



Executive Summary

*The State of Black Milwaukee in National Perspective:
Racial Inequality in the Nation's 50 Largest Metropolitan Areas
In 65 Charts and Tables*

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At this moment of national reckoning, with cities across the country grappling with the state of racial injustice in their communities, it is important to have a solid base of comparative and historical data to guide actions and policies. In 65 charts and tables, this study aims to provide that comparative base, examining how Black communities in the nation's 50 largest metropolitan areas fare on measures such as residential segregation; income, poverty, and intergenerational economic mobility; employment and earnings; the racial composition of private-sector economic decision-makers; mass incarceration; educational attainment; school segregation; and health care outcomes. The charts and tables permit readers from metropolitan areas across the country to examine how the status of their region's Black community compares to the nation's other large metropolitan areas on all of these indicators. Where is Black household income the highest? What metro area has the lowest Black male or female employment rate? Which metro area posts the highest Black incarceration rate? Where is racial segregation in schooling the most intense? All these questions –and many more—are answered in this study.

Our particular emphasis is on Milwaukee, which we argue represents the archetype of modern-day metropolitan racial apartheid and inequality. And our findings are devastating: on virtually all key measures of Black community well-being, Milwaukee ranks at or near the bottom when ranked against other large metropolitan areas. Moreover, when we examine historical trends in some key areas, the results are equally grim: Black Milwaukee is generally worse off today than it was 40 or 50 years ago. This study documents how poorly Black communities across the nation's largest metro areas were faring – even before the COVID-19 economic collapse. But no metropolitan area ranks as consistently poorly, across the board, on indicators of Black community well-being as does Milwaukee.

Some key findings:

- Discernible racial desegregation has occurred in many metro areas since the 1980s, but not very much in Milwaukee, which remains the nation's most segregated metropolitan area, with the region's racial geography marked in particular by the nation's lowest rate of Black suburbanization.
- Milwaukee's Black community is exceptionally impoverished. Black median household income in Milwaukee, adjusted for inflation, has declined by an astonishing 30 percent since 1979. Today, Milwaukee has the lowest Black median household income, adjusted for metro area cost-of-living differences, of any of the nation's 50 largest metropolitan areas. The income of the median Black household in Milwaukee is only 42 percent that of a white (non-Hispanic) household, the biggest racial disparity in the country. Small surprise, therefore, that the Black poverty rate in Milwaukee –33.4 percent—is the highest Black poverty rate among the nation's largest metropolitan areas, and almost five times the white rate.
- The ability of low-income Black youth to climb the economic ladder in Milwaukee is among the most truncated in the country. A Black child born into a

low-income household in Milwaukee in the late 1970s or early 1980s has estimated household income in early adulthood about 11 percent less than his/her low-income counterpart born and raised in Baltimore and over 40 percent less than his/her counterpart born and raised in Boston. Moreover, the racial gap in the ability of low-income youth to climb the economic ladder is wider in Milwaukee than all but three other metro areas (Pittsburgh, Chicago, and New York). A child born into a low-income Black household in Milwaukee has estimated young adult income 80 percent lower than his/her white counterpart.

- Milwaukee has the second-lowest Black homeownership rate among the nation's largest metropolitan areas (27.2 percent). Only Minneapolis' is lower.
- Only two-thirds of Black males between the ages of 25-54 (prime working-age adults) were employed in Milwaukee in 2016-18, the 3rd lowest rate among large metros. (By contrast, 85 percent of prime-age Black males were employed in Milwaukee in 1970). The Black-white gap in male employment rates in Milwaukee is the second largest in the country (only Buffalo's is higher).
- While education clearly matters for Black males in securing employment—a Black college graduate in Milwaukee is almost four times as likely as a Black high school dropout to be employed—race also strongly affects the labor market. A white high school dropout is over twice as likely to be employed in Milwaukee as a Black dropout; and white high school *dropouts* post a higher employment rate than Black high school *graduates* in Milwaukee.
- The median annual earnings for Black male and female workers in Milwaukee, even adjusted to take into account Milwaukee's relatively low cost of living, nonetheless are still among the lowest for Blacks in the nation's large metros. In addition, the median Black male worker in Milwaukee makes only 59.7 percent of a white worker's earnings, the worst racial disparity in the U.S. Only 17.4 percent of Black males, and only 14.6 percent of Black females in Milwaukee make more than \$40,000 a year (compared to 46.3 percent of white males).
- Blacks are severely underrepresented in management occupations in Milwaukee in proportion to their weight in the labor force. Blacks hold management jobs at only two-fifths of their presence in overall employment in Milwaukee, the lowest ratio in the country. The rate for Blacks in top-executive positions in Milwaukee is even lower.
- Black schoolchildren in metro Milwaukee are as likely to attend an intensely segregated school—a school in which enrollment is over 90 percent minorities—as they were in 1965. 72.2 percent of Black schoolchildren in Milwaukee attend hypersegregated schools, the highest rate in the country, and significantly higher than the percentage 30 years ago. Moreover, 35 percent of Milwaukee's Black schoolchildren today attend so-called “apartheid schools” (schools with over 90 percent minority enrollment).

- Milwaukee registers the third-highest rate of Black incarceration in state prisons among the 50 largest metro areas in the US (measured by Black incarceration rates in the central county of the metro area). The Black prison incarceration rate in Milwaukee is 10-times the white rate.
- In Milwaukee, Black infant mortality rates, teen pregnancy rates, and low birth-weight babies rates rank among the worst for Black communities in the nation's 50 largest metropolitan areas.

The study concludes with an intriguing comparison of Birmingham, Alabama and Milwaukee and with an exhortation to “rewrite the racial rules” in Milwaukee and elsewhere where racial injustice prevails.