



# STATE OF BLACK GIRLS & WOMEN IN BATON ROUGE

A REPORT PREPARED BY: BRIANNE A. PAINIA, PH.D.

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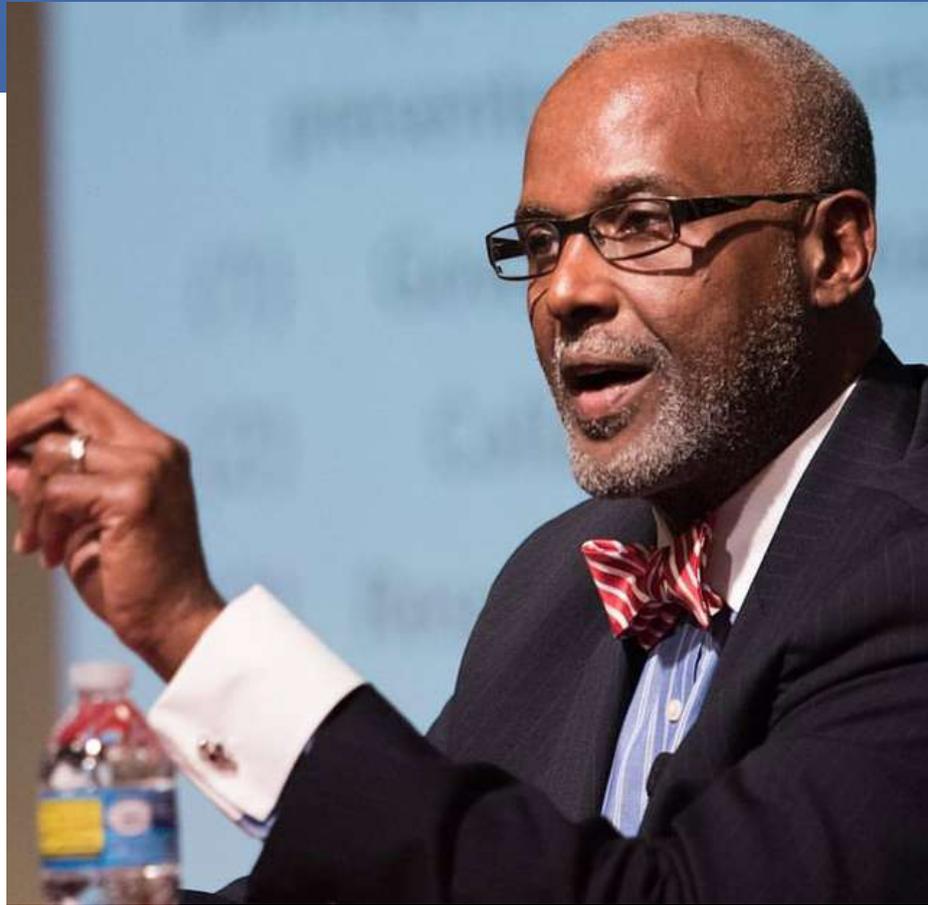
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RECOMMENDATIONS

# A WORD FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE CATALYST

Greetings!

As we observe Women's History month, I am excited to share our first report on the State of Black Women and Girls in Baton Rouge. Some years ago we released a similar report on Black men and boys. That report has served as the impetus for the Urban Congress on African American Males and the work that has followed.



I sincerely hope that sharing this important information will stimulate a corresponding commitment to impact the experiences of Black women and girls in our community. We are thankful for the many organizations and individuals who are active in this work already. We stand ready to be of support in whatever way we might.

Respectfully,

**RAYMOND A. JETSON**

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE CATALYST**

# INTRODUCTION

Black girls and women have long been under the watchful eye of authority figures and policy drafters. Impacted by the scars of both racism and sexism, many times, black women's race and gender have put them in positions of double marginalization in both their professional and personal spaces. Despite black women's admirable leaps in higher education attainment, this segment of the population still faces significant struggles in a myriad of areas including but not limited to: uneven wage earnings; higher likelihood to live in poverty; contact with the criminal justice system; and quality of life.

