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Historical Conditions that Created

# **Occupational Segregation by Race and Gender**



An Intelligent Partnerships Publication



# What is Occupational Segregation?

**Occupational segregation—the disproportionate representation of groups of workers into particular jobs**—represents a foundational disparity within the U.S. economy that aids in the growing gender and racial wage gap and largely affects people of color and women. Research published in *Gender and Society* points to occupational segregation as the primary cause of disadvantaged groups being funneled into unstable jobs that are less prestigious and offer depressing wages. <sup>[1]</sup>

In the United States, the concept of segregating groups by occupation in the labor market cemented itself as a fixed element over the past century. Before attempts at intentional occupational integration began in the 1960s, most high-paying stable jobs were exclusively held by White men. While more people of color and women fought to assimilate into the labor market during the second half of the 20th century, years of discrimination, racism, and sexism funneled minority groups into overrepresented fields of work resulting in insurmountable wage gaps that keep growing despite the growing diversity of America.

This is especially apparent in trade industries where White male workers disproportionately dominate the trade workforce leaving massive gaps of inequities affecting minority workers and women. The U.S. Department of Labor has taken serious steps and made significant investments over the last decade to address access for groups that have historically been excluded, particularly to technically complex occupations that include higher pay structures. Modern-day U.S. Registered Apprenticeship Programs (RAPs)—although successful in providing family-sustaining opportunities to apprentices—have a history of overrepresenting White workers and underrepresenting people of color, women, and people with a disability.

Trades occupations are an invaluable part of foundational industries that keep the nation running, and minorities and women cannot afford to keep being left out, a historical problem that has established occupational segregation at the forefront of workplace inequities.





# Historical Factors That Led to Racial Segregation in the United States

**Segregation, which is the practice of requiring separate housing, education, and services for people of color,** was established in the United States as a legally mandated way to keep White people from coexisting with Black people. Deriving from slavery, race-based occupational segregation took shape in 1865 when two-thirds of formally enslaved people were forced to work in agricultural or domestic roles unless they received a special license from a judge, which often purposely stalled the progression of minority groups.

