

Wealth Inequality: The Myth of the American Dream in Media Narratives



Slavery: 400 Years and Counting

■ Slavery, beginning around 1606, along with loopholes within the ratification of the 13th Amendment such as Jim Crow laws and Black Codes, purposely deprived Black Americans of opportunities to build wealth. **HISTORY, BROOKINGS, CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS**



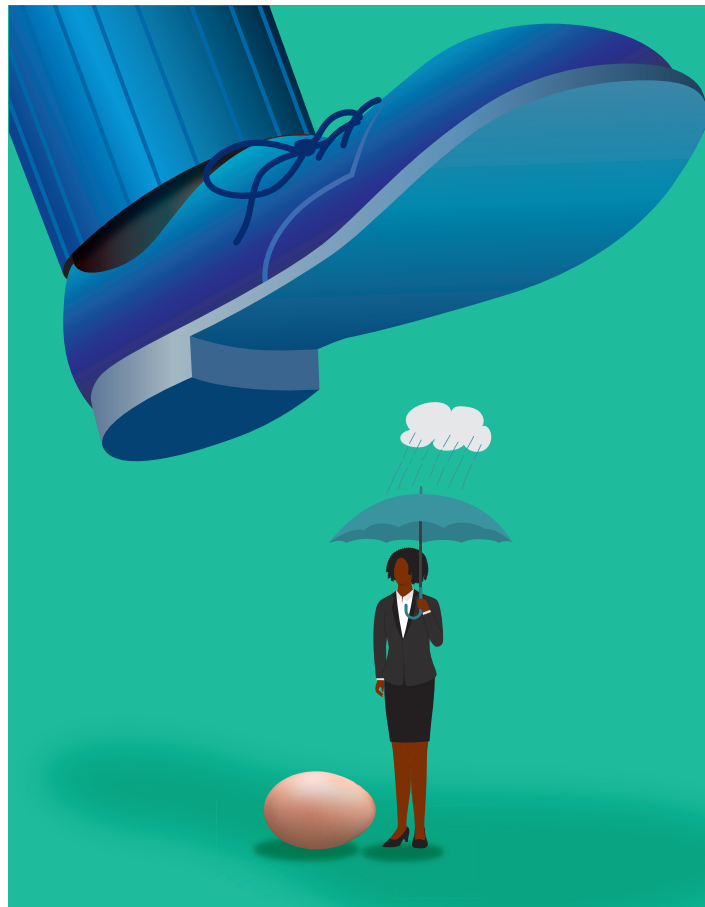
■ Slavery is still legal today. The 13th Amendment outlawed slavery except as punishment for crime. "Nearly 2 million incarcerated people in the United States have no protection from legal slavery."

VERA, HISTORY

\$14 TRILLION

■ In 2019 dollars, the amount of money in terms of labor that white slaveholders extracted from their captives.

CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS



"The American Dream portends that with hard work, a person can own a home, start a business, and grow a nest egg for generations to draw upon. This belief, however, has been defied repeatedly by the United States government's own decrees that denied wealth-building opportunities to Black Americans." **BROOKINGS**



Between 1940 and 1974 white Families had nearly four decades of unmitigated access to credit to build wealth before Black Americans were legally able.

BLOOMBERG

Click or tap button to watch Trevor Noah on "The Daily Show" answer questions for people confused about reparations.



How White Families Recouped and Prospered After Civil War



■ **Jim Crow Credit:** "Before the Civil War, mortgages and credit were collateralized on the backs of enslaved Africans as properties.... By 1940, low-income and working-class white families were ushered into wealth via federally backed housing and farming loans and derivative lines of credit. Black consumers weren't able to participate in the credit market until legislation was passed in 1974." **BLOOMBERG**



■ **White-Only Social Networks:** These helped to facilitate employment opportunities and access to credit. **BLOOMBERG, NBER**

■ **Elite Social Clubs:** These private clubs once only allowed white (and predominantly male) members, and are an example of where important business deals and political contacts were routinely made.