Many of the aforementioned ills are common amongst Black Americans (both men and women) with fluctuation between which group suffers the harsher of the two consequences. For example, black women are far more likely to be disciplined at school compared to white women (Morris and Perry 2017) but when compared with black men the rates are nowhere near as high (Rovner 2016). On the other hand, black men earn less than white men and women overall but are still paid more than their female counterparts meaning that though black men's wages are impacted significantly by their race, their status as men makes for higher earnings than black women. The differences between the two groups' experiences many times is due to the variances in societal treatment of men and women which creates an area of multiple marginalization for black women.

Prior literature and national large-scale organizational initiatives have focused on rectifying the structural and institutional ills done to black men and boys in America with the idea that if black men are helped then the black family as a whole would be uplifted as well (Smith 2017). As well-intentioned and necessary as these efforts might be, black women face influences and barriers that are not shared by their black male counterparts. Seldom has the fate of women, of any race, been discussed outside of their ability to effectively mother and manage the home (Henderson, Harmon, and Newman 2016).

Though these aspects of life are important, black women's fate should matter regardless of their status of mothers, wives, sisters, or caretakers. This report seeks to highlight the disparities which impact black women's ability to earn a living wage, build families and contribute to households, and pursue and maintain a healthy quality of life. Data specific to black girls and women in East Baton Rouge Parish and the state of Louisiana will be used throughout this report where available. In spaces where parish- and state-level data is unavailable, national data is used to provide context to trends which impact black girls and women in Baton Rouge and Louisiana as a whole.

# WHY BLACK WOMEN & GIRLS IN BATON ROUGE?

According to 2017 American Community Survey Estimates,<sup>1</sup> black women make up approximately 25% of the population of East Baton Rouge Parish and 17% of the population of the state of Louisiana. Black girls under the age of 18 account for 4% of the total population of Louisiana and approximately 6.3% of the total population of East Baton Rouge Parish. Both the majority in the state and the parish amongst black persons, black women and girls comprise a significant portion of the population of both East Baton Rouge Parish and Louisiana. Concerned with the livelihood and success of black persons in the Baton Rouge Metropolitan area, MetroMorphosis helps people and organizations transform broken and neglected communities into vibrant and thriving places to live work and experience success.

With black women and girls holding such a considerable portion of the population of East Baton Rouge Parish--which contains the city of Baton Rouge--it is worth investigating their status and wellbeing in the parish where we work and live.

There exists prior literature on the status of black women across the United States (DuMonthier, Childers, and Milli 2017) and the various ways in which their race, gender, and other major identities impact their ability to work, live, and experience success in various sectors of their life (Epstein, Blake, and Gonzalez n.d.). Most of the trends highlighted in this report are not unique to black women and girls in Baton Rouge or Louisiana, but the added clarity of how these trends manifest on a smaller scale can prove useful to community members, researchers, or political activists who seek to know more about and want to improve the conditions of black women and girls either locally or on a national scale. This document provides an overview of black women's and girls' status in the following areas: income inequality, educational attainment, experiences with violence and crime, and health.

# 25%

*black women make up  
approximately 25% of the  
population of East Baton Rouge  
Parish*

# 17%

*black women account for  
roughly 17% of the population of  
Louisiana*

# INCOME INEQUALITY

With Louisiana having the largest gender pay gap in the nation, women as a group earn approximately 68.8 cents for every dollar a white male earns (National Women's Law Center 2018) with black women earning approximately 46 cents for every dollar a white male earns.

It is no secret that there still exists a significant gap in men's and women's earnings. Even within American racial groups men of almost all groups are paid more than their female counterparts even if they make less than white men. Paying women less on average due to their gender, also known as wage theft (Hallett 2018), impacts not only their take-home pay, but it also negatively influences women's ability to contribute to household earnings, their spending power in the greater economy, and their ability to sustain themselves without the contributions of a male partner.