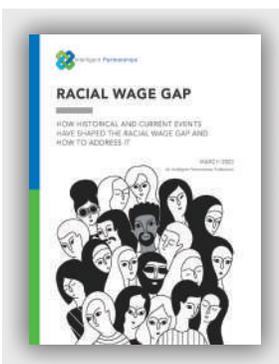
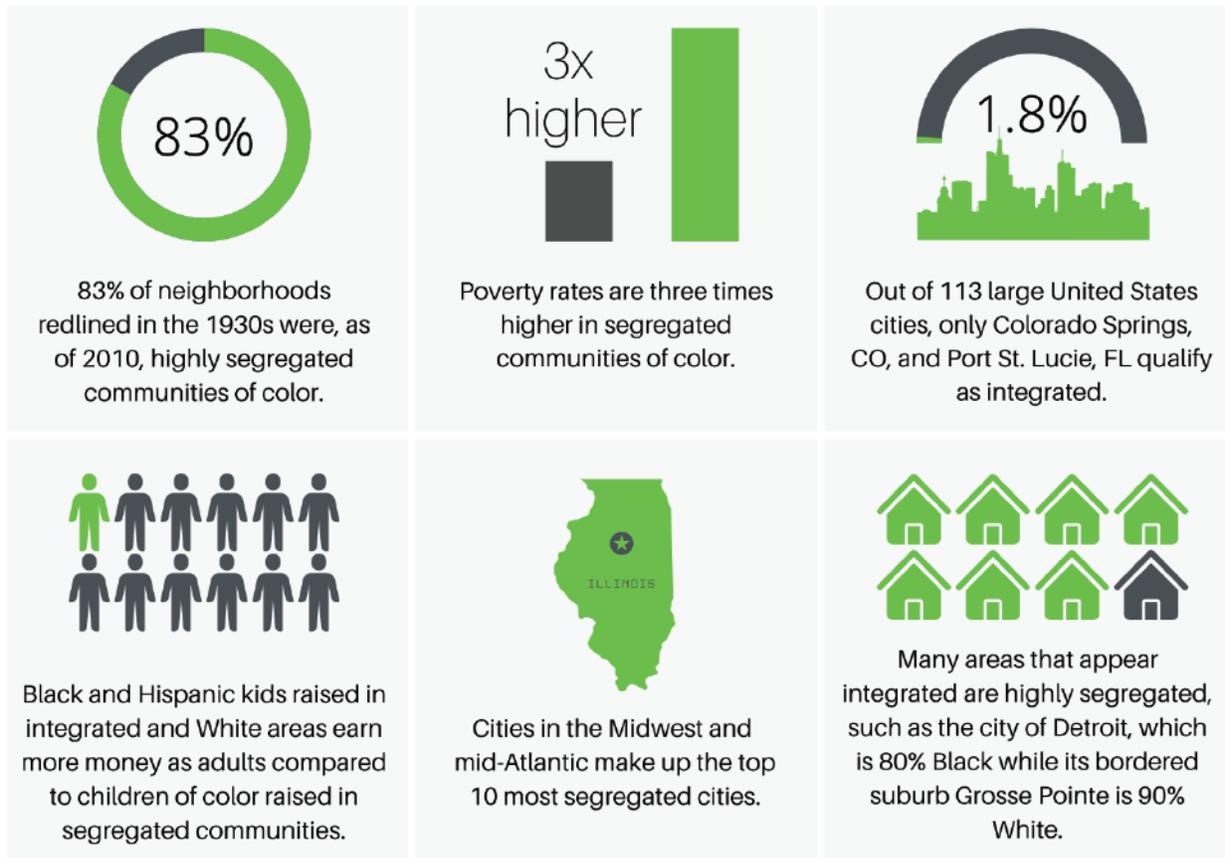
In 1933 the New Deal established regulatory protections such as minimum wage, Social Security, and overtime rights for United States employees. Still, it intentionally omitted farm, domestic, and agricultural workers from its protections. American Progress reports that provisions of the New Deal—specifically Social Security—purposefully “excluded a significant number of Black, Mexican American, Native American, and Asian American workers from basic workplace standards and set a precedent for occupational segregation into low-quality jobs today.”<sup>[2]</sup> While Social Security incorporated domestic workers in 1948 and agricultural workers two years later, its origins of inequity meant that workers of color were financially disadvantaged for well over a decade, while White workers gained wealth, stability, and societal traction in the economy.<sup>[3]</sup>



*The Smith-Hughes Act of 1917* was an act created by the United States Congress to promote vocational education in industrial education, agriculture, and domestic homemaking skills such as sewing.<sup>[4]</sup> Although this represented the first time the federal government invested in secondary vocational education, research from Social Science History claims that the Act “sought to separate students into pre-determined career tracks based upon gender, race, and class.”<sup>[5]</sup> Funding for these programs was established at the high school level, where African Americans and other students of color frequently had little or no educational access. This essentially funneled students of color into agriculture fields and left skilled jobs in manufacturing for White males. Programs that consisted of African American students often had few qualified teachers of color, limited benefits, and were severely underfunded in favor of programs for White students, which promoted racial and occupational segregation.

With the economy’s progression in the second half of the century, people of color still faced harsh segregation laws which mandated that everything from schools, parks, theaters, cemeteries, and housing be separated by color. Although President Lyndon B. Johnson formally abolished segregation in 1964, the influence of persistent racial discriminatory practices such as redlining—a discriminatory procedure where lenders refused to invest in neighborhoods of color—occupational discrimination, and marginalized educational curriculums established systemic segregation that is still present in the 21st century.

According to Time USA, large metropolitan areas in the U.S. are more segregated in 2019 than in 1990. This is due to race clustering in segregated neighborhoods, which creates “social and economic divisions that can fuel unrest.” [6] Although many areas nationwide appear to be integrated, a study of the roots of racism from the Othering and Belonging Institute found the following statistics regarding racial segregation [7]:



For a more detailed overview of racial discrimination in the United States, read: [The Racial Wage Gap: How Historical and Current Events Have Shaped the Racial Wage Gap and How to Address It](#).



