



Purpose & Resistance: **Black Women Workers Confronting Occupational Segregation**

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Photo credit: Call Center Workers United, CWA

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About NELP

Founded in 1969, the National Employment Law Project (NELP) is a nonprofit advocacy organization dedicated to building a just and inclusive economy where all workers have expansive rights and thrive in good jobs. Together with local, state, and national partners, NELP advances its mission through transformative legal and policy solutions, research, capacity-building, and communications. Learn more at www.nelp.org.

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Contents

<i>Transforming Work for Black Women Workers</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Black Women Workers and Occupational Segregation</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>A Knowing So Deep: Black Women’s Reflections on Occupational Segregation.....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Our Labor Is Worthy. Pay Us What We Are Worth.....</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>The Carceral System Shapes Work for Black Women Workers</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Project Hustle: Liberating Futures for Black Women Workers</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Black Women Workers Conjure Horizons</i>	<i>17</i>

Transforming Work for Black Women Workers

NELP envisions a world where *Black women workers are free, well-paid, safe, respected, can grow, and joyfully live the lives of their dreams*. Our year-long conversations with Black women workers across the country have helped us anchor in this abundant vision of the narrative, policy, and system shifts needed to transform the economic lives of Black women, their families, and communities.

We wanted to understand directly from Black women workers their lived experience of occupational segregation; how they understand and articulate occupational segregation in their work; and, most importantly, how they activate their power and agency in service of their dreams and aspirations, families, and communities.

As we previously shared, NELP embarked on our own deep study of the long lineage of research, advocacy, and community activism centered on occupational segregation and Black women.¹ To sharpen NELP's advocacy for Black women workers, we initiated new research analyses of recent American Community Survey (ACS) data focused on the segregation of Black women.

We also directly engaged Black women workers across the country through collected oral histories, one-on-one interviews and a Black Women Workers Roundtable. We wanted to understand directly from Black women workers their lived experience of occupational segregation; how they understand and articulate occupational segregation in their work; and, most importantly, how they activate their power and agency in service of their dreams and aspirations, families, and communities.

This report seeks to deepen understanding, highlight stories and strengths, and build a collaborative community with Black women workers. In tandem with our newly released factsheet: [*Occupational Segregation of Black Women Workers in the U.S.*](#), we hope to provide insights on race, gender, experiences with the carceral system, and factors influencing Black women's lives.² We also hope these tools help workers, advocates, and policymakers ensure that Black women worker voices, experiences, and demands are central to their efforts.

Our conversations with Black women workers underscored core narratives that shape and guide our work:

- **Abundance:** In the resource-rich United States, we have the capacity to afford solutions that address the challenges faced by Black women, their families, and communities.
- **Dignity & Agency:** Black workers and communities possess inherent dignity and worth. Black life and Black women should always be respected and valued. Black women having spaces to dream, innovate, and grow in their desired work honors this inherent dignity.
- **Accountability:** It is the government's and employers' responsibility to provide economic security and good jobs. It is our responsibility as advocates to push for solutions that center the specificity and totality of Black women's experiences.

Our conversations with Black women workers also helped us understand that to achieve the most robust and sustained impact in addressing occupational segregation for Black women, narrative shifts and policy solutions must *concurrently*:

1. **Build** and **fortify** the scaffolding of “good” work, expansively defined, and particularly focused on wages, benefits, working conditions, career growth opportunities.
2. **Name** and **address** anti-Black racism, discrimination, and misogyny that Black women experience in their work.
3. **Expand** worker power and voice for Black women workers.
4. **Support** and **create** the spaces for Black women workers to vision, dream, and innovate.

Finally, our conversations with Black women workers emphasized how the carceral system and anti-Black criminalization of Black communities amplify the impacts of occupational segregation. Over the past several years NELP has illustrated the ways the carceral system shapes work by:

- Criminalizing workers;
- Using probation, parole and community service as exploitative mechanisms to degrade work for people with records;
- Pressuring Black women to stay in bad, underpaid, and/or carceral system focused jobs.³

Continued research and advocacy must bring to the forefront the nuanced ways the carceral system exacerbates occupational segregation for Black women workers; we must ensure our solutions address the full picture of Black women’s experiences.