UPI

Pay Me What You Owe Me

Black workers are far more likely to be unemployed than white workers at every level of education

Unemployment rates by race and education, 2019

| | Black | White |
|-----------------------|-------|-------|
| Overall | 6.1% | 3.0% |
| Less than high school | 14.7% | 8.3% |
| High school | 8.3% | 3.9% |
| Some college | 4.9% | 2.9% |
| Bachelor's degree | 3.4% | 2.2% |
| Advanced degree | 2.3% | 1.7% |

Notes: White refers to non-Hispanic whites, Black refers to Blacks alone. Educational categories are mutually exclusive and represent the highest education level attained for all individuals ages 16 and older.


Source: ECONOMIC POLICY INSTITUTE, State of Working America Data Library, [Unemployment by race and education], 2019.

Black workers are less likely to have paid sick days and less likely to be able to work from home than white workers


Shares of workers with paid sick days and ability to work from home, by race

| | Black | White |
|----------------------|-------|-------|
| Paid sick days | 58.7% | 66.6% |
| Could work from home | 19.7% | 29.9% |


Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Job Flexibilities and Work Schedules, 2017 and 2018; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, American Time Use Survey microdata.




In 2020, the Economic Policy Institute found that Black men are paid \$.71 for every dollar a white man makes. Black women, who face gender and race discrimination, are paid even less—64 cents on the white male dollar.



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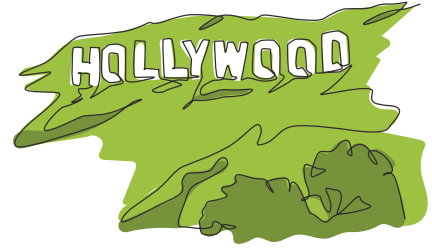


3 out of 5 Black employees are in frontline positions (health care, retail, and accommodation/food service). These industries have some of the highest numbers of workers who make less than \$30,000 a year. **MCKINSEY**



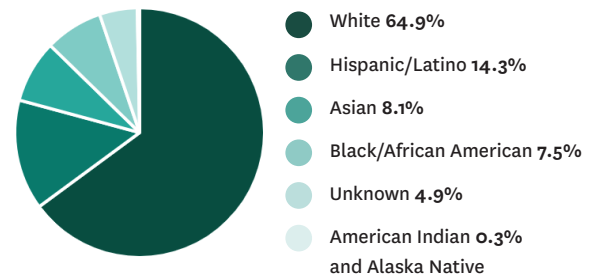
Significantly fewer Black workers can telework than white workers. This makes it harder for them to keep their jobs and stay healthy. **EPI**

Economic Policy Institute



Talent Agent Statistics by Race

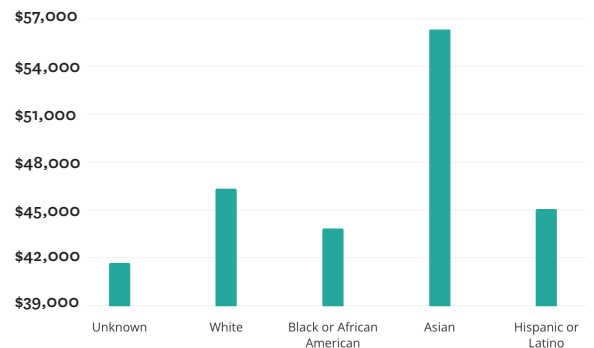
The most common ethnicity among talent agents is White, which makes up 64.9% of all talent agents. Comparatively, there are 14.3% of the Hispanic or Latino ethnicity and 8.1% of the Asian ethnicity.



Talent Agent Wage Gap by Race

Asian talent agents have the highest average salary compared to other ethnicities. Unknown talent agents have the lowest average salary at \$41,745.

ZIPPIA



Click or tap button to learn more about racial disparities in Hollywood.



Discrimination in L.A. Clubs

Click or tap button to learn how then-Mayor Tom Bradley rallied city leaders to end discrimination by private clubs in Los Angeles.