# Historical Factors That Led to Gender Segregation in the United States

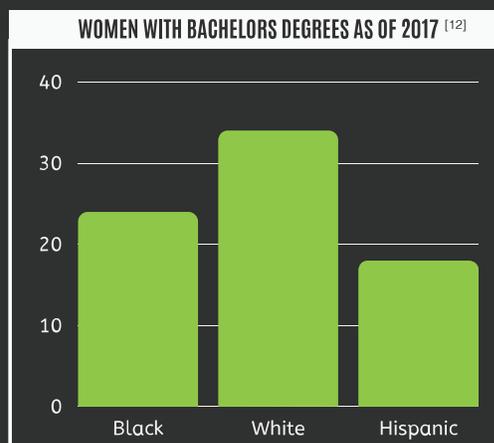
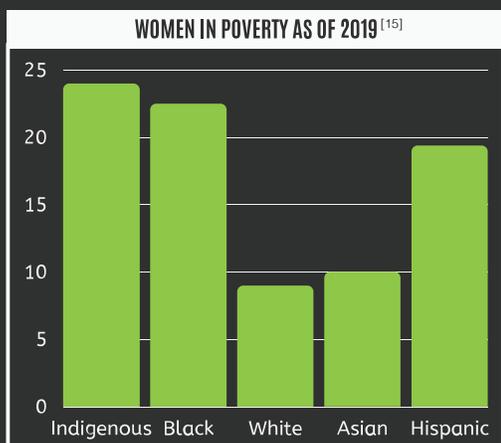
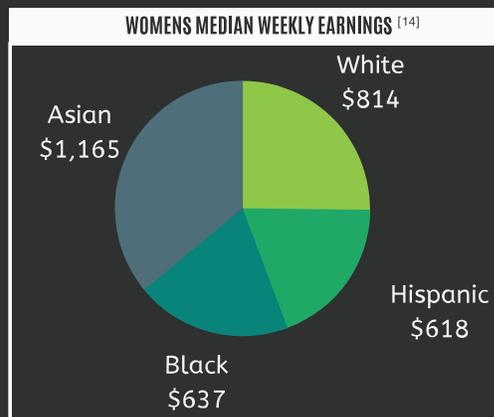
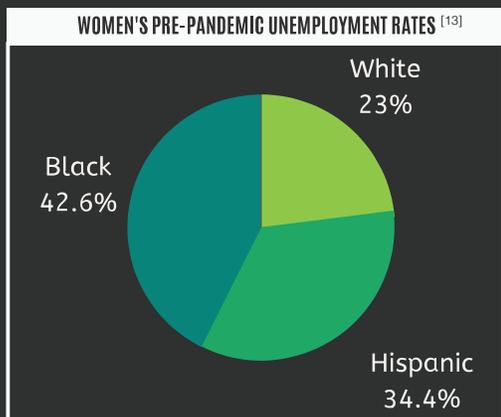
Gender segregation refers to physical and spatial segregation based on gender. In the United States, gender segregation is especially prevalent in the workplace, as women were previously legally segregated within the workforce. Until 1963, it was legal for employers to pay women lower wages than men for completing work requiring the same skill, effort, and responsibility.<sup>[8]</sup> When women integrated into the workforce, they faced extreme discrepancies that fostered the gender wage gap. Companies were allowed to advertise job openings as “men only,” and women were encouraged to work in menial positions.

Not only were women paid less than men, but many states barred women from entering occupations that were seen as dangerous “men’s work,” such as policing, bartending, and military services.<sup>[9]</sup> This meant that women were funneled into positions labeled as “women’s work,” which consisted primarily of occupations that relied heavily on caretaking, such as teaching, nursing, secretarial work, and social work, as these roles were stereotypical of a wife or mother.<sup>[10]</sup>

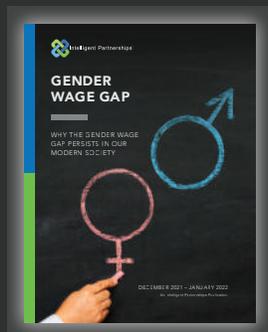
However, by the 1970s, opportunities began increasing for educated women. By the 1990s, Brookings reports that 74% of women ages 25 – 54 participated in the workforce in a more well-rounded array of occupations such as medical professionals, lawyers, managers, military services, and professors.<sup>[11]</sup>



