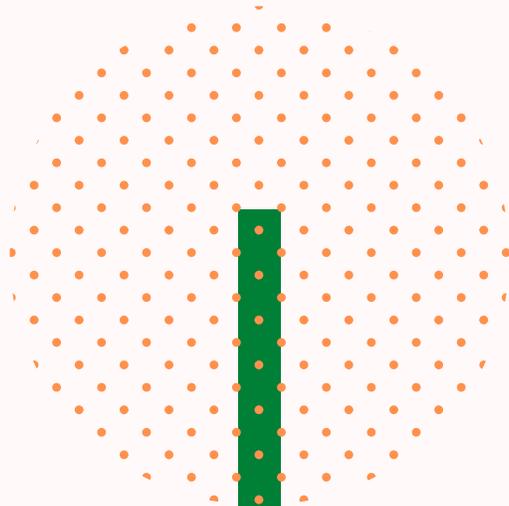


# TRUST BLACK WOMEN: INTERSECTION OF FOOD & HOUSING IN PITTSBURGH

JANIAH MILLER



# INTRODUCTION

Living in a healthy community is a key predictor of life outcomes -- addressing housing and food insecurity is critical in this effort. Examining the connection between housing instability and food are topics that are not commonly connected when doing studies. It is pertinent to connect the two as previous research has found many negative consequences of food insecurity for families and households, but this has not been examined in connection to housing instability. Examining the intersection of food and housing insecurity is critical as they are basic needs for every individual. The clearest obstacle to meeting both needs is poverty. This report examines the intersection of housing and food insecurity as having the most direct impact on Black women with the intention of providing more collaboration across sectors with context from the perspective that this demographic has relating to their role in movement building to address these challenges by using data coupled with direct quotes from the focus group. To examine the impact, a focus group of Black women in Pittsburgh discussed the intersection of food and housing insecurity, their direct causes, and policy recommendations on how to improve these challenges within the community through cross-sector collaboration. While discussing the intersection of these two main themes, more subthemes emerged as they began to dive deeper into the discussion, more specifically around motherhood and youth engagement as this is a central component to how they approach their work.

Throughout the paper there will be direct quotes from focus group participants that are woven into research to further highlight this discussion that aimed to center the voices of Black women. There is a need for cross-sector partnerships in the community that begin with ideas from residents and neighborhood organizations on how to address challenges that remove barriers with the goal of building more inclusive communities. The biggest barrier to addressing these challenges is mobilizing the public and political will to craft and implement remedies necessary for a more just future. This is critical to rectifying the years of unjust policies that continue to impact families. Regardless of the political will there is the community will that continue to advocate for these challenges. This report is a qualitative analysis which allows for policymakers to provide insight on which solutions to target and develop based on the disaggregation of data to ensure more equitable access while applying a racial equity lens. This was done through directly engaging individuals who are disproportionately impacted by these challenges since they are often left out of decision making processes. This analysis uses an intersectional while utilizing the data and direct feedback from Black women in implementation spaces. This allows for a deeper connection to understanding how to address complex issues through a racial equity lens.

# OVERVIEW OF FOCUS GROUP

The individuals who participated are leading efforts across the Greater Pittsburgh region; they are experts in their field and experience. There are existing efforts afoot in our region—Pittsburgh Food Policy Council (PFPC) is not trying to recreate any wheel, but rather to learn and inform particularly as we support collective impact in food systems. The intended outcomes for this focus group is to create a Hunger Free Community Report that informs PFPC/GPFAP work, share information among participants and align networks/efforts in addressing these challenges.

During the focus group, Black women were centered in the discussion as they are generally disproportionately impacted by these issues at a larger rate than other races/ethnicities. This provided for a unique opportunity to bring decision-makers together to discuss how their lived experiences impact the lens in which they do their work, as well as how to create direct change. Often, many reports do not lead to direct policy implementation or these advances are met with legal hurdles.

This focus group was intended to create a space for discussion that focused on Black women in these workspaces to further understand the connection between policy implementation and community organizing. A lot of the work being done in communities overlaps. The discussion allowed for a deeper understanding of how current efforts can be further supported, as well as connecting commonalities in work while expanding their network.

This allows for deeper connection to the work individuals on this call are doing to build partnerships that strengthen community connections to implement and engage in efforts already happening. The guiding discussion themes for the focus group were: 1) housing insecurity, 2) food insecurity, 3) motherhood/youth engagement and 4) policy implementation. The third discussion theme was intentionally connected as motherhood and youth engagement work hand in hand with one another because often the work of Black women can be informed by motherhood or aiming to create more opportunities for the next generation to be successful. This was a recurring suggestion and theme both prior to the focus group and during the discussion. Ultimately, the goal was to facilitate a space that could continually be used to discuss implementation processes. This can be continued through forming a committee or working group that is facilitated by Black women who are staff within the organization, steering committee members or community leaders. It is critical that these discussions are led by someone who is a Black woman as they have lived experience. This allows for more authentic dialogue as well as a space that is empowering without white gaze. Otherwise the discussions could be viewed as performative.

My positionality for this report was to intentionally create this space as it is critical that Black women lead discussions that allow for them to be centered in topics that disproportionately impact them. Black women are often left out of discussions or employment opportunities in which these decisions are made. This leads to lackluster policy implementation advancement. Until all policy intentionally highlights these disparities, inequities will continue to happen across the board in decision-making spaces. There can be an understanding that bringing public administrators with lived experience to the table to have a deeper conversation about the issues at large while discussing barriers to implementation can increase momentum and lead to direct change in equity minded practices.

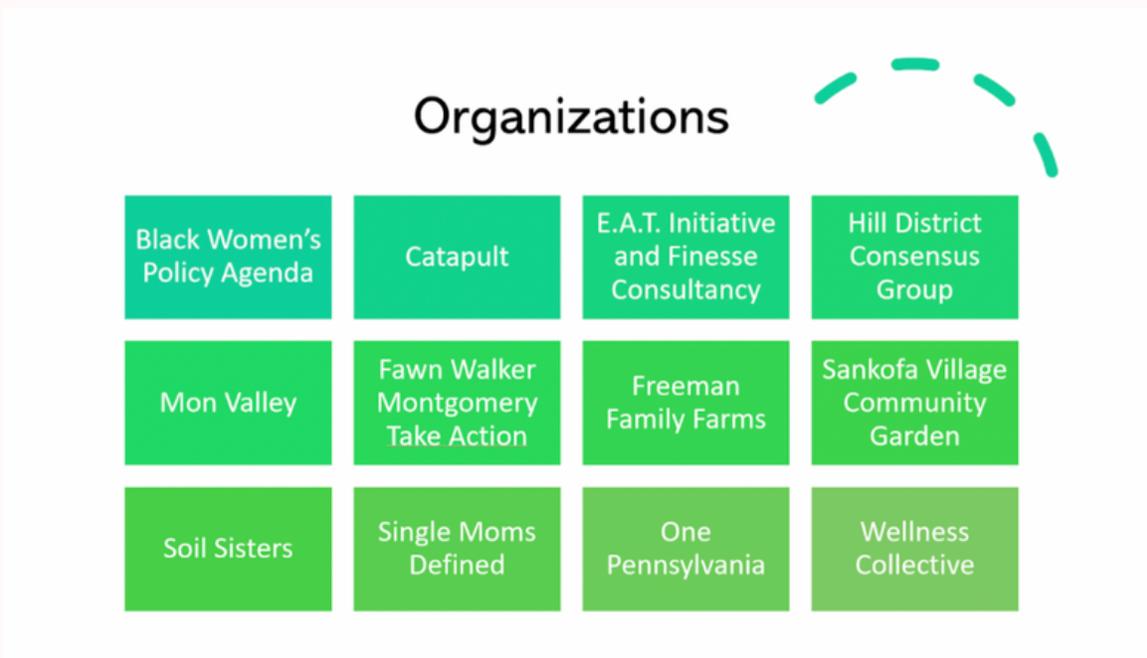
The focus group engaged many individuals across the Pittsburgh community. The overall representation of the focus group included 11 neighborhoods within Pittsburgh. There was representation from 15 nonprofit organizations at the focus group.