The Great Land Robbery

Click or tap button to read story in *The Atlantic* on how 1 million black farmers and families lost their land and farms.



Wealth Inequality: The Myth of the American Dream

“As a Black woman I get looked over for promotions or advancement because of stereotypes. It is believed that Black people as a whole are lazy and unqualified, which is totally the opposite. Sometimes I feel that people are threatened by me because they know I am capable, qualified and competent.”
– Black woman, nurse, 34

“This ‘other-ness’ exists intentionally or unintentionally between those of a minority and those of a majority from lacking of common cultural background. Relationships at work appear polite on surface but reluctant tendency in willing to share limited opportunities.”
– Asian woman, engineer, 56

“The workplace is still geared to the promotion of whites over minorities regardless of the laws in place to promote equality in the work force.”
– Hispanic man, engineer, 65

“People have preconceived ideas of what I am capable of doing.”
– Black man, physical scientist, 39

PEW RESEARCH

How Writers Can Write It Right

STRIVE TO ELIMINATE THE VICTIM PORTRAYAL

- In storytelling, try to depict how Black Americans, and all non-white characters, are **not victims of individual limitations, but historical systemic powers that have kept them from exercising their political rights and attaining powerful positions in many industries.**
- “While using art to shed light on the realities of marginalized communities is important, **the constant narratives of brokenness are dangerous and perpetuate the lie that America’s history of systemic oppression will forever prevent Black families from prospering.**”
ESSENCE
- Books like *Black Gotham: A Family History of African Americans in Nineteenth-Century New York City*; *Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880-1920*; and *Our Kind of People: Inside America’s Black Upper Class* have provided a much needed glimpse into the lives of thriving, and wealthy, Black Americans living in societies that sought to squelch their opportunities.**
ESSENCE
- “Fred Miller, an Air Force veteran from CA, who was looking to buy a large house in rural Virginia for family gatherings didn’t believe he’d be able to purchase a home because he was Black. He ended up buying what he learned was the Sharswood Plantation where his family’s ancestors were enslaved.”
60 MINUTES

How Industry Professionals Can Get It Right

Hire and promote Black writers, executives, agents, and people of color overall, with lived experiences no matter the type of stories you’re creating, or business you’re running. Why?

- The Black audience’s buying power is growing. **NIelsen**
 - In 2021 the Black community represented nearly \$1.6 trillion of buying power. **NIelsen**
 - In 2021, Black Americans were the highest percentage of TV watchers out of all races. They have remained the highest since 2019. **STATISTA**
 - In 2022, Black adults were the most likely ethnic group to subscribe to a cable tv service. **STATISTA**
 - In the 2021-2022 TV season, streaming was the most watched platform for 63% of Black viewers. **NIelsen**
 - In 2022, Nielsen reported that the Black population is on track to grow by 22% between 2020-2060, compared to a 27% decrease in the non-Hispanic White population during that same time. **NIelsen**
 - 56% of African Americans are the most compelled to purchase products that make efforts towards combating racial injustice. **NIelsen**
- Meanwhile:**
- 87% of TV executives and 92% of film executives are white. **MCKINSEY**
 - 78.9% of TV writers in America are white. **ZIPPIA**



Poverty Narratives in Popular Culture

The University of Southern California’s Norman Lear Center’s Media Impact Project published a report on “Poverty Narratives in Popular Culture.” View the report to read examples of how to frame your narratives accurately, including limiting written narratives of meritocracy and “the American Dream.”

MEDIA IMPACT PROJECT REPORT



Reach out to HH&S to be connected with experts and people with lived experiences to help inform your scripts and stories. To hire diverse writers, visit the **INEVITABLE FOUNDATION**, **CHANGE HOLLYWOOD** and **LA LISTA**. Reach out to organizations like **DIVERSE REPRESENTATION** and **COLOUR ENTERTAINMENT** to hire diverse executives and agents.