PITTSBURGH'S DEPLORABLE BLACK LIVING CONDITIONS

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February 9, 2021

For more than 25 years, benchmarking studies have shown that black living conditions in the Pittsburgh area are among the worst in urban America. The major studies are summarized below.

The Bangs and Hong (1994) study, *Economic Benchmarks,* found that the city of Pittsburgh had the fourth highest black **poverty** rate (41%) and fifth highest black **unemployment** rate (19%) among the 50 most-populated cities. The authors found that Allegheny County had the fourth highest black poverty rate (36%) and fifth highest black unemployment rate (17%) among the 50 most-populated counties. The **black-white disparities** for these city and county measures were also among the highest in America, so it was not the case that blacks had poor living conditions here because everyone had poor conditions.

In a more detailed study of the 50 largest cities, *Black and White Economic Conditions in the City of Pittsburgh*, Bangs and Hong (1995) found that Pittsburgh had the:

- **Highest share** of black households with children that were female-headed (69%)
- **Highest rate** of black males age 25-54 not in the labor force (31%)
- **Third highest rate** of black females age 25-54 not in the labor force (35%)
- Third highest unemployment rate for black males age 16-19 (42%)
- Sixth highest unemployment rate for black females age 16-19 (40%)
- Fifth highest unemployment rate for black males age 25-54 (20%)
- Seventh highest unemployment rate for black females age 25-54 (14%)
- Second highest poverty rate for black children under age 18 (57%)
- Highest poverty rate for blacks age 18-64 (35%)
- 15th lowest homeownership rate for black householders under age 65

For each of these measures, Pittsburgh's black-white disparities were also among the highest in the set of cities. In addition, the authors found the **unemployment rate for black youth age 16-19 and poverty rates for blacks age 0-17 and 18-64 were much higher in 1989 than in 1979**.

In an update to the above studies, the *Black-White Benchmarks Reports* (Bangs, Alex, Hughes, and Shorter, 2004) found that among the 70 largest cities and 50 largest counties and metro regions, the Pittsburgh area had:

- Extremely high percentages of black elderly living alone (~55%), **black youth age 16-19 not in school and not in the labor force** (~17%), blacks age 0-17 and age 18-64 in **poverty** (~44% and ~28%), **black households with no motor vehicle** available (~44%)
- Extremely **low median earnings** for black male and female part-time workers (~$8,500 and ~$8,000 year) and median **value for black-owned homes** (~$49,500)

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More recently, the City of Pittsburgh's Gender Equity Commission report, *Pittsburgh's Inequality Across Gender and Race* (Howell, Goodkind, Jacobs, Branson and Miller, 2019), compared 90 cities and found that the following conditions in Pittsburgh were among the worst:

- **Black maternal death rate** (1.8/1000 pregnancies) and **black death rates** for males age 1-17 (1/1000 boys), women age 18-24 (1.6/1000), males and females age 25-64 (15/1000 and 7.8/1000), and males and females age 65-74 (76/1000 and 47/1000)
- Black male and female child **poverty** rates (63% and 55%) and poverty rate for black women age 25-64 (39%)
- **Unemployment** rate for black men age 25-64 (9%) and labor force participation rate for black men age 16 and over (47%) and black women age 16 and over (49%)
- The black male workforce in Pittsburgh is more concentrated in a small number of **occupations** than the black workforce in 99% of the cities
- **College attendance for black women** with a high school degree (>50%)
- Black boys and girls in public high schools who passed as least one **AP test** (0%)
- Black boys and girls in public high schools who took the **SAT or ACT** (7% and 11%)
- **Police referrals** for black boys and girls (5% each) in Pittsburgh's public schools

And last year the Center for Economic Development at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee (Levine, 2020) released a study comparing urban areas on racial inequality. The report, *The State of Black Milwaukee in National Perspective: Racial Inequality in the Nation's 50 Largest Metropolitan Areas,* found that **the Pittsburgh metro area was among the worst for**:

