

**To:** Detroit Black Worker Center Team

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**Date:** November 21, 2022

**RE:** Black Worker Demographics in Detroit

### **Executive Summary**

This memo describes Black worker demographics in Detroit with the aim of informing the Detroit Black Worker Center about its target population as the DBWC plans its launch and strategy. The memo includes historical context and current findings on information such as employment and wages. While the data shows that Black workers are a large and heterogenous group of stakeholders in the city, we find substantial racial inequities across economic measures for the city and region.

### **A brief history of Black communities and Black workers in Detroit**

Detroit's history is closely linked to that of Black workers, which sheds light on the current status and struggles of Black workers in Detroit:

Flocking to Detroit for manufacturing jobs: African Americans settled in Detroit prior to 1900, but first moved to the city in large numbers following the turn of the century during the Great Migration. Under 6,000 Black residents lived in Detroit in 1910 and this number grew to 40,000 by 1920, ultimately swelling to reach 660,000 by 1970.<sup>1</sup> This occurred parallel to growth in the overall city population, from about 465,000 residents in 1910 to just over 1.5 million people by 1970.<sup>2</sup> Many Black workers found jobs in the city's manufacturing sector, which paid relatively well even if discrimination meant that they were often relegated to more menial tasks. This living wage was particularly evident in the automobile industry and within that at Ford, which employed 45% of Black workers in the industry by the 1920s.<sup>3</sup> Henry Ford offered \$5 a week at a time when the average Black wage was \$5 a month.<sup>4</sup>

Historical roots of Black worker organizing in Detroit: Black workers played an important role in unionization at Ford. During an initial organizing wave in the 1930s, Black workers did not feel supported and included by the unionization efforts and so most did not support the cause, with some even acting as strikebreakers. This changed in the late 1930s, when the United Auto Workers Union's policy of racial equality and work to build an interracial coalition contributed to a broader organizing base. Ultimately, the vast majority of Ford Workers voted for the union in 1941, which had a ripple effect on the rest of the auto industry.<sup>5 6</sup>

Post-WWII suburbanization and white flight: After World War II, white residents began to move to the growing suburbs.<sup>7</sup> From the beginning of this period, the Detroit metropolitan area (DMA) was in the top five cities for levels of residential segregation in the United States.<sup>8</sup> At the end of the 1950s, the city demolished the Black Bottom neighborhood and its adjacent business district Paradise Valley to build a freeway, which displaced Black residents and led to additional white flight to avoid integration in other city neighborhoods.<sup>9</sup> The 1967 Uprising in Detroit against police brutality exacerbated the suburbanization trend,<sup>10</sup> with 344,000 white people moving out of Detroit between 1960 and 1970. Overall, the white population fell from 1.18 million in 1960 to 222,316 in 1990 while the Black population in the city remained fairly constant.<sup>11 12</sup> Detroit fell from the sixth largest US city in 1980 to the nineteenth largest by 2014 due to a loss of over 500,000 residents (42% of the population).<sup>13 14 15</sup>

Deindustrialization: The decline in the number of industrial jobs in Detroit hit Black people harder than whites, in part because Black men were more likely to be employed in manufacturing as of 1970.<sup>16</sup> The manufacturing, transportation, utilities, and construction industries employed 102,000 Black men in 1970 in comparison to only 53,000 by 2013, a decrease of almost half.<sup>17</sup> This decline is related to race as well as a loss in industrial jobs: 56% of manufacturing workers in the city were Black in 1970, whereas by 2000 only 26% were.<sup>18</sup> Simultaneously, the average earnings of these workers fell to \$38,100 in 2013 from \$44,700 in 1970 (numbers adjusted for inflation) and the employment rate of Black men and women fell substantially over the same period, including from 75% to slightly over 50% for Black men.<sup>19</sup>

Detroit bankruptcy: The story of how Detroit became the largest city to file for bankruptcy in 2013 is also closely tied to race.<sup>20</sup> While Black residents received increased opportunities to access loans in the early 2000s, they came alongside predatory lending with high interest rates. Ultimately, banks foreclosed on over 25% of properties in the city, or over 100,000 homes.<sup>21</sup> This greatly impacted the city's tax base already hurt by white flight<sup>22</sup> and as a result had implications for local residents reliant on city services.

