



Justice League of Greater Lansing Michigan Reparations Scholarship Recipient — 2024

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What is your understanding of the *Racial Wealth Gap* in America?

Growing up as a Black girl in America, I've often found myself navigating a world where opportunities and resources are not equally distributed. The racial wealth gap is a glaring manifestation of systemic inequalities that have persisted for generations. While many may argue that we live in a post-racial society, the reality I've experienced tells a different story. I aim to shed light on the racial wealth gap from my unique perspective, highlighting its origins, implications, and the urgent need for systemic change.

To understand the racial wealth gap, one must first acknowledge its historical roots in slavery, segregation, and discriminatory policies. For centuries, Black Americans have faced systemic barriers that have hindered wealth accumulation and economic mobility. From slavery's brutal exploitation to Jim Crow laws enforcing racial segregation, the legacy of these injustices continues to impact Black communities today. Additionally, discriminatory practices such as redlining, which denied Black families access to housing loans and quality neighborhoods, further exacerbated economic disparities.

Despite advancements in civil rights and anti-discrimination laws, the racial wealth gap remains alarmingly wide. According to the Federal Reserve, the median wealth of white households is nearly ten times that of Black households. This disparity is not merely a reflection of individual choices or abilities but is deeply rooted in systemic racism and structural inequality. Factors such as lower wages, higher unemployment rates, and limited access to quality education and healthcare contribute to this widening gap. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected Black communities, further exacerbating economic inequalities.

The racial wealth gap has far-reaching implications for Black communities. Wealth disparities contribute to social and political inequalities, as those with greater economic resources often have more influence and power. Additionally, the psychological toll of living in a society where one's worth is often measured by wealth can have detrimental effects on mental health and well-being. Addressing the racial wealth gap requires a multi-faceted approach that tackles the root causes and the systemic barriers that perpetuate inequality. Policy reforms such as investing in education, increasing minimum wages, and implementing targeted economic initiatives for Black communities can help level the playing field. Also, addressing systemic racism in housing, healthcare, and criminal justice systems is crucial to creating a more equitable society.

As an 18-year-old Black girl, I am hopeful but also acutely aware of the challenges that lie ahead. It is time for all of us—individuals, communities, and policymakers—to acknowledge the racial wealth gap's existence and work together to dismantle the systemic barriers that perpetuate inequality. Only then can we truly achieve economic justice and create a society where every individual, regardless of race or background, has an equal opportunity to thrive. The racial wealth gap is not just a statistic but a lived reality that shapes the experiences and opportunities of millions of Black Americans, including myself. As I look towards the future, I am committed to advocating for change and challenging the systemic inequalities that have held back generations of Black families. By working together and prioritizing economic justice, we can create a more inclusive and equitable society for all.