Not-for-profit organizations take on numerous duties that for profit organizations do not. Accordingly, they are inclined to search out help and organizations inside their networks, focusing on commitment. Before a nonprofit with limited resources starts looking for assets, associations and other assistance, it should show that it is additionally able to be a useful local area ally and is an association that merits supporting. This should be possible by first engaging the charitable locally, helping in existing regions where the objectives line up with those of the philanthropic. Making these connections won't occur rapidly and requires a ton of proceeds with exertion however will help guarantee the achievement of the association over the long run. Prior to this focus group there were six participants who had not previously directly engaged with PFPC but engaged with a staff member. The new individuals who engaged with the council were a plus sign as a goal of the organization is to expand its reach to maximize engagement in the community to ensure the implementation process of their efforts is successful.



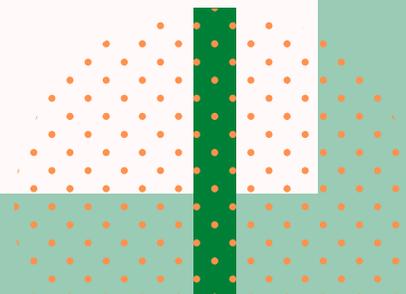
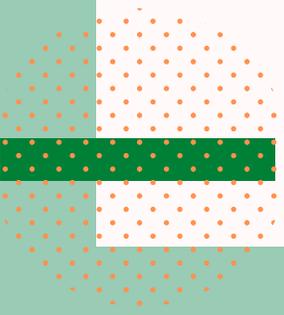
Below is a list of organizations who participated in the focus group. These organizations are all Black-led, and mainly being run by Black women.



While doing this work, it is important to understand the need for engagement with Black-led organizations. A participant noted, “they’re trying to erase Black people. We must stick together as Black people, as women. It’s a sandbox scenario—white people want us to play, but we can’t touch their toys.”



Although this work cannot be siloed, organizations must do more to actively engage the individuals they are seeking to serve as their lived experiences are valuable to how they go about making decisions in the work that they do. When defining racial equity, Black team members must be included in the decision-making process to ensure that there are more just outcomes. This allows for the narrative to be better framed around communities that nonprofit leadership often claims to support. This holds them accountable for what they say which plays a major role in the work that is being done. This further allows for them to be responsible for the work they are producing while ensuring they are not reinforcing any negative stereotypes that communities are trying to overcome. In this project it was essential to include Black-led nonprofit leaders to have an authentic discussion. This allowed for the PFPC to create deeper connections within their community partnerships while creating more momentum around the GFPAP. It should be a priority for white-led nonprofits to engage marginalized communities as a central component of their development as an organization while incorporating these individuals within the decision-making process, especially because they get the most grant funding. Another participant said, “Where are they spending this money? We’re struggling, fighting other Black organizations. We must call out all complicit individuals.” It is important to note each community is different which makes it critical to be aware of the unique assets and challenges while addressing their needs authentically with providing funding opportunities to bring more work and bring individuals to the table. Ultimately, in achieving racial equity, every employee needs foundational knowledge of the challenges Black communities face that are rooted in racism; and their explicit commitment to racial equity needs as an accountability measure.



