
Filipino Americans	4.9	5.4	5.6
Puerto Ricans	8.8	6.3	16.3
Majority	4.7	3.6	5.9
Females			
Amer. Ind./Alask.Nat.	11.9	10.9	15.6
Blacks	9.0	8.4	18.9
Mexican Americans	9.6	9.1	14.9
Japanese Americans	3.2	3.2	3.8
Chinese Americans	3.4	4.0	6.6
Filipino Americans	18.7	5.1	6.0
Puerto Ricans	11.1	9.3	22.3
Majority	4.7	5.0	8.7

Figures for Table #3 were taken from "Social Indicators of Equality for Minorities and Women - A Report of the United States Commission on Civil Rights."

Figures for all other tables are from the U.S. Department of Labor.

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Table #4: Unemployment Status of Men and Women by Race, Annual Average, 1955-76.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Women's Unemployment Rate</u>	<u>Men's Unemployment Rate</u>
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	<u>Blacks & others*</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Blacks & other*</u>	<u>White</u>
1955	8.4	4.3	8.8	3.7
1956	8.9	4.2	7.9	3.4
1957	7.3	4.3	8.3	3.6
1958	10.8	6.2	13.8	6.1
1959	9.4	5.3	11.5	4.6
1960	9.4	5.3	10.7	4.8
1961	11.8	6.5	12.8	5.7
1962	11.0	5.5	10.9	4.6
1963	11.2	5.8	10.5	4.7
1964	10.6	5.5	8.9	4.1
1965	9.2	5.0	7.4	3.6
1966	8.6	4.3	6.3	2.8
1967	9.1	4.6	6.0	2.7
1968	8.3	4.3	5.6	2.6
1969	7.8	4.2	5.3	2.5
1970	9.3	5.4	7.3	4.0
1971	10.8	6.3	9.1	4.9
1972	11.3	5.9	8.9	4.5
1973	10.5	5.3	7.6	3.7
1974	10.7	6.1	9.1	4.3
1975	14.0	8.6	13.7	7.2
1976	13.6	7.9	12.7	6.4

**Others" refers to minorities other than Blacks. Note that Black Women represent 89 percent of the category minority women.