In this report we are intentional in our use of *Black women workers*. Since slavery, misogynistic anti-Black narratives reduced the value of Black women solely to their labor and ability to produce. In essence making the labor of Black women both hyper visible (tropes of the mammy primed for backbreaking labor, “lazy and irresponsible” Black women who must be coerced into work) and invisible (exclusion of Black women from federal workers’ rights protections and advancements). We focus on *Black women workers*, as an essential component to achieving economic transformation for all workers.

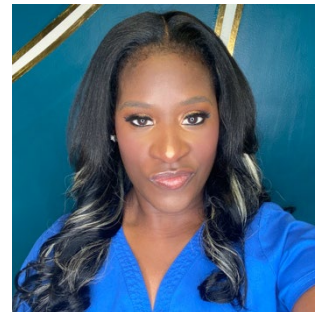
Black Women Workers and Occupational Segregation

Occupational segregation, the concentration or underrepresentation of groups of workers within different jobs or industries, remains a significant driver of racial and gender inequities in the labor market. The segregation of Black women in the workplace has been researched and studied for decades.

Anti-Black policies rooted in slavery excluded agricultural and domestic workers, 90% of whom were Black women, from seminal labor advances; the impact of this exclusion still shapes the working conditions Black women workers face today. Occupational segregation is one of the biggest systemic factors shaping the enduring and harmful wage gap Black women experience in the labor market. ¹

Since the Great Migration, Black women often have been the primary breadwinners of their homes and communities; today sixty-eight percent of Black mothers are the primary or sole breadwinners for their families.⁴ Despite the critical roles Black women have played in undergirding our economy, through legal and policy mechanisms, they have been systematically segregated into the most underpaid, unsafe, and undervalued jobs.⁵

“I started working at West Jefferson Hospital as a unit clerk. I loved the job and I’d still be there if I never got fired. I was doing hair then too, I had my son depending on me...The house supervisor was a white woman. Basically everybody I worked around, me and the other unit clerk were Black women, and everybody else in the department was white. Me and the other Black woman were the lowest in that department. I felt like I was done wrong by the hospital, the house supervisor fired me I think because she was having a bad day. I didn’t want to sign a write up, I didn’t think it was fair, and she got frustrated. So frustrated that she took my job away from me, not caring that I had to provide for my child. Like, you’re having that much of a bad day you ain’t care about my livelihood.”



— Tamara Nelson, Louisiana

“I am a Jamaican immigrant; domestic work is one of the first work that is easily available. A lot of other races don’t want to do this work because of the abuse. A lot of us have families that we are taking care of.”

– June Barrett, Florida

In spite of labor and employment advances during the civil rights movement, the proliferation of discriminatory and harmful narratives and tropes have sustained occupational segregation for Black women workers. In particular, harmful narratives and stereotypes of Black motherhood (ex. welfare queens, irresponsible, hypersexual, overbreeding) have shaped how Black women are treated within multiple systems: work, healthcare, social services, and etc.⁶ Despite historically high rates of workforce participation, these enduring harmful narratives and stereotypes shape the structures that keep Black women in work that continues to be undervalued and underpaid.⁷

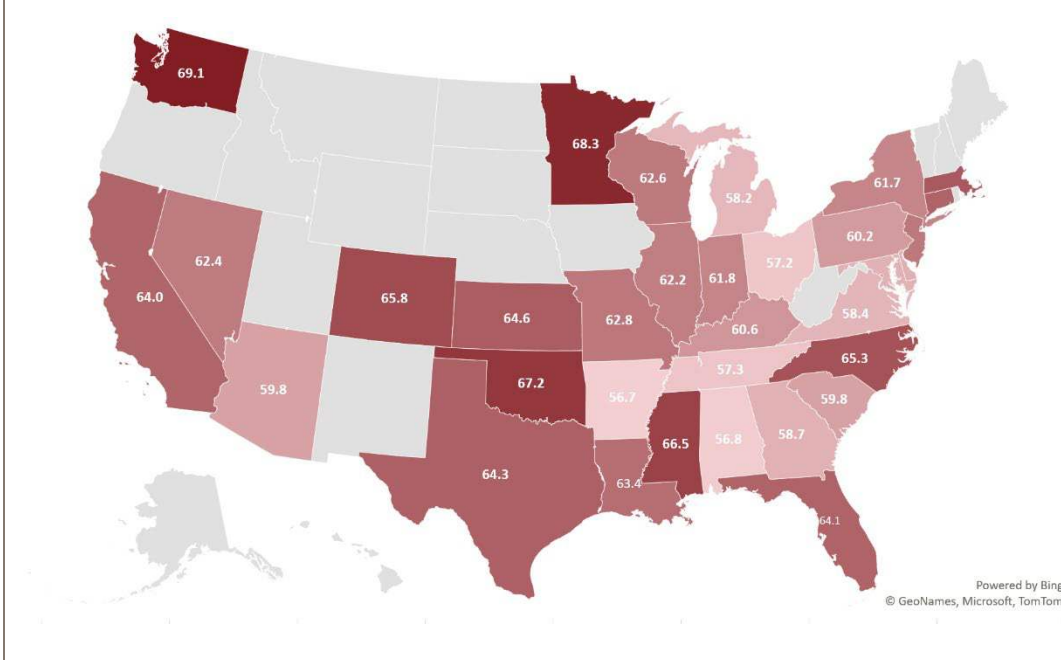
“I worked at Popeye’s in Jackson for about a year and a half. At Popeye’s I was berated by my managers. I was spoken down to, I had property stolen. And I just was, you know, mistreated. They would curse at you, they would call you names, and they would do it in front of the customers. Most of the men were not treated this way, and the managers were women. Women who were berating other women, maybe because they enjoyed having power, but I’m not sure why. Everyone that worked at the Popeye’s with me was a Black person. I did about 35 hours a week and I was in school at the same time.”