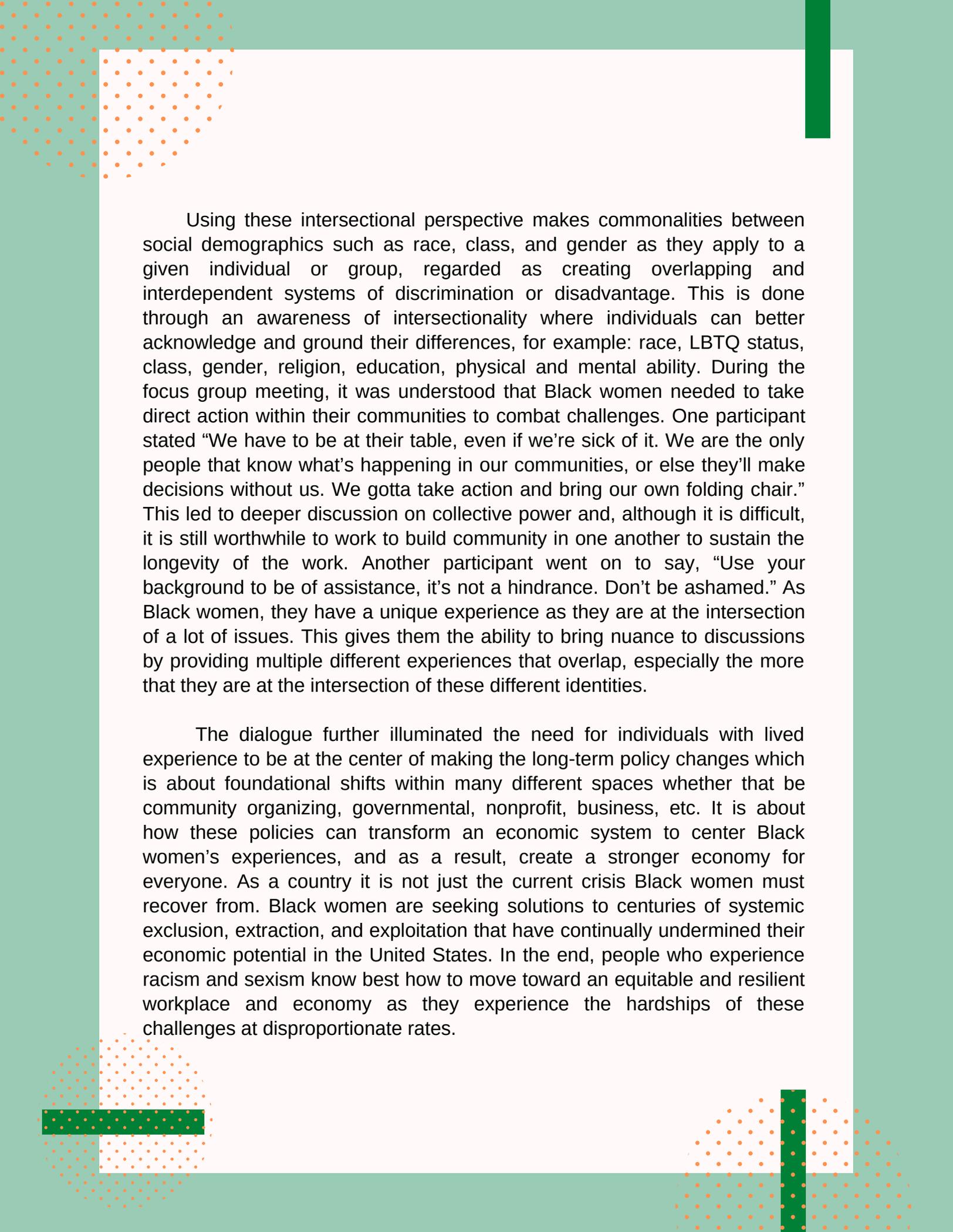
# THE IMPORTANCE OF CENTERING BLACK WOMEN IN POLICY DISCUSSIONS

Although Black women have reliably been pioneers for social change they are frequently relegated to the margins. Research shows that Black women are regularly more averse to be related with the idea of the "typical lady" and are seen as more like Black men than to white ladies, which may prompt some antiracist and women's activist developments neglecting to advocate for the privileges of Black ladies. The under-differentiation of Black women from Black men may help clarify why Black women face comparative paces of racial inconsistencies in rush hour gridlock stops and captures, however hostile to bigoted developments regularly center around Black men in the battle against police mercilessness. Past research has discovered that Blackness is related with manliness, prompting mistakes when cateogrizng Black womens sex or perceiving what Black womens face. The key regularly begins with tuning in to Black women about their interests and what their requirements are and afterward conveying in like manner.

"Black women and femmes keep developing radical ideas about social transformation, wrestling with the ways anti-Blackness manifests in areas such as the criminal justice system, health care, news media and popular culture, and tirelessly amplifying the experiences of Black women, girls and femmes. But even as our ideas are co-opted, their victimization remains on the margins. What will it take for folks to not use our ideas and strategies without crediting us or centering injustices against us? Should Black women, girls and femmes give up on expecting anyone other than us to care? Is solidarity even a meaningful goal if folks continuously fail to cite our labor and center our marginalization?"

By making policy and political choices through the lens of "Black women best," the United States can begin not only to rectify its racist and sexist economic structures, but to cultivate an economy in which all people have power, security, dignity, and prosperity.

"Black feminists have been saying from the beginning that when humanity becomes serious about the freedom of Black women, humanity becomes serious about the freedom of humanity." -Dr. Ibram X. Kendi, How to Be an Antiracist



Using these intersectional perspective makes commonalities between social demographics such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage. This is done through an awareness of intersectionality where individuals can better acknowledge and ground their differences, for example: race, LGBTQ status, class, gender, religion, education, physical and mental ability. During the focus group meeting, it was understood that Black women needed to take direct action within their communities to combat challenges. One participant stated “We have to be at their table, even if we’re sick of it. We are the only people that know what’s happening in our communities, or else they’ll make decisions without us. We gotta take action and bring our own folding chair.” This led to deeper discussion on collective power and, although it is difficult, it is still worthwhile to work to build community in one another to sustain the longevity of the work. Another participant went on to say, “Use your background to be of assistance, it’s not a hindrance. Don’t be ashamed.” As Black women, they have a unique experience as they are at the intersection of a lot of issues. This gives them the ability to bring nuance to discussions by providing multiple different experiences that overlap, especially the more that they are at the intersection of these different identities.

The dialogue further illuminated the need for individuals with lived experience to be at the center of making the long-term policy changes which is about foundational shifts within many different spaces whether that be community organizing, governmental, nonprofit, business, etc. It is about how these policies can transform an economic system to center Black women’s experiences, and as a result, create a stronger economy for everyone. As a country it is not just the current crisis Black women must recover from. Black women are seeking solutions to centuries of systemic exclusion, extraction, and exploitation that have continually undermined their economic potential in the United States. In the end, people who experience racism and sexism know best how to move toward an equitable and resilient workplace and economy as they experience the hardships of these challenges at disproportionate rates.

# FRAMING HOUSING JUSTICE MOVEMENT THROUGH BLACK WOMENS' PERSPECTIVES

The housing crisis didn't occur coincidentally - it is the primary culprit behind the enormous racial wealth gap among Black and white families in the U.S (CITE). The most ambitious campaign to come from the Civil Rights movement was the Chicago Freedom Movement (otherwise called the Chicago Open Housing Movement). The Chicago Freedom Movement went on for longer than a year and at last enlivened the 1968 Fair Housing Act.

In the Northeast, a smaller, grassroots development gained momentum. It was led by Dorothy Mae Richardson, a resident of the Central North Side of Pittsburgh, who began organizing around housing issues after realizing the difficulty of finding quality housing choices. This realization was made after she assisted a visually impaired African American couple with their quest for a reasonable home. Richardson framed a gathering called Citizens Against Slum Housing (CASH), which put focus on neighborhood landowners to make a superior showing by keeping up their properties.

With this momentum, CASH drove the charge for new housing projects and stricter code implementation and afterward broadened their concentration to incorporate the issue of homeownership. The Black women who founded CASH transformed their work into the Neighborhood Housing Services (NHS), an association that "amassed a \$1 million high-hazard rotating advance for homeownership and home fixes." The NHS model brought about a large number of Black families approaching low-premium home buy and fix credits. Surprisingly, all of Dorothy Mae Richardson's work to make CASH and the NHS originated before the government Community Reinvestment Act, which was placed into law in 1977. Her diligent effort and commitment to separating racial hindrances to quality lodging and homeownership motivated the establishment of NeighborWorks America.

In the years that followed, in a public-partnership with 16 financial institutions, NHS successfully secured a \$1 million high-risk revolving loan to fuel homeownership and home repairs, an effort that is said to have been the blueprint for the Community Reinvestment Act. Richardson's work with the NHS would eventually lay the groundwork for **NeighborWorks America**, an organization that works to "create opportunities for people to live in affordable homes, improve their lives and strengthen their communities." She once stated, "I believe people get their roots down when they own their own houses.... take pride in them. That, in turn, is good for the whole city." She is known to many as the "Pioneer of Community-Based Development" that was women-led.

The fight for housing equity has been a long hard fought battle that persists today. There are several organizations led by Black women that are in the fight for housing justice. Moms 4 Housing, organized by a group of Black mothers, are uniting mothers, neighbors and friends to reclaim housing for the Oakland, CA community from the big banks and real estate speculators. They formed as a collective of mothers looking to feel less alone in their struggle. Their ultimate goal is to reclaim housing for the community from speculators and profiteers because they claim everyone deserves a "safe and dignified place to live." Black Women Build - Baltimore is a homeownership and wealth building initiative that trains Black women in carpentry, electrical, and plumbing by restoring vacant and deteriorated houses in West Baltimore.