For black women, their lower earnings than White men and women, Asian American men and women, and black men makes this negative impact even harsher, especially in Louisiana.

Nationally, black women, on average, earn 63 cents for every dollar a white male makes (Temple and Tucker 2017). When narrowing our gaze to Louisiana, the wage gap widens significantly. With Louisiana having the largest gender pay gap in the nation, women as a group earn approximately 68.8 cents for every dollar a white male earns (National Women's Law Center 2018) with black women earning approximately 46 cents for every dollar a white male earns. This means that black women in Louisiana currently earn 15.5 cents less than other black women across the nation making the Bayou State the worst place for black women to earn an equal wage. Researchers have projected that if conditions remained the same in Louisiana, women, collectively, would not see equal pay until the year 2115 (Institute for Women's Policy Research 2018) with black women potentially waiting even longer due to their racial identity.

# LABOR

For black women in Louisiana, disparities in earnings cannot simply be explained by labor participation rates or unemployment rates. Black women have one of the highest labor force participation rates (second only to white men) in the state but have the highest rates of living in poverty (31.0%) compared to other groups of women. Even with one of the highest labor force participation rates in the state, black women experience unemployment at a rate of 9.4% which is almost double that of white women at 4.3% (DuMonthier, Childers and Milli 2017).

As important as closing the gender and race wage gap is, it is not only black women's lesser income which contributes to their economic status. The type of work black women are participating in plays a role as well. In Louisiana, black women account for roughly 34% of women in service occupations (versus white women's 16%) and only about 30% of women in management, business, science, and arts (versus white women's approximate 45%). The gap in representation in management positions may only be 15% but taken together with black women's lowered income rates, such a divide proves significant.



# POVERTY

If we turn our lens to black women individually, the disproportion continues with 29.8% of Louisiana black women being the female head of their household with no husband present compared to 9.9% of white women in the same demographic. These numbers are relevant not because we believe marriage to be the absolute fix for women to receive financial equity or wealth. The female headship with no husband present numbers are relevant to this report because it provides another look at the ways black women's systemic income theft contributes to their diminished economic position (National Partnership for Women & Families 2018).

The median income of black female headed households is \$31,592 dollars compared to that of white female headed households with no husband present being \$50,623 meaning that black women in these households are in a position to provide for the same amount of children and family members with roughly \$20,000 less than their white counterparts.



# POVERTY (cont.)

The wage gap not only impacts black women's individual earnings but also their ability to contribute to their household and family earnings. The median family income for a black married-couple family is \$35,012 while that of white married-couple households is \$73,312 making the gap in median earnings roughly \$38,000 (United States Census Bureau 2017). One of the major financial benefits of legal marriage is the potential contribution of two incomes to one household, making caring for children, acquiring household goods, and saving for long-term goals easier (Thomas and Sawhill 2005; Brown 2013).

With black women and men earning significantly less than their white counterparts, joint black households are still in vulnerable economic positions. Black married couple families experience poverty at a rate of 11.4% versus 4.1% of white married couple families.

The gap widens even further for married couple families with children under the age of 5 with black families experiencing poverty at roughly 19% while white families of the same composition only experience poverty at a rate of 4.2%. These numbers suggest that marriage serves as less of a financial security for black couples than it does for white ones.





Source: <https://paulimurrayproject.org/durhamstories/bwswomen/>

## EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

In the state of Louisiana, 81.3% of black women have obtained a high school diploma or higher with 17.8% of the group possessing a bachelor's degree or higher. Black women's diploma and baccalaureate degree acquisition has been on the rise in Louisiana since 2015. Although black women and girls have increased their graduation rates at both the secondary and postsecondary level there are other factors which impact their ability to learn and thrive in American schools.