– SheRa Phillips, Louisiana

As detailed in our [*Occupational Segregation of Black Women Workers in the U.S. fact sheet*](#), Black women workers are segregated into lower-paying occupations and locked out of higher-paying occupations; this is true regardless of geography. Figure 2 from the fact sheet maps the proportion of Black women who work in jobs where they are overrepresented or highly overrepresented across states. Segregation of Black women workers in lower-paying occupations is persistent even in states that would be considered progressive and worker friendly.

Figure 2. Proportion of Black women working in occupations where they are overrepresented or highly overrepresented by state



Source: Authors' analysis of IPUMS American Community Survey, 2018-2022.
Note: States with sufficient sample sizes were included in analysis.

Occupational segregation not only robs Black women of their earning potential over their lifetimes, but also contributes to worse job quality and inequitable work environments, stifles career advancement, and can drive poor health outcomes.⁸

A Knowing So Deep: Black Women's Reflections on Occupational Segregation

We believe that centering Blackness and Black women in our narratives, research and advocacy is instrumental for creating a good-jobs economy.⁹ In late 2022 and 2023, NELP partnered with nineteen Black women workers across the country, who are working in common industries, to better understand their lived experiences of occupational segregation and the narratives that underpin these experiences. This exploration was done in tandem with research analyzing ACS data on Black women's occupations, wages, and education at local, state, and national levels.

The Black women workers we engaged are primarily concentrated in the Midwest and Southern regions of the United States. They work in a range of industries including: domestic care, gig work, fast food, warehouse work, community organizing, retail, non-profits, and corrections. Almost all work multiple positions at

a given time including a variety of hustles (hair braiding, bead selling, food and plate preparation, gig driving, and food delivery) to supplement their “formal” jobs. They embody a range of identities, values, and lived experiences. They range in age from their late 20s to 70s. They are mothers, grandmothers, aunties; single, married, partnered; cis, heterosexual, queer; entrepreneurs, advocates, leaders. Many have been working since they were teens and are part of a legacy in their families of constantly hustling to navigate and survive interlocking oppressive systems and purposeful disinvestment within their communities. They are hustlers, advocates, storytellers, and dreamers of liberation for themselves, their loved ones, and their communities.

While occupational segregation is a term of art used to make sense of the labor market, Black women workers we spoke to have a deep understanding of how occupational segregation and anti-Black discrimination shapes their lives. They talked about occupational segregation as a force that creates divisions in their workplaces, “keeping us [Black women] down,” keeping them from their families, and keeping them from opportunities and being recognized for their leadership.

“Occupational segregation is an aspect of it, it’s a symptom of general segregation because of white supremacy and all these other things.”

— Toya Ex, Louisiana



“I love my job...it’s not the problem of my job, it’s the bosses...you don’t get paid time, no sick day, 7 days a week. I work for my same race, they underpay you. Pay me what I’m worth and give us a paid vacation...you shouldn’t have to work 12-13 hours a day, 7 days a week to survive. My daughter works at the post office- it’s a lot of work. Until you get in that line of work- you don’t appreciate the impact of the work....I’m losing time with my daughter because we’re exhausted. We work hard and we have to work all day.”