The central government could fill a significant hole by giving extra and more focus on assets. Government support for moderate lodging has declined in the course of recent many years, such countless states have stepped in to grow access through neighborhood motivators.

The support of the federal government has declined over the past two decades which makes affordable housing options limited if local governments are not pushing to expand these resources. If additional funding was provided by the federal government a major gap could be filled by providing additional and more targeted resources. When addressing this challenge there must be a push in advocating for antiracist housing and land use policies at the local, state and federal levels. There are many policies that can bridge the gap to advance racial equity.

# DEFINING HOUSING INSECURITY FOR BIPOC WOMEN

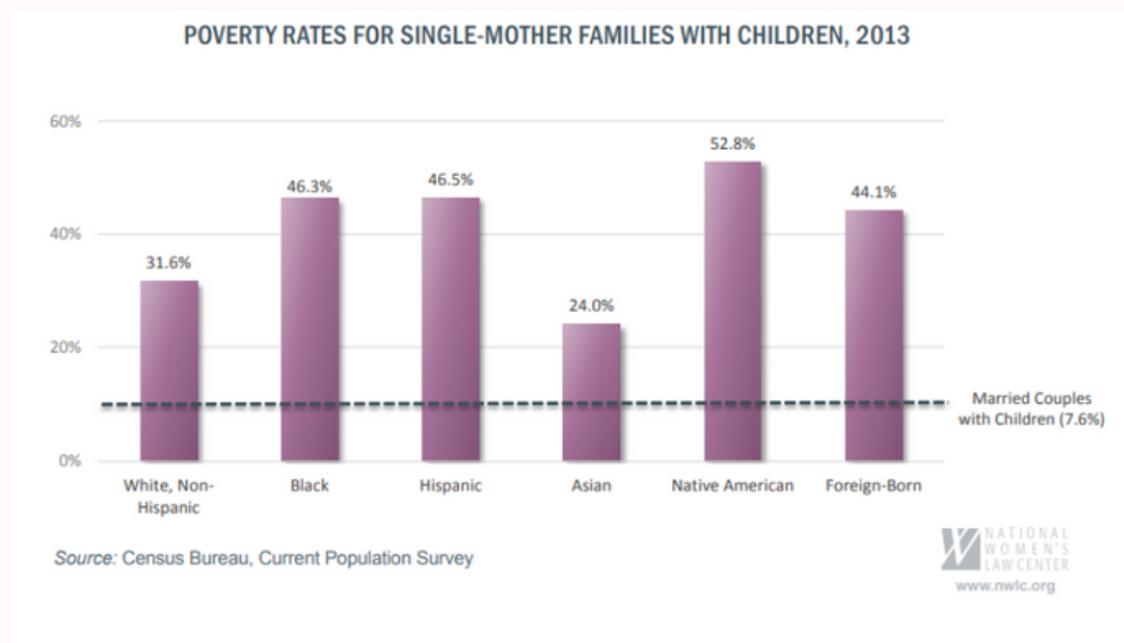
Centering racial equity in housing discussions is key to solving housing insecurity. One way this can be done is through disaggregated data in research that further allows for programs and policies to be accessed in a way that would not be if it were to be generalized. It allows for deeper determination of how Black, Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) are impacted compared to the majority. When data is disaggregated in this way it generally indicates that BIPOC individuals are disproportionately impacted by housing insecurity. Analyzing data in this way allows for decision makers to evaluate whether a law, regulation, or practice is helping reduce racial inequities or perpetuating them. The value of applying a racial equity lens to housing policy analysis pushes for deeper value in understanding eviction, socioeconomic mobility, education, health, food and so many other factors that intersect with one another while not allowing this challenge to be siloed to develop targeted solutions to ensure more equitable outcomes.

Viewing housing a public good rather than a commodity is critical in advancing housing equity. The current system in place has created a network of laws and regulations which reinforce a housing system rooted in racialized capitalism. This challenge can be directly attributed as a consequence of the decisions that policymakers and corporate interests determined to profit from housing rather than people, and by a government gentrifying neighborhoods rather than building affordable housing.

To reimagine housing as a public good, the market should not dictate where people can live, how much they'll pay, and if they can access opportunity. When addressing this issue it is critical to push for transformative change because the current housing system does not work.

Individuals in positions to make decisions must be willing to do the work to make safe, healthy, and affordable housing a human right. Ultimately, turning this vision into a reality requires a shift in the national mindset.

An individual who is low-income has to uproot their entire life to live in housing that is affordable. Single mothers and those who do not make at least 40 times their rent often bounce between several homes with no luck of finding stability. There are many barriers beyond having several months' worth of rent. This is something property managers can require up front prior to moving in. Another big hurdle is not having credit or a poor credit score. Having children can result in landlords coming under more intense scrutiny. For example, they can test positive for lead poisoning.



Although women in high-poverty neighborhoods are more likely to work than men, their wages are often lower than the wages of working men from these neighborhoods (CITE, 2). “In disadvantaged neighborhoods, eviction is to women what incarceration is to men: incarceration locks men up, while evictions lock women out (Desmond, 2014).” Low-income women are evicted at much higher rates than men for varied reasons. One of the biggest reasons is linked to lower wages and children. Although this is a significant reason there is lack of discussion on the gender dynamics between male landlords and female tenants.

Evictions can be the equivalent of a prison record due to the stigma it carries. It also can make it hard to get affordable housing. When an individual loses their home, they also lose their belongings, often the only assets they have. It can be extremely difficult to find stable housing after being evicted which then causes continual hardship. A lot of landlords will only rent to individuals who don't have an eviction history (CITE, 2). Eviction and conviction are used in a twinned process working to propagate economic disadvantage in the inner city (CITE,3). Therefore, poor Black men are locked up while poor Black women are locked out. There is a need for more research to understand the connection to racism and poverty. A lot of efforts that monitor and reduce housing discrimination have been almost wholly concentrated on getting in, not getting (put) out of housing.

When addressing these challenges zeroing in on explicit people who are excessively unprotected by current lodging strategy are ladies who are poor or close to poor, veterans, once in the past detained individuals, and sex nonconforming youth. 3/4 of families living openly lodging advancements are female-headed, as are 3/4 of families getting Section 8 Project-Based Rental Assistance. A bewildering 83 percent of families taking an interest in the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program are driven by ladies. Critical extents of these female-headed families incorporate kids.

The National Women's Law Center (NWLC) indicates women live in poverty rates higher than men: In 2013, 14.5% of grown-up ladies lived in destitution, contrasted with 11% of grown-up men; and simply more than 6% of grown-up ladies lived in outrageous neediness, contrasted with just shy of 5% of grown-up men. Right around 60% of helpless youngsters lived in families headed by ladies; and very nearly 40% of female-headed families with kids were poor, contrasted with around 20% of male-headed families with kids. One reason for these holes is that word related isolation actually drives huge quantities of ladies into low-paying homegrown, medical care and neighborliness occupations. As per the NWLC report, despite the fact that ladies make up roughly 50% of the public labor force, they make 60% out of the lowest pay permitted by law labor force and a mind-boggling 73% of the "tipped" labor force (which acquires the government the lowest pay permitted by law for such specialists, which is just \$2.13 each prior hour tips). (Note that everyday work at the current government, the lowest pay permitted by law of \$7.25 yields \$15,080 yearly, simply under the current neediness edge for a single parent with one kid.)