## DISCIPLINE IN EDUCATION

In the era of mass incarceration, there has been a targeted focus on the impact of our educational and correctional institutions--and the biases of those who run those institutions--have on black children and adults, many times black males.

Though black men unequivocally have the highest representation in corrections nationwide, people have begun to highlight the ways black girls and women are also impacted by over-policing and racially biased discipline practices within schools. Research on discipline practices across the nation found that black girls were significantly more likely to receive discipline (office referrals, in- and out-of-school suspensions) within primary and secondary than their white female peers.

# DISCIPLINE & CRIMINAL JUSTICE ENCOUNTERS

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A study of a Kentucky school district found that black girls are 3 times more likely to receive an office referral for a rule violation than their white counterparts at both the middle and high school level (Morris and Perry 2017). This same study found that blackness had a larger impact for black girls than black boys when compared to their white same-gender counterparts for minor and moderate rule violations. Louisiana does not deter from this national trend with 11% of black girls receiving one in-school suspension compared to 3.8% of their white counterparts—who make up the majority of the Louisiana public school system. The disciplining of black girls extends past educational settings to the juvenile justice system. Black female juveniles were 3 times more likely than white female juveniles to be referred to juvenile justice court (Puzzanchera and Hockenberry 2018).

According to the Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention's National Disproportionate Minority Contact, black girls in the juvenile justice system have the lowest rates of cases diverted per 100 cases referred. This means black girls, once brought to juvenile court, are the least likely to be offered pre-trial interventions as an alternative to jail time. Black female juveniles were more likely to have their cases petitioned in juvenile court at a rate of 54.6 per 100 cases versus 45.2 per 100 cases referred for white juvenile girls. Black female juveniles are more likely to be brought before formal juvenile court and petitioned to go to trial, increasing their probability of being sentenced to jail time.

*Black girls, once brought to juvenile court, are the least likely to be offered pre-trial interventions as an alternative to jail time*

Taken together, black juvenile girls are the most likely to be incarcerated because they are being referred to the juvenile justice system at a higher rate than other female groups, they are least likely to be offered alternatives to trial and potential sentencing, and they are the most likely to be petitioned to have their cases handled via trial.

# VIOLENCE AND CRIME

In Louisiana, homicide is the second leading cause of death for black women between the age of 15-34, making homicide a significant threat to black girls and young women

A 2014 Center for Disease Control national study found that 41.2% of black women experienced physical violence by an intimate partner during their lifetime while 53.8% of black women report experiencing psychological aggression. These rates are the third highest amongst the six racial groups of women surveyed. With black women having one of the highest intra-racial partnering habits (Wilson, McIntosh, and Insana 2007), one might assume that the majority of this violence is happening at the hands of black men. Yet, it cannot be assumed that all violence is happening solely in heterosexual partnerships. Lack of state-level data on directionality of abuse or accounts of intimate partner violence amongst members of black LGBTQ partnerships makes further inferences about the source of such violence beyond the scope of this report.

Homicide is the second leading cause of death for black females aged 15-24, accounting for roughly 23% of the top ten leading causes of death for the age group (Center for Disease Control 2017). Homicide accounts for only approximately 7% of white women's deaths and 11% of Hispanic women's deaths in the same age group. In Louisiana, homicide is the second leading cause of death for black women between the age of 15-34, making homicide a significant threat to black girls and young women though it does not claim as many black female lives as it does black men.<sup>3</sup>



# 41.2%

Percentage of Black women who report experiencing physical violence at the hands of an intimate partner

# 53.8%

Percentage of Black women who report experiencing psychological aggression at the hands of an intimate partner

Source: Breiding et al. (2014)