While all women were experiencing a breakthrough in occupational segregation, women of color were disproportionately affected compared to White women. Disparities among groups of women offer an additional layer of segregation that is often overshadowed in favor of comparing men to women, as seen by the following statistics:



Gender segregation surpassed insurmountable feats over the past one hundred years. However, women—especially women of color—still deal with workplace discrimination, low-wage occupations, and a wage gap that the World Economic Forum estimates will take another 135 years to close. <sup>[16]</sup>



For a more detailed overview of gender discrimination in the United States, read: [The Gender Wage Gap: Why the Gender Wage Gap Persists in our Modern Society](#)



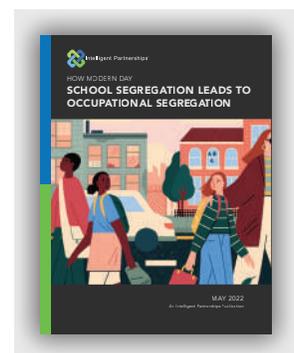
## Modern Day School Segregation



21st-century school segregation directly correlates to occupational segregation. At the same time, it's commonly believed that educational segregation ended with *Brown v. Board* in 1954. Equitable Growth and the Economic Policy Institute found that segregation in the United States school system is currently experiencing discrimination and racial isolation comparable to those in the 1960s and 1970s. <sup>[17]</sup> Currently, students of color primarily attend 75% of schools in low-income neighborhoods, while 75% of schools in high-income neighborhoods consist of majority White students. <sup>[18]</sup> These socioeconomic disparities create a pattern of fostering educational growth among students from whiter and wealthier neighborhoods while allowing students of color to stagnate, which ultimately encourages occupational segregation.

When students attend racially segregated schools, they have less access to diverse peers and teachers, STEM classes, extracurricular activities, college prep courses, and they are underexposed to a variety of incomes, backgrounds, professions, and careers. <sup>[19]</sup> 21st-century school segregation creates a pipeline for low-income minority students to either not qualify or succeed in college and enter low-wage occupations. This sets students of color on a trajectory of poverty-level wages and a lifetime of lost earnings.

For a more detailed overview of educational discrimination in the United States, read: [How Modern-Day School Segregation Leads to Occupational Segregation](#)





# Historical Factors That Led to Occupational Segregation in Registered Apprenticeship Programs

In 1937, the National Apprenticeship Act, also known as the Fitzgerald Act, regulated apprenticeship and on-the-job training in various industries and trade unions. While apprenticeship proved good for business and the economy, it far more benefited White workers. At the same time, minorities and women have struggled to obtain entrance into the career sustaining opportunities provided by Registered Apprenticeship Programs.

## *Minority Apprentices*

In the 1970s, trades had an unspoken hierarchy that saw White apprentices in more luxurious trades that earned higher wages. In contrast, minority apprentices tended to participate in more physically demanding trades that were common tasks of African Americans during slavery. In more mechanical trades such as electricians and sheet metal workers, minority apprentices only occupied 10.9% and 13.8%, respectively, whereas physically demanding and non-mechanical trades such as ironworkers, carpenters, and painters saw higher minority apprenticeship participation at 15.2%, 17%, and 23%, respectively. <sup>[20]</sup>

Over the next 50 years, registered apprenticeships developed a history of excluding minority workers. From 1990 to 1999, apprenticeship participation from the two largest minority groups—Blacks and Hispanics—ranged from 8.4% to 9.3% for Blacks and 6.1% to 18.1% for Hispanics. <sup>[21]</sup> It is important to note that these percentages reflect those who merely joined apprenticeship programs, as not all apprentices complete and graduate. While minority representation has improved since the 90s, data from 2019 show that RAPs still lack substantial diversity, with White apprentices accounting for 76%, followed by Hispanics at 18%, Blacks at 17%, Asians at 2%, American Indian or Alaska Native at 1.8%, two or more races at 1.4%, and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander at 1.3%. <sup>[22]</sup>