## Black women are most at risk of eviction

Black women are twice as likely as White men and women to say they are behind on rent during the pandemic.

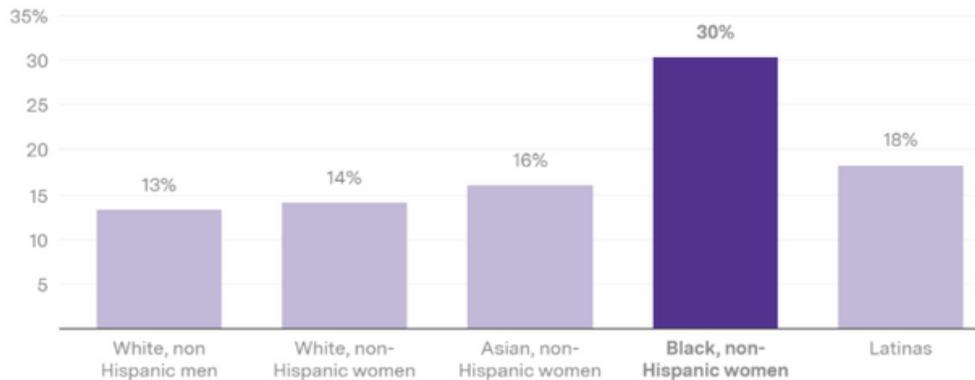
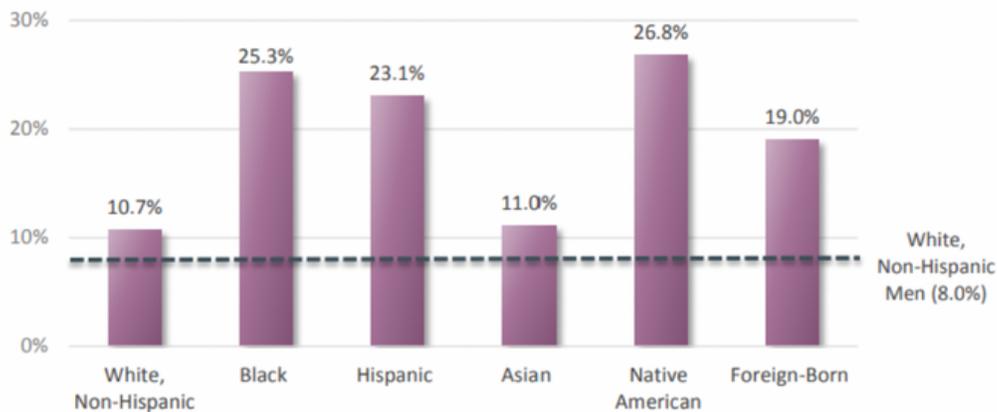


Chart: Chabeli Carrazana · Source: [National Women's Law Center analysis of U.S. Census data](#)

## POVERTY RATES FOR WOMEN, 2013



Source: Census Bureau, Current Population Survey

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Lodging segregation is another challenge to women – particularly moms with children – having the option to discover the lodging they need. Moderate units may stay past their span since reasonable lodging laws are not reliably implemented, and property managers have substantiated themselves careful about female-headed families because of generalizations that incorporate "lethargic" government assistance beneficiaries; helpless maids; solo, dangerous youngsters; and male companions and family members that get involved in actual fights and take part in unlawful movement (e.g., drug managing). Such generalizations are impacting everything in the lodging segregation that BIPOC face when trying to lease or purchase homes, as a recent report by the Department of Housing and Urban Development appeared.

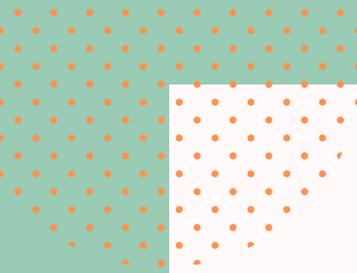
# DEFINING FOOD INSECURITY FOR BLACK WOMEN

Food touches everything and is never just food: it is a way of getting at something else: who we are, who we have been, and who we want to be. Above all, food marks social differences, boundaries, bonds and contradictions.” Although food has a major impact on every aspect of an individual's life there are 23.5 million Americans currently living in food deserts, urban and rural communities with no access or severely limited regular access to healthy and affordable food. Food deserts can be defined as neighborhood blocks that are more distant from grocery stores than other blocks within a city. Often in these neighborhoods fast food restaurants or corner stores that have limited healthy food options are available. In discourse individuals need to move away from language such as food deserts but really call it what it is -- food apartheid. “The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) reports that 39.4 million Americans live in communities where it is far simpler for residents to purchase grape soft drinks rather than a bag of grapes” (CITE) This issue impacts residents of both metropolitan and rustic regions.

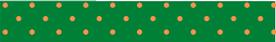
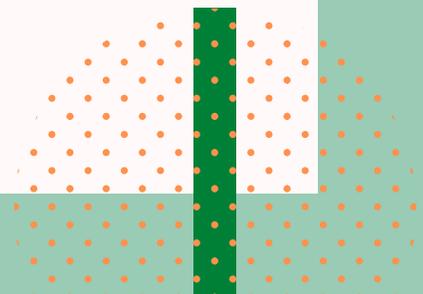
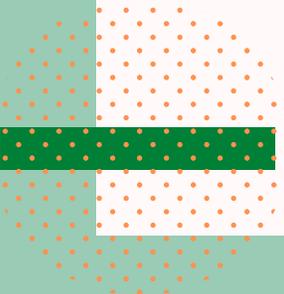
The challenge of healthy food access is notably persistent for those living in communities of color -- the very same communities that are quickly growing in number and population share. By 2044, a majority of Americans will be people of color. According to the 2012 study, *Searching for Markets: The Geography of Inequitable Access to Supermarkets in the United States*, African-Americans are 2.49 times and Latinos are 1.38 times more likely than Whites to live in neighborhoods without access to a full-service grocery store. Further, families living in a low-income block group are 2.28 times more likely to travel a greater distance to shop at a grocery store or supermarket than middle-income households (6).