### **Recent context on racial dynamics and segregation**

Detroit's official population in 2020 was 672,000 people, including 515,000 non-Hispanic Black residents making up 76.6% of the population.<sup>23</sup> There is an ongoing debate about whether the Census undercounted Detroiters,<sup>24</sup> which if accurate could mean it did not capture a significant number of Black residents.

Economic and racial segregation in the region: Beginning in the early 2000s, the Black middle class began to move to the suburbs.<sup>25</sup> Today, while the Detroit suburbs are not as segregated as they were in the mid-20th century,<sup>26</sup> there are still strong differences in key demographics between Black and white residents in the counties surrounding the city:

- Only 22.4% of residents in the DMA area were Black as of 2016, with even lower percentages in Oakland and Macomb counties.<sup>27 28</sup>
- In the three major counties in the DMA, about 80% of white residents own their home, whereas Black homeownership ranges by county from 34-50%.<sup>29</sup>
- The city and suburbs have bus systems that function without coordination,<sup>30</sup> which exacerbate transportation issues for workers who commute without cars.
- In 2010, the Detroit region had the highest level of segregation between Black and white residents out of the 50 metropolitan areas with the greatest African American populations.<sup>31</sup>

### **Employment and unemployment of Black workers**

#### Employment

One notable feature of employment in Detroit is the racial divisions when examining work locations. Only 19.4% of workers who both live and work in the city are white, whereas 55.8% of workers employed in Detroit are white. 77.1% of workers living and working in Detroit are Black in comparison to 38.7% of Detroit workers overall.<sup>32</sup> This means that a significant percentage of white workers are commuting into the city from the suburbs. The majority of jobs in Detroit are located in or near downtown, rather than other neighborhoods.<sup>33</sup>

Covid-19 had an outsized effect on Black workers. In the early months of the pandemic, Black workers in Detroit and nationally were simultaneously more likely to be laid off as a result of the economic disruptions caused by covid-19 and more likely to work in essential jobs. 74% of Black workers worked outside of their home at least some of the time during the pandemic, 23% more than white workers, which meant higher levels of exposure to the virus. Black residents reported higher rates of concern about eviction and a need for rent assistance.<sup>34</sup>

### Largest Detroit Employers

Company	Full-Time Employees in City of Detroit (July 2021)
Rocket Companies Inc.	18,000
Stellantis NV	9,263
City of Detroit	8,563
Henry Ford Health System	8,199
Detroit Medical Center	7,301
Detroit Public Schools Community District	6,892
U.S. Government	6,673
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan/Blue Care Network	5,355
Ilitch Holdings Inc.	4,830
General Motors	4,658

Source: Crain's Detroit Business, 2022

### Largest Southeast Michigan Employers

Company	City	Full-Time Employees in SE MI (July 2021)
Ford Motor Co.	Dearborn	47,750
Stellantis NV	Auburn Hills	37,761
University of Michigan	Ann Arbor	35,185
General Motors Co.	Detroit	33,935
Beaumont Health	Southfield	24,668
U.S. Government	Detroit	19,953
Rocket Companies Inc.	Detroit	18,000
Henry Ford Health System	Detroit	17,875
Trinity Health Michigan	Canton	12,991
Ascension Michigan	Warren	12,452

Source: Crain's Detroit Business, 2022

Figure 1: Largest employers for the city of Detroit and Southeast Michigan as of 2021. While this data is not specific to Black workers, it is informative about key employers in the Detroit region.<sup>35</sup>

Additional facts about Black employment in Detroit:

- Based on measures of job quality and growth opportunity, 36% of Black workers are likely to have low-opportunity jobs compared to 21% of white workers. Low-opportunity is defined based on calculating an occupation opportunity index that looks at measures of job quality and growth and then sorts occupations into high-, middle-, and low-opportunity categories based on their index score.<sup>36</sup>
- Black people own 64.2% of firms in Detroit (see the Black businesses section for more details on this).<sup>37</sup>
- In 2013, only 13 percent of professional/managerial jobs in the DMA were held by Black workers.<sup>38</sup>

Unemployment

Workers in Detroit were hit hard by the covid-19 pandemic, with an unemployment rate of over 43% in 2020. Unemployment was even higher for Black Detroiters at almost 50%.<sup>39</sup> While still well above the pre-pandemic rate of 10%, unemployment has subsided substantially since its peak, to 20% as of 2021. Rates of unemployment vary across races, with Black workers unemployed at rates four times higher than white Detroiters, and are higher for low-wage earners and residents without four-year college degrees.<sup>40</sup> Interestingly, while hit harder by layoffs, manufacturing jobs in Detroit also rebounded more quickly post-pandemic than some other private sector job markets.<sup>41</sup>