## *Women Apprentices*

It wasn't until the 1970s that the Women's Bureau, in collaboration with the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, sought to address and eliminate discrimination against women and minorities in the workforce. With the enactment of the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act of 1973, the Bureau provided funds for focusing on "women in nontraditional jobs, special counseling and referral services, pre-apprenticeship training, and job development." <sup>[23]</sup> Opportunities for women in non-traditional roles expanded in the 1990s when the Bureau published a directory encouraging the recognition of Women in Apprenticeship. However, even with intentional efforts to convince the nation that women could maintain a work-life balance while contributing to the family household, the reputation of females as primary caretakers continued to make it difficult for women to be accepted in trades. In 1997, women occupied 2.4% of construction trades, 1.9% of electricians, and 1.6% of carpenters, <sup>[24]</sup> numbers that have seen modest growth over the past 20 years as women in 2018 occupy only 3.4% of construction trades, 2.4% of electricians, and 2.2% of carpenters. <sup>[25]</sup>



# Occupational Crowding

**Occupational crowding—crowding marginalized workers into lower-paying jobs**—funnels people of color, women, and disadvantaged workers into low-wage jobs. This speaks to historical discrimination against groups, in which employers would not hire certain workers for high-wage jobs because of their race, gender, sexual orientation, etc. Although White workers make up a larger majority of the overall workforce, many marginalized workers are funneled into low-wage jobs, creating an excess supply and depressing wages. As seen in the Economic Policy Institute's graphic below, Black men and women are particularly affected by occupational crowding. <sup>[26]</sup>

	White	Black	Latinx	AAPI
Total Workforce	61.4%	12.8%	17.4%	7.4%
All Professionals	70.5%	10.0%	9.8%	8.9%
Management Occupations	72.5%	8.9%	10.8%	7.1%
Business and financial operations occupations	69.7%	9.7%	9.1%	10.8%
Computer and mathematical science occupations	64.0%	10.5%	8.9%	16.1%
Architecture and engineering occupations	69.5%	5.9%	8.1%	15.9%
Life, physical, and social service occupations	67.6%	6.0%	8.7%	17.1%
Legal Occupations	79.8%	6.9%	6.2%	6.5%
Community and social service occupations	60.8%	20.5%	12.8%	4.6%
Educations, training, and library occupations	73.8%	10.0%	9.7%	5.8%
Arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media occupations	71.6%	8.2%	12.0%	7.4%
Health care practitioner and technical occupations	69.3%	10.9%	6.9%	12.2%



For a deeper view on occupational crowding and how it impacts occupational segregation, read [The Wage Gap: Addressing a Systemic Issue Through Organizational Change](#)



## Devaluation of Work

Data collected between 1950 and 2000 found that when some occupations became more concentrated with female workers, wages tended to fall or stagnate as opposed to occupations dominated by men. Equitable Growth found that “positions in education provide a good example of this phenomenon. The share of men’s public-school teachers fell from 32.2 percent in 1979 to only 24.9 percent in 2018. Research shows that men’s exit from this occupation could reflect a growing wage penalty, where teachers’ earnings have declined relative to comparable workers in other professions.” [27]

While K-12 teachers are largely affected by the devaluation of work, this trend is common among any occupation that can be labeled as “women’s work.” Researchers Phillip N. Cohen and Matt L. Huffman describe women’s work as “work done primarily by women [and] are rewarded less than work done by men. This has been documented for broad occupational categories and specific job titles in work establishments. Although economists explain this result by pointing to differences in skills, working conditions, and supply and demand factors, sociologists assert that pay penalties result from the widespread cultural devaluation of “women’s work” . . . Additionally, those skills closely associated with women’s work, such as nurturance, are systemically under rewarded.” [28]

In 2020, The Balance reported female C-suite executives earned an average of \$0.75 for every \$1.00 earned by their male counterparts. The report found that “although there were slightly more women in the top jobs in 2020—14% vs. 8% in 2012—and their cash salaries were about on par with men, their share-based compensation, made up of stock and stock options, fell short. Men’s share-based pay increase outpaced women’s by nearly 30 percentage points, on average. At the current rate, women aren’t expected to reach pay parity with their male counterparts until at least 2060.” [30]