Black women are often on the frontline of the battle for food justice in their communities – deriving power from alternatives to the food system has a strong history in Black communities because the food system was not designed to meet their needs. Community food work can re-inscribe a woman's role as caretaker, but it does much more than that. It is a portal into all kinds of activism. Although Black women can be seen at the forefront of these efforts, they have to counter racialized stereotypes of them being a mammy by repositioning their connection to food as something cathartic and as a form of self-care. One focus group said, "Black women have had leadership roles all their lives," she says. "They just didn't know they had leadership roles." What the women learned about food in this process, they would teach to each other. They used to hold cooking demonstrations, chili cook-offs, and other events that built collective enthusiasm around good food. Women were also at the helm of the Black Panthers Free Breakfast program, established in 1969. Creating a temporary autonomous zone around the feeding of children, the Free Breakfast Program served Black Panther chapters nationwide and put pressure on the government to ultimately increase funding for children's food. Food work is women's work. The work of food justice for Black women is one of resistance and resilience that pushes for a more equitable food system which can be defined in different languages that is not rooted in capitalism.

The term "alternative food" can be used as an umbrella term to encompass the sentiment that the solutions to the problems of the industrial food system lie in some "alternative" form of food production, procurement, preservation, preparation, and/or consumption. The alternative form can be used in language such as "food justice" and "food sovereignty." Which would best describe a utopian alternative to the food scene that engages with race, class and gender since that typically does not. This framework allows for "communities to [exercise] their right to grow, sell, and eat [food that is] fresh, nutritious, affordable, culturally appropriate, and grown locally with care for the well-being of the land workers, and animals (CITE)." One of the biggest challenges to addressing food equity is that organizations do not allow individuals to have agency in developing food solutions. Black women can be seen at the helm of organizing around issues of food equity as they are often mobilized through their positions as mothers or their families or to the community. Although they are often in the frontline their efforts are often pushed to the side as white-led organizations have more access to visibility through increased grant funding opportunities.



During the 1960s Fannie Lou Hamer was a grassroots political organizer who fought for voting rights and Black political representation in Mississippi. Through her work, she supported the expansion of voting rights through articulating what Black empowerment means. She strengthened labor organizing through focusing on food insecurity. She once said, “she believed that if survival [was] the name of the game” then African Americans must work to see ways and means of channeling discontentment into creative and progressive change.” In 1969, her advocacy in addressing food instability through launching the Freedom Farm, which permitted her to get 40 acres of farmland in the Mississippi Delta to address the limit destitution and craving in Sunflower district. She saw food as the foundation of nearby Black independence and self-assurance. She once said, “I know what the pain of hunger is about. My family was some of the poorest people in the state of Mississippi... We were sharecroppers.” Hamer and other individuals she organized used food cooperatives to advance Black education. This cooperative included community gardens, a commercial kitchen, affordable housing and other resources designed to create a sustainable shared Black community. They can be an excellent strategy to advance economic opportunity for marginalized communities. Local area individuals frequently make these sorts of cooperatives in light of racial and social disparities. Food cooperative or co-op models can provide communities with locally-sourced, affordable, equitable, and ecologically-sound food. Community members often create these types of cooperatives in response to racial and cultural inequities by pulling together their resources to develop resilience in the food system. One participant from the focus group noted: “The land is in the black community, but white people are farming it.” Today, food co-ops do 2.5 times more business with local farms and producers than conventional food sources.



Nationwide, food insecurity disproportionately affects women; female-headed households, particularly those headed by women of color, are more likely to be food insecure. Historically, Black women have derived strength from their foodways. There is a strong history in Black communities in finding alternatives to the food system because it was not designed to meet their needs. Soul Fire Farm, an Afro-Indigenous centered community farm in upstate New York, explains the injustice in the food system as follows:

*“The food system is built upon land theft and genocide of indigenous people and the exploitation of Black and Brown labor. Black farmers currently operate around 1% of the nation’s farms, having lost over 12 million acres to USDA discrimination, racist violence, and legal trickery. 85% of the people working the land in the US are Latinx migrant workers, yet only 2.5% of farms are owned and operated by Latinxs. People of color are disproportionately likely to live under food apartheid and suffer from diabetes, heart disease, and other diet related illness. Labor laws continue to permit the exploitation of farm and food workers.”* The work, then, is to cultivate new systems and pathways to grow, produce, and distribute food justly and equitably, while simultaneously addressing the related aspects of food cultivation and distribution such as access to clean water, farming, and fair labor practices for workers (CITE).”

There is something salient about growing social movements centered around food issues, likely because, as many of the women put it, “we all need to eat.” Gender roles prescribe women to feed their families and communities, so it makes sense that the food activism of the last few decades has been sustained by women. Laura DeLind and Anne Ferguson picked up on this trend in their 1999 article titled, “Is This a Women’s Movement?” DeLind and Ferguson argue that the movement is indeed a women’s movement, but not necessarily a feminist movement, because women’s work in community food projects reinforces the socialization of women as caregivers. Other Black organizers discussed remembering the importance of food in their household growing up. “We celebrate through food,” she says. “My mom always cooked for every holiday because we didn’t have money for toys, money for anything, so she always cooked a lot of food.” Today, the food available in predominantly Black communities is often highly processed and unhealthy. Even when mothers do qualify for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), the grocery store that is accessible is often out of WIC-eligible items. Accessing food as a low-income individual can be difficult as transportation can be a challenge. This means that they likely have to get on the city bus and go to a grocery store in a wealthier neighborhood, forfeit items on my voucher or go to a local corner store which can have limited options, particularly ones that are healthier. A lot of the fight regarding food justice is rooted in regard to their family.

# THE INTERSECTION OF HOUSING AND FOOD

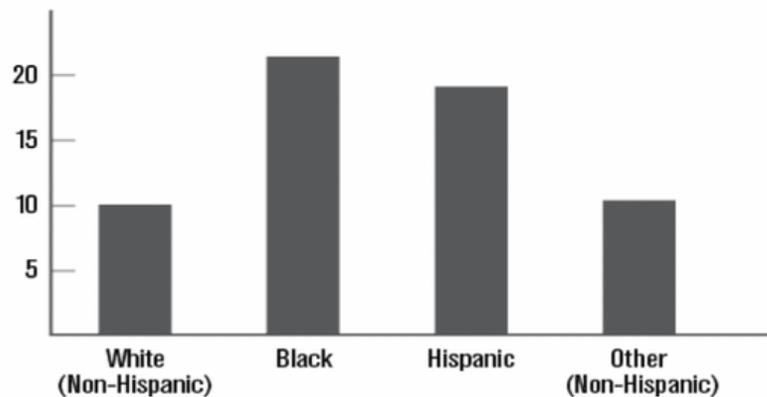
The intersection between housing instability and food access has an important connection that should be further explored to connect the complexity of these two issues. If a family is experiencing financial hardship, they are more likely to prioritize paying for their rent or mortgage to avoid facing eviction rather than purchasing food. Therefore, this leads to many families to rely on food pantries or other limited options for food that is healthy and affordable.

“A report commissioned by Feeding America shows that more than half of the 46.5 million clients that Feeding America serves make the difficult choice between paying for housing or food. This is even more evident when there is a decrease in income, such as job changes, job loss, or disability, and a lack of social services to fill the gap. Families grapple with meeting their immediate needs (food, transportation, childcare) while risking falling behind on rent or mortgage payments.”