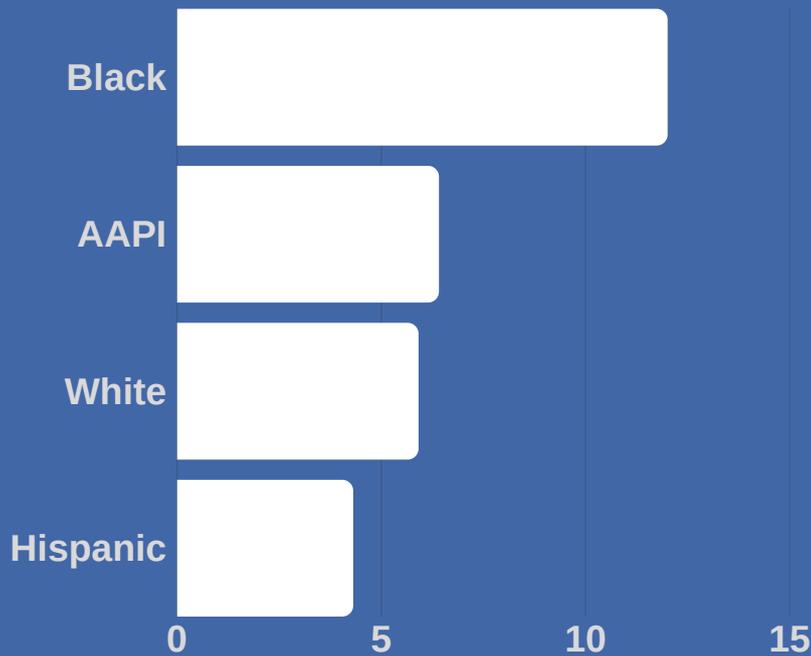
# 3x

Black women's infant mortality rate is almost three times white women's infant mortality rate, per 100,000 live births

# 3.4x

Black women's maternal mortality rate is roughly 3.4 times white women's maternal mortality rate, per 100,000 live births

Source: Novoa and Taylor (2018)



## INFANT MORTALITY RATES

Black women have the highest infant mortality rates at roughly 12 infant deaths per 100,000 live births. This rate is almost double that of infant mortality rates for women of other American racial groups.

# HEALTH & CHILD BIRTHING

Health care and access to quality care is not simply a matter of individual access and ability to afford proper healthcare. Factors such as access to quality food providers, home environment, quality of health care professionals all contribute to one's ability to live a long and healthy life. Black Americans' long-standing presence in home and professional environments that are bereft of quality food providers and grocery stores, proximity to industrial areas which contaminate the quality of air and water, and other forms of environmental racism and classism have contributed to the bleak picture of black people's health and quality of life. Even if one is able to move to an area with better access to healthcare providers and better food access other issues can arise which are unrelated to one's physical environment.