- **Black-white residential segregation index** (66)
- Black median annual household **income** ($33,121)
- Black household **income** as percentage of non-Hispanic white household income (50.6%)
- Black **poverty** rate (30%)
- Ratio of black poverty rate to white poverty rate (3.3)
- Blacks living in extreme poverty—less than 50% of poverty level (13%)
- Black children in poverty (45%)
- **Black households living in census tracts with a 40% or higher poverty rate (14%)**
- Black households with annual income of $100,000 or more (9.9%)
- Black male age and black female age 20-24 employment rates (58% and 59%)
- Black male age and black female age 25-54 employment rates (67% and 72%)
- Black youth age 16-24 not employed and not in school (21%)
- Black male and female median annual earnings adjusted for regional cost-of-living ($27,122 and $23,841)
- Black male and female workers earning over $40,000/year (19% and 15%)
- Blacks age 25 and over holding a college or advanced degree (20%)
- **Black males who were born in 1978-1983 and were incarcerated in 2010 (13%)**
- **Blacks age 15-64 incarcerated** in the central county of the metro area (2.3%)
- Black infant mortality in the central county of the metro area (13/1000 live births)
- **Black deaths by homicide** in the central county of the metro area (44/100,000 pop.)
- **Black deaths of despair** (drug abuse, alcohol abuse, or suicide) in the central county of the metro area (46/100,000 pop.)

Finally, national data for 2020 show that COVID has had devastating effects on blacks. For example, the national black age-adjusted death rate due to COVID is 3.6 times the white rate, and blacks have been hurt economically much more than whites.[2] We would expect no less harm among African Americans in the Pittsburgh area once more complete data are available.

The benchmarking studies above compared black conditions in Pittsburgh to black conditions in many other urban areas using a variety of indicators. The overall conclusion is irrefutable: a large part of the black population in the Pittsburgh area has had deplorable living conditions for many decades. Blacks in the Pittsburgh area continue to be extremely disadvantaged.

In terms of solutions, there are hundreds of actions that could be taken. For example, see the policy agenda in the *Vision for Black Lives*. This was produced by 170 black-led organizations in the nation and coordinated by the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL).[3]

I recommend that leaders and organizations in the Pittsburgh area start with the following two types of economic initiatives as well as policing/criminal justice reform:

1. The low employment, wages, and income of African Americans negatively affect all aspects of life, including crime and violence, education, housing, and family life. **Employers need to**: 1) end the segregation of African Americans in low-wage occupations and contract jobs, 2) increase minimum wages, 3) hire more African Americans in jobs paying over $40,000 and jobs paying over $100,000 a year, and 4) create thousands of quality jobs for African American youth each summer. One way to proceed is for the CEO of every major organization in the Pittsburgh area to form a committee of department heads to work continuously on designing, implementing, and evaluating initiatives.[4] These efforts would cover training, hiring, retaining, and promoting African American adults and youth and awarding prime contracts to African American-owned firms.

2. African American people know their needs best and how to address them. **Government agencies and foundations** should invest tens of millions of dollars each year in African American organizations so they can provide employment, income, food, education, healthcare, housing, and public safety services and assist with procuring income-support. This investment should include African American political, labor, and community entities that can obtain adequate responses from local, state, and national leaders by organizing, getting out the vote, and demanding change.

3. **Massive reform of criminal justice in the Pittsburgh area is needed.** High African American incarceration rates destroy lives, families, and communities. We need to end police targeting of African Americans for traffic stops, pedestrian stops, searches, and

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[2] https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/12/21/covid-19-economic-mobility-racial-justice-and-the-middle-class/
[3] For the Preamble to this document, see https://m4bl.org/policy-platforms/the-preamble/. For the M4BL 2020 Policy Platform, see https://m4bl.org/policy-platforms/. For other M4BL proposals, see https://m4bl.org/resources/.
[4] For the effectiveness of this strategy and others, see https://hbr.org/2016/07/why-diversity-programs-fail?cm_sp=Magazine%20Archive-_-Links-_-Current%20Issue.

arrests. Ban all consent searches and minimize probable cause searches. End arrests for low-level offenses. Use social workers for mental health, drug addiction, homelessness, and other behavioral problems. End pretrial detention and cash bail. End police use of algorithms, predictive policing, face and voice recognition software, and other data-driven techniques in relation to African Americans due to the racial bias involved. Reduce spending on police, jails and prisons, and other parts of the criminal justice system and invest the savings in the African American community.

If major changes aren't made in 2021, then all citizens and leaders must ask themselves **why African Americans should live here**. There are many urban areas in America with better African American conditions. Why shouldn't African American families, workers, and businesses leave? Why shouldn't high school graduates from here find good jobs in other urban areas or go to college in areas with better post-graduation opportunities?