These discrepancies existed prior to the pandemic, as well, with a 1.5 times higher unemployment rate for Black versus white residents in the city in 2019.<sup>42</sup> At the state level, Michigan had one of the highest unemployment rates in the country as of Q4 2021 at 5.2%, and the rate for Black workers was even higher at 10.7%.<sup>43</sup>

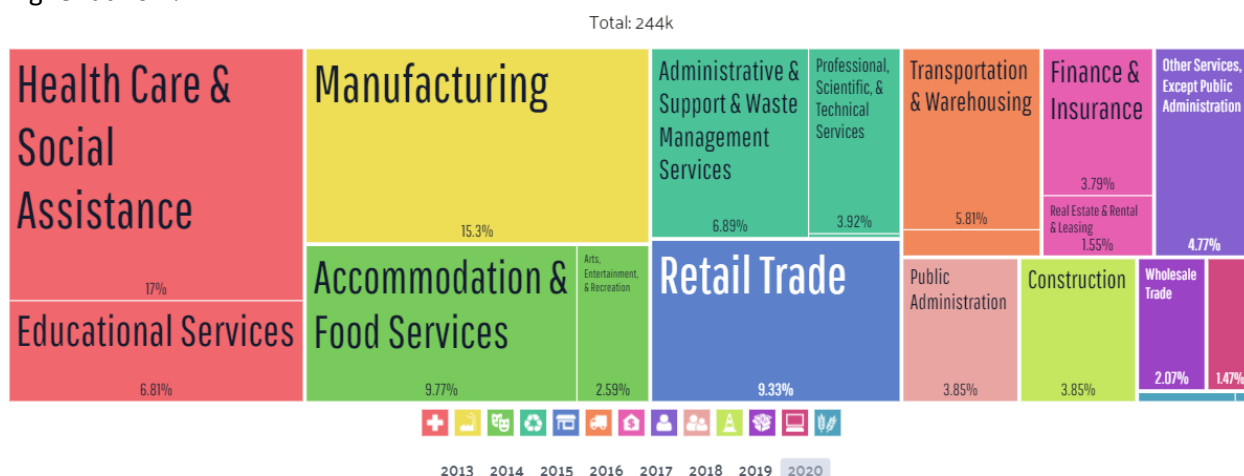


Figure 2: The top-emplying industries in Detroit according to the Census Bureau ACS 5-year Estimate from 2020. <sup>44</sup>

Sector-specific employment and workforce trends

Figure 2 above provides an overview of the work landscape for the city. A lack of detailed data analysis exists to show employment and workforce trends within specific sectors, particularly across race, for Detroit. This information exists for a few occupations including teachers, direct care, nonprofits, and creative workers and may be useful for considering how to best support Black workers in those jobs.

- **Teachers:** The number of Black teachers in Michigan fell by almost 50% from 2005 to 2015, from 7,233 to 3,795.<sup>45</sup> Detroit closed hundreds of schools where Black teachers had historically worked during this period, and while many students transitioned to the suburbs, largely white suburban districts did not employ a significant number of additional Black teachers.<sup>46</sup> As of 2021, only 7% of teachers in the state were Black while 18% of students were,<sup>47</sup> further showcasing the underrepresentation of Black workers in the teaching profession.
- **Direct care:** The direct care workforce in Detroit is prevalent, including home care workers and nursing assistants, and about one third of its workers are Black. However, these jobs are part-time for two thirds of workers and pay poorly even if full-time. Additionally, hourly wages have not kept up with inflation.<sup>48</sup>

- *Nonprofit organizations:* Given the large Black population in Detroit, a high number of nonprofits in the city employ BIPOC staff and/or executive directors. However, these numbers do not fully correspond to city demographics, with BIPOC executive directors leading only 66.4% of organizations. 62.6% of those directors serve as their organization's first leader of color, showing that even this prevalence is a recent shift. On average BIPOC-led organizations have 81% BIPOC staff, coming much closer to city demographics than the 51.4% of BIPOC staff at white-led organizations. While median revenue is comparable between BIPOC-led and white-led nonprofits (\$1.3M vs. \$1.4M), a substantial difference exists in their average revenue, due in large part to the existence of several large white-led organizations.<sup>49 50</sup>
- *Creative workers:* Among Black creative workers (artists and paid staff), 33.8% made less than \$10,000 annually as of 2021, whereas only 26.4% white creative workers fell into the same earnings category. Black creative workers are also less likely to earn over \$100,000 by 5 percentage points (3.1% versus 8.1%).<sup>51</sup>