— Laverne Blunt, Louisiana



“I worked at a Ground Pati. It was mostly Black workers, with white men as managers. We made burgers. When a new manager was hired on he said I was too old to work there. I was the oldest worker there, 42, and everyone else was teenagers. The manager cut my hours down to 20 hours. And he wanted me to do work I hadn’t done before. I had to go and quit from that job. I think I was there for four years.”



— Faye Lewis, Louisiana

“Being a Black female, women we don’t get paid as much as men. And then on top of that, you’re an African American in the workforce. I’ve actually seen a Spanish guy come in and do the same job and he’s getting paid more. That’s my experience. I’ve seen it with my own eyes. I had to have a conversation with HR. Why is he getting paid more? I experienced it.”

— D’Nea Franklin, Florida

“Inside the jail they have a lot of Black supervisors. Like the majority of the supervisors working inside the jail was Black. But when it go to higher ranks, the higher ranks were more white. We felt like it was punishment working inside the jail, everybody wanted to be “post” – a post-deputy outside the jail – but you ain’t getting out the jail unless, if you didn’t know somebody... if you wasn’t white, you wasn’t getting to the road, you wasn’t getting out that jail to different departments. You was staying right there in the jails. Majority of the Black staff worked the jail, a mixture of Black women and males.”

— Tamara Nelson, Louisiana

Our Labor Is Worthy. Pay Us What We Are Worth



“I have never had a job that pays me close to what I was worth...it’s always about dehumanizing, disrespecting, or dismissal. It’s always something to make you less than.”

— Denise Augustine, Louisiana

Structural racism, and specifically anti-Blackness, create a matrix of inequities that keep Black women workers locked out of good jobs and also stagnant in the positions they currently hold. Access to education and professional degrees are touted as important tools to address inequities and pay and wealth gaps for Black women. However, due to generations of Black women’s socioeconomic status shaped by misogynoir, simply providing more access to education is not enough. Higher education settings can be toxic for Black women and despite more Black women obtaining higher education, these degrees do not mitigate the harms of occupational segregation.¹⁰ Even with higher education, Black women’s access to better-paying jobs remains limited. At each level of educational attainment, wage disparities between Black women and white men are more pronounced in occupations where Black women are underrepresented.^{11”}



I got into a corporate office of a reputable company... I saw upward momentum in the company, they helped push me up the corporate level. I worked with them about 6 years, I hit a ceiling... because I don't have a bachelor's degree as an accountant, they didn't give me a salary that complemented a head person, although I was doing all the work of a head person... I asked them for help, they hired a part-time person, and I needed more help, so they hired me a boss.

Because of my education level, I was educated as a paralegal, I had a salary ceiling. They hired a white man who was working on his accounting degree. I had to train him to use the software we were using, train him on the policies and protocols, he was in school to get his bachelor's in accounting. I stayed with them another 9 months. I began a search after they hired a new boss, I realized I can't do this, this man knows nothing."

— Tamah Yisrael, Louisiana

Takeisha Nelson has a bachelor's degree, two master's degrees, and currently works as a deputy officer in New Orleans Parish Sheriff's Office. The position was one of the few accessible higher wage jobs but is not the role that allows her to fully integrate her educational background and mental health specialist skillset.

"I'm not living my dream job, not at all...I would like to be a counselor for people that have been incarcerated and released from prison and be a resource for them. I'm currently a deputy- and only limited to what I can do in here." — Takeisha Nelson, Louisiana

Efforts to hire more Black workers or diversify workplaces do not necessarily correlate to retaining them in higher-paying positions.¹² One study showed that turnover rates are higher for Black women in certain industries where they work with mostly white colleagues.¹³

"I applied for a salary position 84 times. I'm college educated, I am qualified and able to do the job, but they keep saying no because I'm me. Because I refuse to put that mask on all the time."

— Taneka Hightower, Tennessee

“I always had to do something outside of whatever job that I was working, whether I was a regular employee or in management or whatever. I was never paid, I felt, a living wage, something where I didn’t have to worry about money, you know, that I didn’t have to worry about any of those things. They could have paid me like that for the work that I did.”