Food insecurity is both a neighborhood and income challenge. Many low-income residents are subjected to live in underinvested neighborhoods that lack opportunities for the needed revitalization to maintain the area without it being gentrified. These are underinvested neighborhoods with perceived blight and a lot of vacancy. When neighborhoods lack accessibility with necessities they live further away from resources when they need them the most. These resources mean they lack access to good schools, healthcare providers, employment opportunities, and healthy, affordable food. Therefore, they will have more money to spend on food and other needed resources. A longitudinal study conducted showed families living in subsidized housing had lower odds of food insecurity than those on a waiting list for such housing. Having access to these resources are all connected to having stable affordable housing.

**FIGURE 3.5 HOUSEHOLD FOOD INSECURITY, 2015**

**Percentage of Households That Are Food-Insecure**



*Source: Household Food Security in the United States in 2015, U.S. Department of Agriculture*

The median Black American was farther behind their white counterpart in 2017 as they were in 2000 in terms of income, wealth, unemployment, earnings, the risk of incarceration, and many measures of health (CITE). This is a major issue for the Black community but progress toward equity for Black Americans has been halted. A lot of generational wealth was lost in the 2008 recession. Across the country, many families lost their homes.

Addressing housing inequity can also be connected to social determinants of health. Research has shown that income is increasingly linked to health. If an individual has a higher income, then their health outcome is better. This is likely because it increases one's ability to have access to healthier food. Some research concludes that a key part of the problem is "food deserts" – neighborhoods without supermarkets, mostly in low-income areas. A widely held theory maintains that those who live in food deserts are forced to shop at local convenience stores or corner stores, where it's hard to find healthy groceries.

When housing is in substandard condition it can cause pest infestation, lead paint, faulty plumbing, and overcrowding, this disproportionately impacts Black families. These poor living conditions lead to lifelong health problems in asthma, lead poisoning, heart disease, and neurological disorders. The likelihood that a Black home has severe physical problems is 1.7 times higher than a white home. These substandard living conditions disproportionately impact Black communities as they are exposed to these environmental pollutants at a higher rate. Living in communities further isolates at-risk populations from essential health resources. While in the focus group a participant comments, "It also encompasses medical apartheid and gentrification. Redevelopment will happen, but we need a voice at the table. It's colonization, and we need our own table." Therefore, this leads to continued trauma within the household, specifically around food.

# POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation process is about turning policy into practice. There is a gap between what is planned and what actually is implemented. When implementing policy there are three major theoretical models that are generally used. From there they are communicated from bottom up to entities that relate to the specific implementation who are charged with the technical, managerial, and administrative tasks of putting policy into practice.

Policy implementation processes are often one dimensional and lack nuance from multiple entities. Having individuals within the community who are in executive leadership, public administrative, and community organizing spaces allows for a robust dialogue that misses what typically goes wrong in implementation processes. Often individuals are on the ground doing the needed work to push for these efforts but they are often unpaid. This makes the efforts inconsistent and sometimes unsustainable because individuals also have to live. There are organizations working to push that organizing and/or volunteer work should be a paid role. Afua Atta-Mensah, the executive director of Community Voices Heard, an organization that fights for economic justice for all New Yorkers, wants to encourage people to turn their unpaid community organizing into a sustainable line of work that gives back to everyone. The executive director of that organization has led efforts to push the Black Women Survey which audits the experiences of Black women across New York state to figure out what their biggest political needs are and to turn those needs into civic action. Engaging groups of individuals that are marginalized allows for policy to be more reflective as well as centering them in the discussion. The survey that was mentioned above could be one tool in centering voices that are not typically heard like the focus group that PFPC facilitated. One participant stated, "I'm often the only Black person at the discussion in these political spaces. White people don't know how to talk or do things for Black people. It's fluff. So, I'm proving myself in these spaces to both Black elders and white people. It's also a trust and respect issue for elders and youth." This makes it all the more critical that individuals are not only brought to the table but are included in the processes in a meaningful way that is sustainable, so the work is not performative.



The Pittsburgh research called Trust Black Women: The Intersection of Food and Housing was grounded in qualitative analysis which can allow for policymakers to provide insight on which solutions to target and develop based on the disaggregation of data to ensure more equitable access while applying a racial equity lens. When doing this more robust policies can be created that otherwise would not be present in research because translators and advocacy organizations often do not apply a racial equity lens when analyzing these multifaceted issues. Below are examples from the Equitable Development: The Path to an All-in Pittsburgh report of what a city could do in addressing gentrification to provide more equitable housing opportunities that focus on low-income peoples:

1. Fund tenant organizing and resident leadership development. Tenant and resident leadership and organizing is foundational to ensuring those most at risk of being displaced know their rights and have a voice in how their neighborhoods change.
2. The city and developers should provide clear, widespread information about the development process and specific proposals in neighborhoods, so residents are informed and empowered to weigh in on proposals in their neighborhood.
3. Local foundations should create a tenant protection fund to support tenant advocacy and organizing to prevent displacement, engage in neighborhood planning, and ensure healthy habitable housing.
4. Community development groups should also implement strategies to empower residents to engage in the development process.

This list is not exhaustive of what a city could do but these several examples provide steps that one could take in addressing an issue relating to these. One participant stated that, “Mon Valley is a dumping ground for Pittsburgh. In many of these conversations, the transient population is ignored. The Black population is increasing outside the greater Pittsburgh area due to lack of affordable housing in Pittsburgh.” It is critical in policy implementation processes to set out a clear breakdown of how to solve such issues.



# PITTSBURGH FOCUS ON HOUSING AND FOOD INSECURITY

Pittsburgh Food Policy Council's (PFPC) mission "is to build a just, equitable and sustainable food system that supports our communities, economy, and environment." PFPC is a collective impact organization that believes large-scale social change comes from cross-sector coordination and not from the isolated intervention of an individual organization. When different organizations across the community are brought together to find a solution then sustainable change can happen more effectively. This allows for the much needed progress in communities to happen more efficiently through collaborating with nonprofits, governments, businesses, and the public through bringing them together to create collective impact. The Food Policy Council (FPC) typically consists of a group of representatives and stakeholders from many sectors of the food system that come together to examine how this system is operating and to develop recommendations on how to improve it through policy changes (CITE). Through the PFPC's efforts they created an initiative called, "The Greater Pittsburgh Food Action Plan" (GFPAP) is a community-centered approach to a policy roadmap and an action plan of strategies that prioritize healthy, affordable, and sustainable food for all. Food action plans seek to envision a regional food system rooted in collaborative, community-based decisions, that prioritize equity and supports the health of people, natural resources, and our economy. The goals of this project at to:

1. Enhance coordination and communication among existing food systems' resources and agencies;
2. Center the roles of equity, sustainable agriculture and environmental stewardship in a healthy food system;
3. Support a robust regional food economy that benefits all;
4. Improve food security and public health by increasing availability and accessibility of nutritious, high-quality, affordable and locally-sourced food;
5. Build community power based on the principle of food sovereignty for all residents.