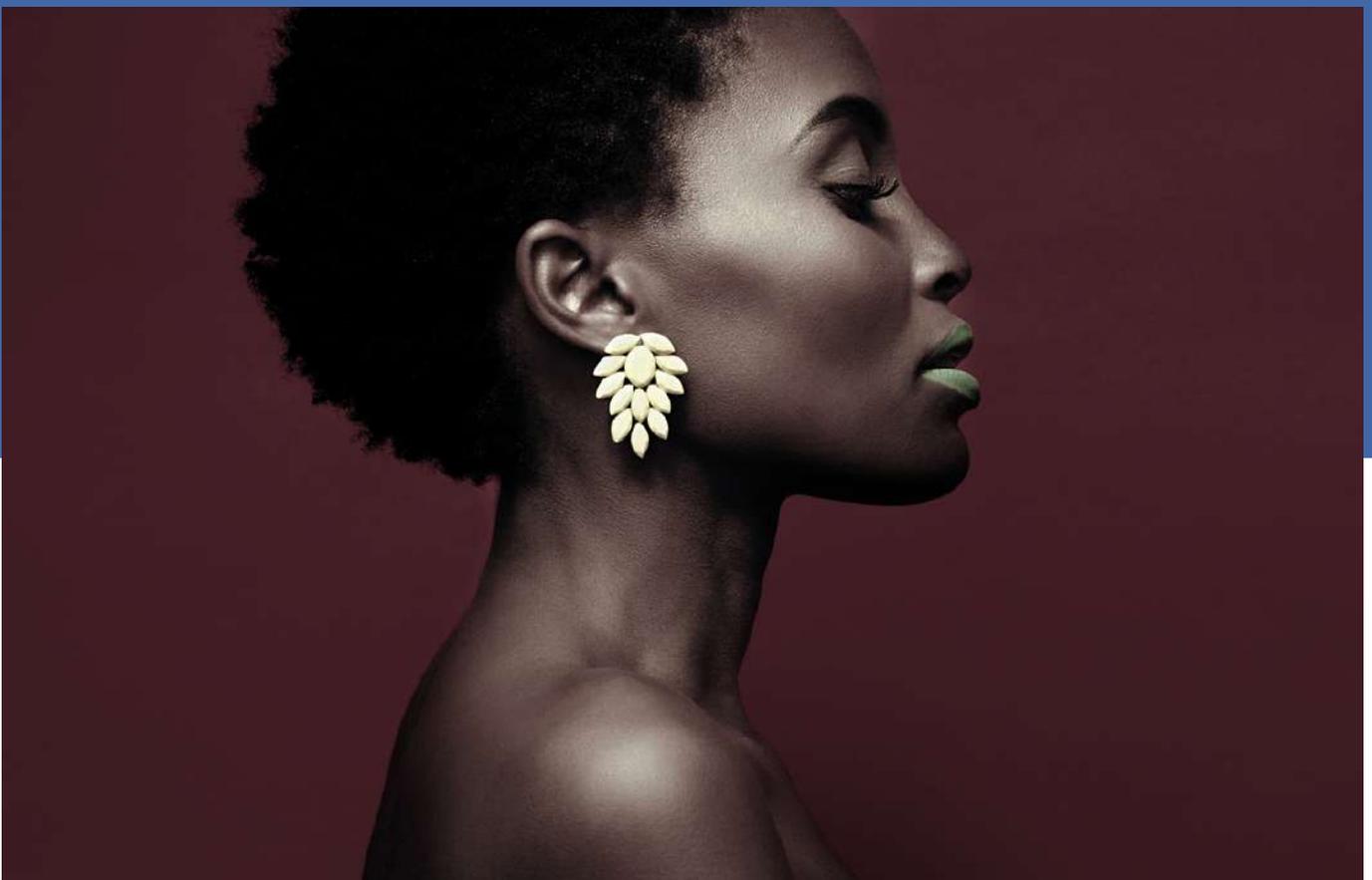
For black women, their racial identity makes gender health issues even more perilous than their white counterparts. For example, Black women have the highest infant mortality rates at approximately 12 infant deaths per 100,000 live births compared to white (5.9), Hispanic (4.3), and Asian Pacific Islander women (6.4). Black women's maternal mortality rate is also significant at 43.5 per every 100,000 live births compared to a rate of 12.7 for white women (Novoa and Taylor 2018) making Black women 3x more likely to die in labor than their white counterparts.

# MORTALITY

Nationally, the top five leading causes of death for black women are: heart disease, cancer, cerebrovascular diseases, diabetes, & Alzheimer's disease.

When stepping outside the delivery room, black women's causes of death are also interesting to investigate. Like women of other racial groups, unintentional injury is the leading cause of death for black females aged 1-34 in the year 2017 according to the Center for Disease Control. Yet, there is variance in the types of unintentional injury. For black girls aged 1-24, the leading type of unintentional injury was a motor vehicle traffic accident, but for black women aged 25-34 accidental poisoning by and exposure to narcotics, hallucinogens, medications was the leading type of unintentional injury.

Said another way, accidental drug overdoses killed more black women between the age of 25-34 than heart disease, the second leading cause of death for the same age group. For black women aged 35-64, the leading cause of death was cancer, with heart disease being a close second. For black women over the age of 65, the numbers reversed with heart disease accounting for the largest share of deaths.