— Ayanna Molina, Louisiana

Black women workers face a “double gap” – the compounding impact of gender and racial discrimination that keeps wages for Black women at the lowest levels.¹⁴ Default solutions to occupational segregation for Black women workers over-focus on upskilling and workforce development, anchored in harmful narratives of individual responsibility and meritocracy. Those narratives were also present in our roundtable space, an indication of how pervasive they have become. But the data shows us repeatedly that Black women cannot upskill or “individual responsibility” their way in a system that is fundamentally designed to extract and undervalue their labor; particularly within a climate hostile to diversity, equity, and inclusion.¹⁵ Black women’s labor power is largely undercompensated by employers. The wage gaps that Black women experience provide billions of dollars to corporate profits, a capitalistic cycle that benefits the wealthy and maintains a racial hierarchy in the workplace.¹⁶

All of the Black women workers spoke extensively about their labor being unseen and undervalued which for them meant less pay, less safe and inclusive workplaces, and more time away from their families because of having constantly to work at underpaid jobs. They named how their experiences of discrimination and assumptions of their abilities obstructed promotion and growth opportunities in their jobs; often non-Black workers with less experience and less competencies were promoted over them.

“I love doing the work but no one acknowledges what the work takes.”

— Amethyst, Louisiana

“They will pass you up for everyone else. I have been at the shipping dock since the beginning. It can cause mental stress for not being recognized for the work you do.”

— Anna Rucker, Missouri

“They have the opportunity to train you and a lot of folks get trained that have been there half as long as me, and the trainers don’t want to train us. I’m 62 about to be 63, I saw this growing up in Mississippi. They don’t want to share. We can be trained to do anything, in the warehouse, in the food industry.”

— Teresa Smith, Missouri

Several of the workers we spoke to pride themselves on being leaders in their workplaces, despite the obstacles that they face on the job. They also often take on responsibilities beyond their roles. Bessie Young, a FedEx package handler from Miami, considers herself a role model to younger staff in her workplace. She encourages them to use their voice on the job and not to be afraid of their power. A wife and mother of nine, Bessie runs other businesses to supplement her income. She wants employers to start recognizing Black women more; she says that men and other women of color receive higher positions and promotions even though Black women work just as hard.

“Black women at FedEx- we work just as hard. Why can’t we get promoted?...We’ve been there 2 to 3 years, someone’s been there 6 months and they’ve gotten promoted...you have 200 to 300 packages and big packages. The scanners we use break down but we get the job done even if you don’t have the resources or equipment to get it done. We need to be acknowledged. They don’t recognize us enough. Most of the women in the higher positions are other women of color, the women who are package handlers are all Black women.”

— Bessie Young, Florida

The Carceral System Shapes Work for Black Women Workers

“I have to work too many jobs because no one values what I do...we work, we sweat, can they please put more money on our check ‘cuz I do more than just my job.”

— Tamika Smith, Missouri

*“At every level of the U.S. carceral system (policing, arrest, jail, bail setting, trial, plea coercion, sentencing, prison, probation, parole, and ongoing punishment of having a record) radical race and class inequality persist, as well as an invisible increase of the care burden disproportionately placed on women of color. Stemming in part from decades of U.S. deindustrialization as workers’ movements demanded occupational integration and higher pay, **Black women are now increasingly disproportionately employed in the unsafe, unhealthy, undesirable, and poorly paid jobs that prisons and jails create, and they are disproportionately put in the position of supporting loved ones incarcerated by that same system.**”¹⁷*

Black women workers highlighted the constant and intrusive presence of the carceral system in their lives.

“... The money, traffic violations, fines. We constantly was paying something to the city and the courts, it felt manufactured.”

— Tamah Yisrael, Louisiana

They spoke about making decisions to take on particular types of work or retain jobs they would’ve otherwise left because they were responsible for supporting incarcerated and/or recently released loved ones. They talked about the limitations of job prospects because of the impacts of their record. Several spoke to their experiences working in corrections which ironically was one of the few higher-paying positions open to Black women.

Black workers, especially Black women, are penalized in the labor market more harshly than white workers for having a record. Formerly incarcerated Black women bear the highest rate of unemployment among all formerly incarcerated groups, in part because women are more likely to be occupationally segregated into industries that perform more criminal record background checks – e.g. retail and care work.¹⁸

Women of color disproportionately hold the financial burdens of supporting incarcerated loved ones.¹⁹ Essie Justice Group describe women as “the informal reentry system of this country”; they fill the void left by public policies that withdraw assistance for affected families.²⁰ Bessie Young spoke about the pending release of her son who has a GED. She expressed a desire to open a nonprofit serving recently released people with records, “*Because everybody need a second chance. They will have a place to go, where folks won’t look down on them, they will have counseling & support.*”

Geneva Joy stayed on longer at a temp position to support her incarcerated boyfriend and the overwhelming fines and fees often levied at incarcerated folks.