### Employment and Transportation

Transportation limitations for Black workers in and around Detroit impact their employment options and experiences:

- 26% of Black households lack access to a car,<sup>52</sup> limiting residents' ability to commute to additional job options in the suburbs or across town.
- Many predominantly Black neighborhoods have medium to high average commute times.<sup>53</sup>

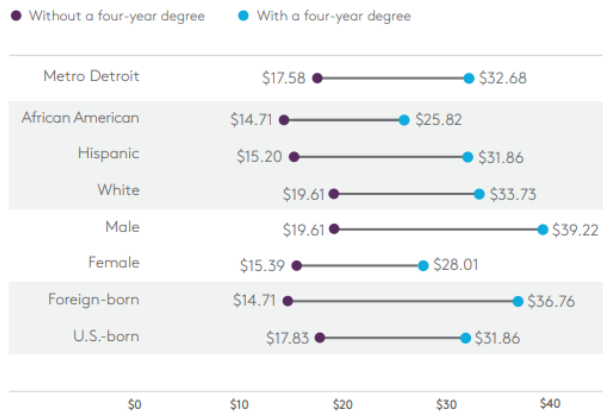
### **Wages & Income**

Even without examining racial disparities, Detroit's 2021 median household income of \$36,140 is just under half of the US median; an estimated 15.5% of households earned under \$10,000 and 64.3% of Detroiters earned under \$50,000.<sup>54</sup> From 1979 to 2014, wages declined for all earning groups, with those in the bottom half experiencing the largest decrease.<sup>55</sup> Detroit Future City reports that middle-wage jobs make up 35% of the city's offerings and that the city job market is shifting towards a higher percentage of low-wage jobs, a troubling trend due to the concentration of Black workers in low-wage work. Additionally, commuting is costly for many Detroit residents as a result of these low-wage jobs.<sup>56</sup>

Turning to comparisons of white and Black wages showcases a range of racial inequity in pay and its effects:

- Three times more Black than white residents indicate experiencing financial insecurity, including 171,257 Black residents that lived below the poverty line in 2020.<sup>57 58</sup>
- The number of Black families with retirement savings is likely to be lower than the national average of 41% given these low incomes.<sup>59</sup>
- In the last ten years, white Detroiters saw an increase in their median income of 60% in contrast to an 8% increase for Black residents.<sup>60</sup>
- Black residents work higher rates of accessible but low-wage jobs and lower rates of middle-wage jobs than white or Hispanic residents (Figure 4). Middle-wage jobs are defined as those that pay more than a median wage (in Detroit in 2019, the median wage was \$37,000) and are held by a worker without a bachelor's degree.<sup>61</sup>
- They also make lower wages, earning 75 cents for every dollar white workers make (Figure 3).<sup>62</sup> Even college-educated Black workers experience a wage gap of \$3.20/hour compared to white workers.<sup>63</sup>
- Black workers are also more likely to work in part-time jobs rather than full time (79%).<sup>64</sup>

Median hourly wage for job holders with and without a four-year degree  
Metro Detroit, 2019



Source: IPUMS USA, 2019

Share of private jobs by race/ethnicity  
Detroit, 2019



Source: Mass Economics Analysis of QCEW data, 2019; IPUMS USA, 2019

Figures 3 (above left) and 4 (above right): These charts from Detroit Future City show the disparities in wages and in types of jobs held by Black workers in comparison to others in 2019.<sup>65</sup>

Figure 5 (right): This diagram highlights racial disparities in the share of Black-owned businesses in Detroit and the sizes and revenues of these businesses.<sup>66</sup>

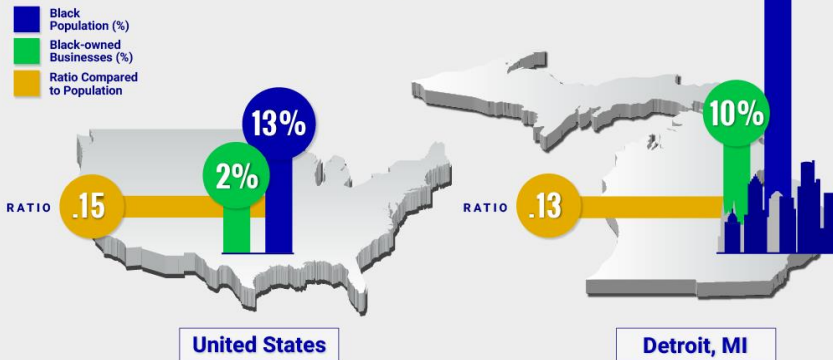
## Racial Disparities in Detroit Businesses