References

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Current Education Data by Race in Pittsburgh
Ralph Bangs, PhD -- Feb. 23, 2021

Data from Pittsburgh Promise 2020 report https://pittsburghpromise.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/24290-Annual-Report-v14_spreads.pdf

% On-Time Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS) HS Graduation, 2019

Black	76
White	86
Asian	82
Latinx	64
Multiracial	83

Received Pittsburgh Promise 2008-2017

Black males	1200
Black females	1946
White males	1789
White females	2192

% of Promise recipients still enrolled or attained degree

Black males	55
Black females	66
White males	75
White females	81

In 2018 black males were 24% of PPS graduates but 14% of Pittsburgh Promise recipients. Since 2008 only 42% of PPS graduates received a Promise scholarship.

Data from A+ Schools 2020 Report on Pittsburgh Education
https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5d977b8beed3244415fe3f68/t/5fb29ae9327f2e4fadf0985f/1605540633134/A%2B+Schools_2020+Report+to+the+Community.pdf

PPS Enrollment Fall 2019 to March 13, 2020
63% low-income, 20% IEP
51% black, 32% white, 9% multi-ethnic
13% of teachers are black, 85% white

PPS students missing 20% or more of days: 5% grades K-8, 21% grades 9-12
PPS students missing 10-19% of days: 14% grades K-8, 25% grades 9-12

PPS K students missing 10% or more days: black = 30%, white = 10%
PPS 9th grade students missing 10% or more days: black = 57%, white = 32%

Black students were 79% of those suspended but 51% of enrollment; mostly IEP and low-income
In 2019 23% of white HS students passed an AP exam, 1% of black

PPS 2020-21 https://www.pghschools.org/Page/5075 Chronic absences-black 35%, white 15%

Bangs, DRAFT Feb. 2021. **Black-White Disparities in Arrests in the City of Pittsburgh**

Table 1. Black and White Male Arrests, City of Pittsburgh, 2017-2020

Year	Black Males Arrested	White Males Arrested	% of Black Male Pop. Arrested	% of White Male Pop. Arrested	Ratio of Black/White Male Arrest Rates
2017	5295	3256	16.0%	3.5%	4.5
2018	4899	2772	14.8%	3.0%	4.9
2019	5013	2567	15.1%	2.8%	5.4
2020	3883	1746	11.7%	1.9%	6.2

Table 2. Black and White Female Arrests, City of Pittsburgh, 2017-2020

Year	Black Females Arrested	White Females Arrested	% of Black Female Pop. Arrested	% of White Female Pop. Arrested	Ratio of Black/White Female Arrest Rates
2017	1731	1474	4.5%	1.5%	3.0
2018	1623	1235	4.3%	1.3%	3.4
2019	1709	1085	4.5%	1.1%	4.1
2020	1220	733	3.2%	0.7%	4.3

Table 3. Black and White Male Arrests, Age 19-29, City of Pittsburgh, 2017-2020

Year	Black Males Age 19-29 Arrested	White Males Age 19-29 Arrested	% of Black Male Age 19-29 Pop. Arrested	% of White Male Age 19-29 Pop. Arrested	Ratio of Black/White Male Age 19-29 Arrest Rates
2017	2124	1087	29.3%	4.5%	6.5
2018	1903	824	26.3%	3.4%	7.6
2019	1911	722	26.4%	3.0%	8.8
2020	1574	512	21.7%	2.1%	10.2

Table 4. Black and White Female Arrests, Age 19-29, City of Pittsburgh, 2017-2020

Year	Black Females Age 19-29 Arrested	White Females Age 19-29 Arrested	% of Black Female Age 19-29 Pop. Arrested	% of White Female Age 19-29 Pop. Arrested	Ratio of Black/White Female Age 19-29 Arrest Rates
2017	706	556	11.2%	2.7%	5.1
2018	633	430	10.0%	1.7%	5.9
2019	668	334	10.6%	1.4%	8.0
2020	525	206	8.3%	0.8%	10.2

Show Summary Table on page 11 in
[https://apps.pittsburghpa.gov/redtail/images/11740_Community_Task_Force_on_Police_Reform _October_2020_Report.pdf](https://apps.pittsburghpa.gov/redtail/images/11740_Community_Task_Force_on_Police_Reform_October_2020_Report.pdf)