“...I worked for a temp agency, Kelly Services. It paid well, about \$17 an hour, but it wasn’t worth it. I didn’t feel safe...the temp office drug tested us [Black workers] first, not the white workers, and we had to take long typing tests. I did deal with the temp agency stuff a little longer because I knew I needed that check next week, because he needed money on his books, or we might need to go pick him up, what’s he going to do when he comes home. Or all of it, that was intense...it was always the fees.”



– Geneva Joy, Louisiana

In New Orleans, employment in the carceral system ranks as the second highest-paying industry for Black women.²¹ For Black women working in the jails and prisons, a higher wage also means a deeply segregated workplace, unsafe working conditions, and limited promotion and advancement opportunities. This is an example of the false options that Black women workers often face in the formal labor market.

“The jail was the highest paying job around ... I caught COVID three times working in that jail house. It wasn’t good on my mental state or health.”

– Tamara Nelson, Louisiana

Project Hustle: Liberating Futures for Black Women Workers



PROJECT
HUSTLE

“We make our joy possible while we make it easier for us to thrive now. We can’t wait for policy makers to agree. We hustle.”

-Toya Ex, Louisiana

As previously discussed, transformative narratives, policies, and advocacy for Black women workers need to holistically (1) address the scaffolding of work, (2) name and confront anti-Black racism, discrimination, and misogynoir, (3) build and amplify their power and voice, (4) center their vision, dreams, and innovations. **Project Hustle exemplifies a visionary project unapologetically grounded in these four areas.**

Project Hustle is a Black, queer, hood feminist-led transformative organizing project in Southeast Louisiana. Project Hustle engages a strategy of political education, collective narrative-building and narrative intervention against harmful narratives that undermine Black women's power as workers.

Project Hustle divests from the continuous exploitation of Black women's labor in the formal economy and posits **hustler culture as a culture of resistance against bad jobs and criminalization.**

Project Hustle promotes Black women's hustles (street- and home-based income-generating activities outside of and in addition to employment or other "formal" work).

As previously described, Black women workers in New Orleans are segregated into the lowest-paid jobs. Project Hustle amplifies how Black women and queer hustlers create alternatives to job exploitation in the formal economy by building the infrastructure to support each other and support loved ones who are incarcerated; resist in a state regularly ranked the incarceration capital of the world; push back against individualistic bootstraps narratives that blame individuals for structural problems. As scholar Tressie McMillan Cottom advises: *"...we have an opportunity, in crisis, to build foundations for a new normal that works better for women than did the old normal. Targeted interventions that only focus on women in waged employment will miss a significant anchor of women's economic lives."*²²

"Yea, hustling is saying "by any means necessary, I'm going to make what I need to make, regardless of your rules and your permits and licenses." I think it's the ultimate revolutionary work. I think hustling is something I saw my mama do, something I saw my grandmother do, you know, something that's embedded in who we are as a people. And I think it just challenges the system, I truly do. And I'll do it, I'll always do it. I'll always do it, because it's my right as a human being to put my product and my work out for my community to support and to buy, and help me take care of my family. And so I think it's the most revolutionary thing we can do under such an oppressive regime."

— Ayanna Molina, Louisiana

Project Hustle divests from the continuous exploitation of Black women's labor in the formal economy and posits **hustler culture as a culture of resistance against bad jobs and criminalization.**

"These jobs aren't set up for your prosperity. Exchanging your physical labor for your livelihood never works out well. The struggle is so unnecessary with the amount of abundance in the world that we've been taught to believe isn't for us. What I love about New Orleans is that we hustle so hard. People work dangerous jobs for nothing and that breaks my heart."

— Geneva Joy, Louisiana

Project Hustle’s long-term vision is to exert collective power economically and politically in New Orleans, including policy change that decriminalizes and removes barriers faced by vendors; and to build a Black women workers’ cooperative of hustlers called Hustle Village.

“So when I’m making jewelry, I know that I’m being connected to something larger and really I feel like a medium. My jewelry means that to me as well. It’s clearly a symbol of like my financial freedom, my independence, my power, my talent...I’ve always been artistic my whole life and never was told I could make money like that.”