### By the Numbers

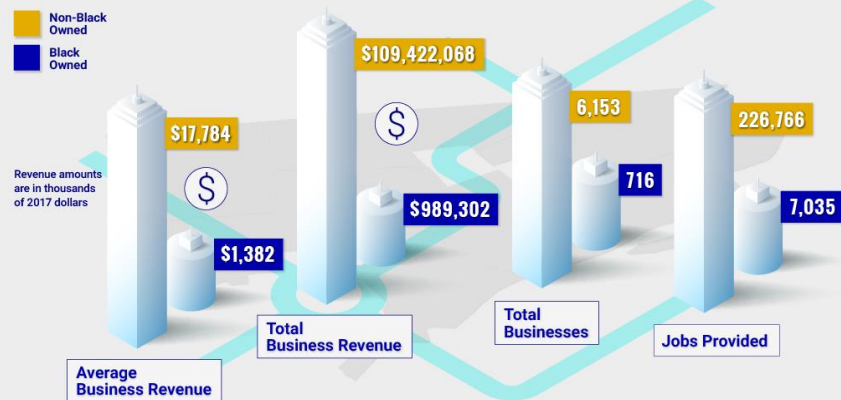
These visualizations are based on *What Would Detroit Businesses Look Like with Racial Parity?* published August 2, 2021 on ChicagoFed.org & *The State of Economic Equity in Detroit* published in May 2021 by Detroit Future City's Center for Equity, Engagement, and Research

#### Black Population Share vs. Black-owned Business Share\*

(According to 2020 U.S. Census's population estimates)



#### Detroit Businesses at-a-Glance\*



\*Businesses refers to businesses with employees. For more information on microbusinesses in Detroit, please read *What Would Detroit Businesses Look Like with Racial Parity?* (Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago)

- Annual income for people of color in Detroit would increase by 25% if racial equity in income existed.<sup>67</sup>
- As of 2014, racial gaps in income meant that Detroit lost out on almost \$30 billion in economic terms, a 13% difference from status quo economic activity in the city.<sup>68</sup>

### **Black-owned businesses**

Black business owners are a specific type of Black worker and tend to employ Black workers at higher rates than white employers.<sup>69</sup> In 2021, Detroit had 716 Black-owned businesses with at least \$1,000 in annual receipts (employer firms) and many more small Black-owned businesses likely exist, potentially up to 50,000. The Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago points out that if there were a proportional amount of Black-owned employer firms to residents, Detroit would have almost 5,000 additional businesses (see figure 5). The average revenue of Black-owned employer firms is \$1.38 million whereas the average revenue for other employer firms is almost 8 times higher.<sup>70</sup>

Non-Black-owned firms also tend to have significantly more employees and much better pay. As smaller businesses tend to have lower capacity, less capital access, and higher failure rates, the high number of Black-owned small businesses are subject to high risk.<sup>71</sup> Detroit Future City reports that if access to capital was equitable between businesses in Detroit and those in the broader region, Detroit businesses would have \$90 million more to work with.<sup>72</sup>

Covid-19 showcased additional disparities between businesses, as Black businesses received Paycheck Protection Plan funding at lower rates and in lower amounts than businesses owned by others. A 2021 Brookings study recommended the following measures to reduce covid-19 related racial disparities in the city: equitable PPP funding; hazard pay to essential workers; and providing a living wage.<sup>73</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The broad story of Black workers in Detroit is one of disparities, including lower wages, more low-opportunity jobs, and higher rates of unemployment as compared to white workers in the city, and this story has only been reinforced by the effects of the covid-19 pandemic. These disparities alongside the potential economic benefits to Black workers and the city of Detroit as a whole if these disparities were removed showcase the opportunity for the Detroit Black Worker Center to contribute to rectifying these inequities.

## Appendix: Data Sources

Given that the Detroit Black Worker Center will be designing and implementing its own data tracking system, the following summary of data sources is intended as a helpful starting place for DWBC leadership and staff. While the raw data linked to here was not analyzed for this memo due to time constraints, the sources referenced utilized all of the below sources in their reports and articles.

