

COMMUNITY IMPACT

Government & Regulations

What is driving Black wage, wealth gap in Orlando and beyond? Area experts weigh in.

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Experts say these factors are behind the Black wealth gap in Central Florida and beyond.

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IN THIS ARTICLE

- [Tony Jenkins](#)Person
- [Mark Dorosin](#)Person
- [Justin Williams](#)Person



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Area experts say a number of factors — including historical racial discrimination — continue to contribute to the widening wage and wealth gap for the Black community in Central Florida and beyond.

[The 2022 Community Health Need Assessment created by the Central Florida Collaborative](#) — a group of local organizations that work to meet health and community needs — found that while white people make up 63.6% of Orange County's population and Black residents make up 20.9%, more than 24.3% of area Black residents live in poverty, compared with just 13.3% of the region's white population.

Further, three of the four counties in Central Florida (Orange, Seminole and Lake) have a poverty rate for Black residents near or above 25%, while 15.7% of Osceola County's Black population lives in poverty, per the report.

Meanwhile, 16% of Florida's population is Black, of which 28.6% is living in poverty, according to the Central Florida Collaborative, which is made up of AdventHealth;

Aspire Health Partners; Community Health Centers Inc.; the state Department of Health in Lake, Orange, Osceola and Seminole counties; Orange Blossom Family Health; Orlando Health; Osceola Community Health Services; and True Health.

Orlando Business Journal, as part of its **Community Impact series**, brought in business leaders, experts, nonprofit executives and more to break down some of the issues that have created the gap, and what can be done to address the issues in a meaningful way. Here's what local leaders had to say about some of the factors that have played a role in continuing that gap:



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Tony Jenkins

RYAN LYNCH/OBJ

Tony Jenkins, Central Florida Region Market President, Florida

Blue: "Those statistics [tied to single-parent rates] weren't always this prominent, so how did we get here? When you take a look, let's go back to right around emancipation, when the slaves were given their freedom in 1863. There were laws that precluded African Americans from participating in the mainstems of life — social, political, economic — which had a huge impact.

"I remember growing up in Jacksonville in the 1970s, going to water fountains that said colored and white. When I went to the doctor's office, I had to go in the back door. What does that do to the mental aspect of a Black family, where you are thought of as inferior? Over the course of time, that impacts someone's economic mobility, and then redlining came into effect where Black economics and Black neighborhoods were affected because capital was not brought into those communities, which affected jobs and the ability for Blacks to participate in the mainstream of life.

"I'm saying all that because those had an impact on Black families. I remember in college growing up, I saw one African-American role model. I didn't see any Black doctors, I saw one Black attorney. Those had an effect on younger African Americans' lives, which now is having an effect on us today."



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Mark Dorosin
RYAN LYNCH/OBJ

Mark Dorosin, associate professor of law and director of legal clinics & field placements, Florida A&M University College of Law: "The question is what are the causes, and the most obvious poverty cause is the legacy of race discrimination in America, and the operation and institutionalization of racism through all the things Tony mentioned — redlining, access to education, access to the legal system, access to jobs, access to credit, but also racial segregation in housing, racial segregation in the justice system.

"You want to talk about fatherlessness — we know Black communities have been over-policed and Black men have been targeted for decades. Those fathers aren't out of the home randomly; that's not just something that happened randomly. It's something that was part of the foreseeable and intentional outcome of decades of government policy.

"I think in terms of developing solutions, the interventions that have been done, in some ways address the system, but not the causes. So how do we change — and part of that is compelling our civic leaders and society more broadly to own up and acknowledge that legacy, that it has those continuing impacts.

"I know we are sort of in a place where there's a sense either we are past discrimination — we have laws — and these problems are intractable or they just happen because Black folks live in that neighborhood and white folks live in this neighborhood, instead of thinking of there have been policies in place, first overtly discriminatory and now arguably racially neutral, but [they] have continuing discriminatory impacts. Really thinking about that in that context is important."



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Justin Williams
RYAN LYNCH/OBJ

Justin Williams, general manager, Grand Bohemian Orlando: "Part of it [is] you have to change the hearts of men, and the only way you can do that is make better men. One thing, I look at the fatherhood statement, and we [as a country] have a welfare system that incentivizes people to be in single-family households. I know this from growing up where I had a single-parent household, but a two-person household with my mother and grandmother.

"I came from Atlanta where there were examples around me and I knew Black doctors and judges, but I also knew the drug dealer, the thief, the scammer. Although I did not have a father, I had a tribe of individuals around me, that neighborhood that picks up and fills the gaps."



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Tanisha Nunn Gary, president and CEO of the African American Chamber of Commerce of Central Florida.

RYAN LYNCH/OBJ

Tanisha Nunn Gary, president and CEO, African American Chamber of Commerce of Central Florida: "When we look at economic upward mobility for Black families, I truly believe education is a true equalizer. It doesn't start when you go to trade school or college; it starts when you are born. We look at the statistics with a lot of Black children before they enter preschool, and where they are compared to other groups, they often already are behind.

"One of the many things we have to go back to look at is education. When we're looking at the public school system, when we are looking at communities that are predominately Black, perhaps the system is not as good as in other communities. So they may not have those advantages. That goes back to segregation and those days where schools weren't equalized, and I think a lot of that may still continue."