— Amani Pearl, Louisiana

Spotlight on Tamah Yisrael, Project Hustle Member

Tamah is a New Orleans based mother, bookkeeper, wife, business development coach, coop-erator. Tamah is invested in the liberatory possibilities of worker coops.

“...the feeling of what it meant to live cooperatively is something I knew from living in my grandmother’s house. Black people, this is our stuff.

We need to bring it back to what people can use and need. Worker coops give us agency to own the things we do, owning our labor, owning our work, not having people come in to capitalize. That’s been my experience. I worked for Walmart. I can fry the mess out of chicken, someone is capitalizing from my frying the chicken, what if I help people own their own labor?

...Major corporations are paid to come into neighborhoods. The governments- cities, states, and federal government- pay Walmart to be in your neighborhood, so why can’t they pay for worker cooperatives, incentivize small business owners through some kind of benefit program, where they subsidize health insurance? But they are paying major developers to come in... when you have all the elements you need in a community to drive commerce, if the commerce were rightly divided amongst the people in the community.”

“I see Black women make jewelry, Black women that cook food in their houses, Black women going to city council to push the City to divest from task forces that criminalize us to instead fund people to meet their needs. To stop with the fines and fees, and to put money into free access courses, stipends, and grants... So I think if we’re going to be doing hustling work, work that we have to do, then we need an element of healing, restoration, and harm reduction. These elements need to be prioritized and incorporated into the work we’re doing so that we can live to see our victories. Right, so it’s about not waiting for the City, or the State to overturn it. It’s about filling in the good now.”

— Toya Ex, Louisiana

Black Women Workers Conjure Horizons

“Black women have the ability to conjure horizons out of possibilities that we did not even know were possible.”

— Aisha Nyandoro, Springboard to Opportunities



Photo credit Call Center Workers United, CWA

Black women workers know they contain multitudes. The women we spoke with operate from a deep knowing of their power and connection to the lineages of their mothers, grandmothers, and ancestors.

They see themselves and their work as multiple things. They spoke about their experiences of the layered impacts of occupational segregation. They articulated nuances of labor exploitation, low wages, lack of growth opportunities, harassment, and discrimination that they regularly face in their work. AND they spoke of their leadership, the joy in their work, the depth of the skill and creativity they harness in jobs often looked down on as “low-skilled”. Several named that they enjoy their work and don’t necessarily want to shift away from food service or care work, but want to ensure they are treated with dignity and are paid the full value of the labor they bring.

Fran Marion, a fast-food worker and organizer in Missouri, is using her power and leadership to change her workplace,

“combatting the upper management for equal pay and equal treatment and moving up the ladder...People ask me, why not go back to college or find another job...it’s something that I’m passionate about...serving people. I’ve been doing this my whole life.”

“I’m most proud of my ability to thrive and to love...we are the holders of lives...all the work we are doing will never cease...how are we gonna shift and change the conditions of this work. My strength is fighting for labor protections for women like myself.”

— June Barrett, Florida

Black women workers want the trust and agency to create new systems in their workplaces and they want their jobs to springboard to career growth and diverse opportunities. They take pride in the ways their leadership and skills nourish their co-workers, supervisees, families, and clients. They are clear on how powerful and life-sustaining the labor they offer to ensure people are fed, provided care, and have the things they need to thrive.

Black women workers crave rest and life beyond work; they want “savings and vacation wages”. They want to spend time with their families and communities. They want to enjoy their creative and imaginative selves and have the spaces and the resources to play and experiment and try new things.

“One of the most important things to me is that I have more say-so in the work that I do. I have more autonomy in the work that I do, and influence on how it’s done. In other jobs, I was being fought for having creativity, and for choosing to do things that felt purposeful and intentional and meaningful to me. And now I get to be fully aligned with what feels good. I get to work with people, and we can collaborate. We can make adjustments that feel good to us both, or to us all, rather than being mandated or being put in a box. I want to work with folks instead of working over folks.”

– SheRa Phillips, Project Hustle member, Louisiana

A good-jobs economy that works for Black women workers is one grounded in abundance and the dignity and agency of Black women workers. As workers’ rights advocates, we are all accountable for amplifying the visionary narratives and solutions Black women workers name for themselves.

“I take great pride in the way Black women are moving through the world now. Less fearful, more self-assured, more educated, bold in their presentation. The other thing I love, they have no problem teaching me things, asking for what they want. Not afraid to say no.”

– Denise Augustine, Louisiana

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