### Primary data sources

The following sources come from the Census Bureau. Many of the links below lead to IPUMS, a platform that allows for pulling Census data including anonymized microdata.

- American Community Survey provides worker data and allows for working down to race and neighborhood levels.
  - [Tabular data](#)
  - [Microdata](#)
- [The Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) provides employer and labor data..
- [Current Population Survey](#) provides monthly data, so is more current than the above Census resources, however, it has a smaller sample size and can be difficult to use for local analysis.

[The Detroit Metropolitan Area Communities Study \(DMACS\)](#) is a survey regularly conducted by the University of Michigan to capture demographic, employment, wage data and more in addition to opinion data on Detroit residents' priorities and perspectives. Given the city-level specificity and focus of DMACS data, it may prove quite useful to DBWC.

### Secondary sources

- Detroit Future City has a few comprehensive reports on race and workers, suggesting that they may be a useful partner to coordinate with or at a minimum follow for access to data.
- A range of nonprofits and think tanks from across the country have researched and written on Detroit, as quoted in this memo and shared in the accompanying research resource library.
- In addition, academic papers provided collected data on specific subtopics and newspaper articles from local papers summarized the data from research studies in helpful ways.

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<sup>1</sup> Migration has Been a Thorn in the Historical Story of Detroit's Black Population. (2021, February 18). *Detroit Is It*. <https://detroitisit.com/migration-detroits-black-population-history/>

<sup>2</sup> *Transit History of the Detroit Region*. (2009). Michigan House of Representatives Intergovernmental and Regional Affairs Committee. <https://legislature.mi.gov/documents/2009-2010/CommitteeDocuments/House/Intergovernmental%20and%20Regional%20Affairs/Testimony/Committee13-3-31-2009.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Rummel, J. (2010, March 1). Black history, labor history intertwined in Detroit. *People's World*. <https://www.peoplesworld.org/article/black-history-labor-history-intertwined-in-detroit/>

<sup>4</sup> Migration has Been a Thorn in the Historical Story of Detroit's Black Population. (2021, February 18).

<sup>5</sup> Rummel, J. (2010, March 1).

<sup>6</sup> Nosti, A. C. (Fall 2016). "We are Americans, too:" Interracial Relations in Detroit's Postwar Auto Industry. *The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College*.

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- <sup>7</sup> *Growing Detroit's African-American Middle Class: The Opportunity for a Prosperous Detroit*. (2019). Detroit Future City. <https://detroitfuturecity.com/middleclassreport/>
- <sup>8</sup> Farley, R. (2022). Chocolate City, Vanilla Suburbs Revisited: The Racial Integration of Detroit's Suburbs. *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race*, 19(1), 1–29. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1742058X21000266>
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- <sup>15</sup> AlHajal, K. (2016, May 20). Denver knocks Detroit off list of 20 most populous U.S. cities. *Mlive*. [https://www.mlive.com/news/detroit/2016/05/denver\\_knocks\\_detroit\\_off\\_list.html](https://www.mlive.com/news/detroit/2016/05/denver_knocks_detroit_off_list.html)
- <sup>16</sup> Kolesnikova, N. A., & Yang, L. (2010, July 1). *A Bleak 30 Years for Black Men: Economic Progress Was Slim in Urban America*. Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. <https://www.stlouisfed.org/publications/regional-economist/july-2010/a-bleak-30-years-for-black-men-economic-progress-was-slim-in-urban-america>
- <sup>17</sup> Farley, R. (2015). The Bankruptcy of Detroit: What Role did Race Play? *City & Community*, 14(2), 118–137. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cico.12106>
- <sup>18</sup> Kolesnikova, N. A., & Yang, L. (2010, July 1).
- <sup>19</sup> Farley, R. (2015).
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>21</sup> Wilkinson, M. (2016, December 6). Black flight to suburbs masks lingering segregation in metro Detroit. *Bridge Michigan*. <https://www.bridgemi.com/urban-affairs/black-flight-suburbs-masks-lingering-segregation-metro-detroit-0>
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- <sup>25</sup> *Growing Detroit's African-American Middle Class: The Opportunity for a Prosperous Detroit*. (2019).
- <sup>26</sup> Farley, R. (2022).
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- <sup>50</sup> Note: The source for this data uses the category “BIPOC” rather than including numbers for Black workers specifically, which is why the term is utilized only in this paragraph of the memo.
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