Additionally, as education becomes more valuable to the workforce, family-sustaining occupations require more education. This phenomenon drives up the value of education-based careers while simultaneously devaluing positions that require little-to-no education. This trend negatively affects all groups entering these occupations; however, devaluation of work is most prevalent in occupations that involve care of some sort, including childcare, education, and healthcare. [29] Since female-dominated work tends to pay lower wages, women are thus hit with a double penalty: low pay and earning less than men. Yet, the opposite effect happens for men—particularly White men—who enter female-dominated jobs. While women tend to stagnate with low wages, men promote to authority positions and earn more. Even when women successfully integrate into male-dominated occupations, occupational gender segregation is present at all levels and has depressed earnings for women of all backgrounds.



## Workers With a Disability

Workers with a disability have faced severe discrimination and have struggled to impact the workforce. The nation, however, had made meaningful attempts to include persons with disabilities into the labor market, most significantly beginning in 1990 when the Americans with Disabilities Act was signed into law following the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. <sup>[31]</sup> In 1990, the employment rate of persons with a disability was 49%, a rather large percentage due to the economic expansion of the 90s. <sup>[32]</sup> However, as time has passed, the percentage of persons with a disability has significantly dwindled. In 2021, only 19.1% of persons with a disability were employed. <sup>[33]</sup>

Registered Apprenticeship Programs aim to help increase the number of persons with a disability in the workforce by helping individuals with disabilities enroll and succeed in RAPs. In 2021, RAP regulations set a goal to have “7 percent of a sponsor’s apprentices, for each major occupational group within the apprenticeship program” qualify as individuals with disabilities. <sup>[34]</sup> In doing so, more workers with disabilities will have a chance to enter the workforce with equitable opportunities regardless of disability status.



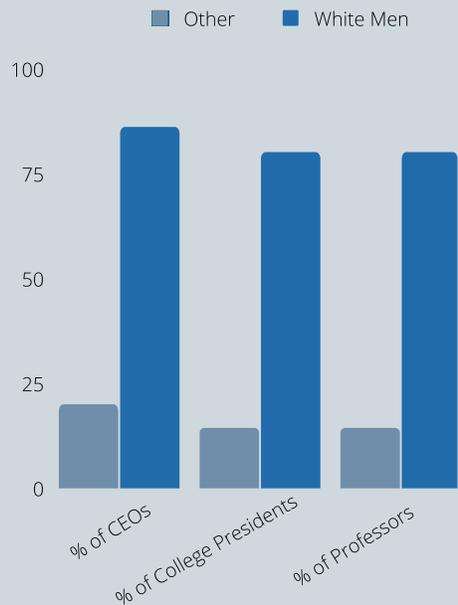


# Workplace Segregation

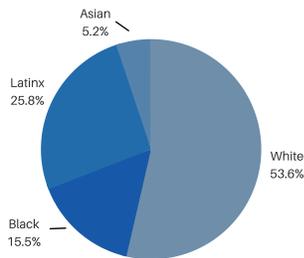
## The Facts

White men have a long history of dominating the American labor market. After the Great Depression, the workplace tilted in favor of the White man as modern work requirements such as the Aid to Dependent Children (ADCs) De Facto and De Jure Requirements purposely withheld assistance from Black families “to force them to work, and enact farm policies forcing Black families, but not White families, out into the fields at harvest time.” [35] As previously mentioned, this act of segregation caused a devastating financial loss for families of color, while White families prospered in the labor market.

Even as the workforce became racially integrated, and national laws were developed to include people of color, White men have dominated higher paying jobs for more than 50 years. Equitable Growth reports that White men make up the majority of chief executives, legislators, lawyers, judges, surgeons, physicians, sales workers, and truck drivers. As of 2020, 86% of Fortune 500 CEOs are White males, [36] 80% of college presidents are White Men, [37] and despite higher education becoming more diversified, 80% of full-time college professors are White, with 53% being male. [38]