# CONCLUSION

As with black men and boys--whose adultification has been cited as justification for their criminalization and demonization by law enforcement, school authority figures, and politicians (Kleider-Offut, Bond and Hegerty 2017)--perceptions of black women and girls contributes to how others handle and address them in various areas of their lives (Epstein, Blake and Gonzalez n.d.). Georgetown Law Center on Poverty and Inequality published a study that examined the perception of black girls and women by adults of multiple racial groups. Their study found that overall adults perceived black girls to need less nurturing, protection, and support while assuming that the group was more knowledgeable about adult topics and sex (Epstein, Blake and Gonzalez n.d.). Beginning as early as age 5, black girls were adultified in comparison to their white counterparts.

Taken together with sociohistorical tropes and controlling images of black womanhood--such as the Mammy, Sapphire, Jezebel and the Welfare Queen (Collins 2000)--Black girls and women are working against systems and structures that perceive them to be less vulnerable and less in need of protection. It is not possible to cite the adultification of black girls as the sole cause for their heightened exposure to discipline, policing, and incarceration when compared to other racial groups of women, but it is a phenomenon worth considering when assessing the outcomes and treatment of black girls and women in our national, state, and city/parish institutions and systems.

Responsible for the founding of both the Black Lives Matter and #MeToo Movements (two of the most impactful and notable social justice movements of the last decade), black women have a long-standing history of working for the uplift of their people--whether that be their fellow women or fellow black persons--by mobilizing to have their voices be heard in this country. Now is the time to start a new trend of our country taking care of and reconciling the hurt done to black women. Most of the problems presented in this report are not the result of individual choice or shortcoming, but the product of institutional negligence and systemic apathy coupled with individual biases and abuse of power.

The facts presented here are grim. Painting a picture of seemingly endless raced barriers to success in the most routine of acts such as having a child, receiving a fair wage, or even being perceived as the correct age in order to enjoy all the carefree benefits of girlhood. Yet, all is not lost, for there is always room for reconciliation.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

*The work to rectify the current state of black girls and women in Baton Rouge calls for collective action and institutional support such as:*

- Collaboratives of community members, organizational partners, and institutional representatives focused specifically on the needs of black girls and women at a local level, similar in nature to The Urban Congress on African-American Males in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.
- The building, maintenance, and ongoing support of black-run institutions and service providers which can provide culturally relevant and sensitive care for black women [such as the Birthmark Doula Collective a birthing collective of doulas based out of New Orleans, LA or Parker's Pharmacy based out of Baton Rouge, LA]
- Speaking truth to power via policy advocacy and organizing around black women's issues. In line with past national efforts to address the inequity experienced by black men such as the My Brother's Keeper Initiative or the Campaign for Black Male Achievement, there needs to be national organizing around black women's health, education, and earning power.
- Ally-ship from groups other than black women. Black men experience wage theft at a lower rate than black women but their support against the gender wage gap is necessary for such an issue to be rectified. If the racial wage gap was closed black women would still receive less earnings due to their gender and this impacts their ability to contribute to their households and communities making the crime of wage theft even more relevant for black persons regardless of gender. Black Louisianans' ability to be fully recognized citizens of the economy impacts the financial welfare of the entire state. Wage theft based on race and gender is not just a violation of employees' rights for it also hurts the state as a whole since its citizens have less purchasing power to spend within the local economy.

# ENDNOTES

1. State and Parish population data comes from the 2017 American Community Survey by the United States Census Bureau, unless otherwise cited
2. For such marriage-centered beliefs have long contributed to the perpetuation of the gender wage gap by suggesting that men should earn more than their wives since they are the breadwinners and are responsible for the caring and financial support of his family (Griffith, Gunter, and Allen 2011)
3. Homicide was the leading cause of death for black Louisiana males aged 10 through 34.

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