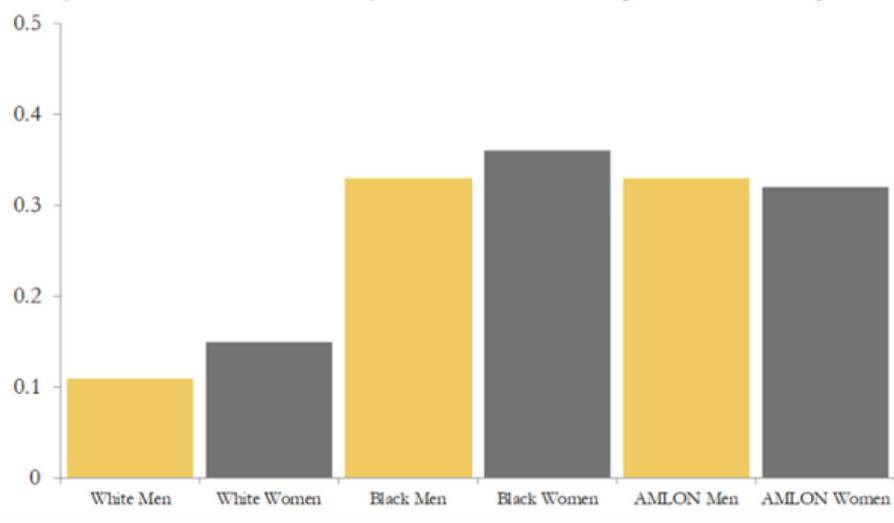
The GPFAP is a community-centered set of strategies that prioritize healthy, affordable, and sustainable food for all. The plan provides a comprehensive look at Allegheny County's food system and details recommendations for how it can be made more just, equitable, and sustainable. GPFAP is the culmination of two years of research, planning, and community engagement led by PFPC in collaboration with dozens of council member organizations and community partners. The Trust Black Women: The Intersection of Food & Housing focus group ties into the GPFAP plan as it is community-centered, particularly focusing on the Black community as they are often disproportionately impacted by these disparities. The recommendations from this focus group further reach the goals of the GPFAP through centering the roles of equity, supporting a regional food economy for all, improving food security, strengthening coordination between existing food systems and building a power base on the principle of food sovereignty for all. This focus group also allowed for a deeper strategy and director to implement the GPFAP.

Residents and community-based organizations like PFPC are working to create initiatives that center individuals living and working in distressed communities that are central to making the connection between housing and food that leads the discussion around solving those issues together as a reality.

Local residents are a critical component in being a part of dialogue where decisions are made in neighborhoods as they live there. Their knowledge can assist in advancing data, knowledge, and intelligence basic to planning arrangements that work. Inhabitants are additionally extraordinarily situated to be the specialists and proprietors of neighborhood change, changing issues into local area resources. Including experience inside networks that have been improved likewise uncovers the significance of local area possession and control of land just as credible local area commitment in the advancement interaction to guarantee that local area occupants and private ventures can remain in their neighborhoods as they improve.

In Pittsburgh, White and Black women are likely to live in poverty rather than their male counterparts. However, the racial differences are much larger than the gender distinctions.. Pittsburgh's Black women are twice as likely as White women to live in poverty. More than 33% of Pittsburgh's Black women live underneath the federal poverty line. To additionally comprehend these racial and sex differentiation, it is useful to analyze how poverty rates vary across different age demographics.

Proportion of the Population Living in Poverty



Pittsburgh's Black women have less favorable results than Black women in the majority of U.S. urban communities. In this city BIPOC live below the norm paces of gestational diabetes, gestational hypertension, gestational disease, and secondary school dropouts. Notwithstanding, for by far most of the results, Pittsburgh's Black women have lower decency rankings than most of the cities. These results include: fetal demise rates, strange conditions, inherent peculiarities, maternal mortality, passing rates among youthful grown-ups, grown-ups and more seasoned grown-ups, cardiovascular infections, malignancy, tobacco related passings, self destruction, manslaughter, neediness, youngster destitution, pay, work rates, extent out of workforce, extent breezing through cutting edge situation assessments, taking school affirmations tests, and references to the police by school authorities. Pittsburgh can be considered the most unacceptable city for Black women. Interventions should seek to improve life in the city by targeting these indicators to cultivate livability for this demographic.

To achieve Pittsburgh's goal to be a city that is livable for all residents, the city will need to address several of these areas for improvement. Recognizing that previous research has shown how several of these indicators are interconnected, we summarize where the city might focus attention to begin to address Pittsburgh's ongoing gender and racial inequality.

During the focus group for the research projects, several recommendations were suggested. These can be listed below as a direct reflection of the discussion in the group.

# RESEARCH SUPPORTING RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Increase the availability of quality, safe, affordable public housing - City of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County Health Departments and Housing Authorities
2. Ensure residents have access to clean, safe drinking water - Allegheny County Health Department, Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority (PSWA) and other water-sewer authorities
3. Revitalize existing corner stores with fresh, healthy products and safe infrastructure - City of Pittsburgh Dept. of Urban Agriculture & City Planning, Urban Redevelopment of Pittsburgh, Grow Pittsburgh
4. Rehabilitate existing structures to increase housing stock, contribution to tax rolls, and eliminate environmental hazards - City of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County Health Departments and Housing Authorities
5. Increase access to fresh, healthy foods by eliminating food deserts - City of Pittsburgh Dept. of Urban Agriculture & City Planning, URA
6. Focusing home economics is key with the recent changes in income, time management kids' online school, stretching meals, reduce utility use, self-care regarding emotional social, physical and spiritual health and wellbeing
7. The distance between good/affordable food and good/affordable housing
8. Co-op housing and community ownership

Although these recommendations are not reflective of everything that should be done to address these disparities it is a start, especially as these responses were directly pulled from Black women who are leaders within their organizations. It is critical that they be included in the decision-making processes when addressing such challenges as they are directly impacted by it as well as have lived experience.

# CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Shifting the narrative to move beyond these issues as an individual struggle, but recognizing it as one collective, will lead to a shift in the mindsets of individuals across the nation. These narratives are rooted through the lens of negative stereotypes and caricatures that villainize low-income people, particularly Black women. Having the opportunity to share one's story can be a politically freeing activity in knowing that you are not the only one experiencing isolation and inequity, as well as being brought to the table to make decisions that are implemented rather than being tokenized.

Black women are most affected by these issues and they are not represented at political discussions about policy and policy implementation. The challenges around food and housing must be addressed through a gendered and racial lens as they are multifaceted and overlap with one another. The intersection of food, housing, and poverty deeply affect black communities across the country due to structural racism. Black women are at the helm of the Black community as they are central to caregiving. As well as being central to historical organizing efforts that are still prevalent today when addressing these issues. The policies and recommendations listed above would benefit the community of Pittsburgh, as well as communities nationwide by directly addressing the multifaceted and intersectional challenges faced by Black Women and other marginalized groups. One participant stated that “we failed our young people. We must put boots on the ground for the youth. There is a dissociation with nature occurring in our community. When we do not speak up, we’re complicit” and “with young and old coming together--we can truly make a difference.”

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