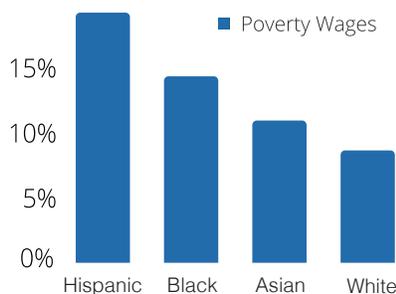
% of Low Wage Incomes



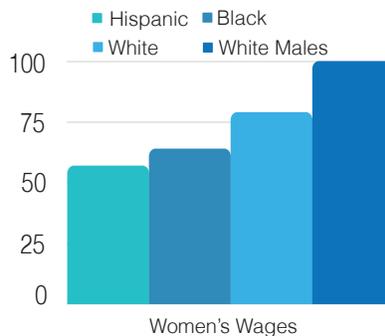
## Meanwhile

women and people of color, especially women of color, disproportionately represent low-wage occupations. A low-wage job—a job that cannot support both the worker and their family—affects more than 53 million people each year. According to Brookings, the 2019 breakdown of low-wage income shows “52% are white, 25% are Latino or Hispanic, 15% are Black, and 5% are Asian American. Both Hispanic and Black workers are overrepresented relative to their share of the total workforce, while whites and Asian Americans are under-represented. Females account for 54% of low-wage workers, higher than their total share of the workforce (48%).” [39]

Additionally, as of 2017, 8.6% of White workers were paid poverty wages compared to 19.2% (nearly one in five) Hispanic workers, 14.3% (nearly one and seven) Black workers, and 10.9% of Asian or Pacific Islanders.[40] Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, Brookings reports that 44% of families with children struggled to make ends meet, with Hispanic and Black families topping the chart at 57% and 58%, respectively. In comparison, White and Asian families were 30% and 29%. [41]

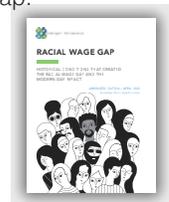


Women—especially women of color—are also drastically affected by workplace occupational segregation. American Progress reports that in 2020, Hispanic women earned \$0.57, Black women \$0.64, and White women \$0.79 for every \$1.00 earned by a White male. This discrepancy highlights a wage gap that has existed for decades and will continue for approximately 135 more years. [42] Women are also more likely to earn minimum wage than white men. In 2014, 62% of women earned the federal minimum wage or less than 38% of men.



Furthermore, even as the economy has exploded with modern jobs such as technical fields, health care/social assistance jobs, and educational services, manufacturing jobs largely disappeared, and other previously highly employable careers became labeled as low-wage and low-skill. This created a dichotomy of sought-after jobs vs. “jobs Americans don’t want,” which include occupations such as taxi drivers, maids, slaughterhouse workers, janitors, porters, and laborers.[43] People of color and immigrants disproportionately hold jobs that other Americans reject, which aids in workplace segregation and the racial wage gap.

For a brief look at racial segregation in the United States, read: [Historical Conditions that Created the Racial Wage Gap and the Modern-Day](#)





## Final Thoughts

Occupational segregation is a foundational issue that progressed over decades and still persists. Solving this issue is not impossible, but it requires nationwide systemic changes. One viable solution is to expand Registered Apprenticeship Programs (RAPs) in major sectors including STEM, construction, healthcare, and hospitality. RAPs are successful in providing family-sustaining wages while diversifying the workforce, thus reducing occupational segregation. Other alternatives to eliminating occupational segregation is through Pre-Apprenticeship and Youth Apprenticeship programs. Pre-Apprenticeship programs help prepare candidates for entry-level RAPs while Youth Apprenticeships provide paid opportunities for students which helps them enter the workforce or pursue higher education.

## Key Takeaways

- ✓ Occupational Segregation formed over many years and has a deeply rooted systemic foundation in the workplace.
- ✓ People of color and women are primarily affected by occupational segregation.
- ✓ Modern-day school segregation is a leading factor in workplace segregation.
- ✓ Registered Apprenticeship Programs can provide family-sustaining wages but are dominated by White males.
- ✓ Workplace segregation favors White males and funnels people of color and women into low-wage occupations causing occupational crowding.
- ✓ To understand the severity of occupational segregation, read the next eBook, which breaks down occupational segregation by sector.





## ENDNOTES

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