

New York City Council – Women’s Issues Committee  
Hearing:

**“Women of Color in New York City:  
Still Invisible in Policy”**

Second annual report on the Status of Women of Color in New York City

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Service

Thank you for inviting us to discuss the status of women of color in New York City. My name is Walter Stafford. I am a professor of Urban Planning and Public Policy at the Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service at New York University. I am joined by Diana Salas, a graduate research assistant for the Women of Color Policy Network and co-author of the report.

We are representing the Roundtable of Institution of People of Color and the Women of Color Policy Network based at the Wagner School of Public Service at NYU. The Roundtable and the Network are honored that the City Council passed a resolution recommending this hearing on our report *Women of Color: Two-Thirds of All Women, Still Invisible in Policy*. Council people Bill Perkins and Tracy Boyland and Manhattan Borough President C. Virginia Fields deserve special thanks for their encouragement and support.

For over a year, we collected and analyzed data on women of color in New York City. We have also presented the data at a large forum at NYU and at two forums in Harlem. Today is our final unveiling.

The principal theme of the report is the invisibility of the needs and problem of women of color during policy making. This invisibility is attributable to three factors.

1. **The failure of analysts and policy makers to identify the trends, needs and problems among women of color.** Although women of color have been the majority in the city since 1990, analysts failed to identify their problems and issues. This omission of women of color from policy deliberations has had consequences, many of which we will talk about today.

2. **The tendency of analysts and policy makers to view the issues and problems of women of color through the prism of white women.** This tendency has often led to a false collective construction of “women” that minimizes the particular issues of Asian, Black, Hispanic, and Native American women. This problem has been exacerbated by the paucity of women of color in policy-informing faculty and research positions and in the larger advocacy community.

3. **The tendency to misdiagnose problems that have been identified.** Even when the issues and problems of women of color have been identified, they

have been misdiagnosed because of stereotypes and cultural and language barriers. Historically, these problems have been especially acute for Black and Puerto Rican women. They have become more complicated with the increase of immigrant women from Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America. New York City has the country's most diverse female population among cities with populations of 500,000 or more. We have a special need for policies that are culturally sensitive.

Our study attempts to correct many of these historical omissions by identifying the needs and problems of women of color in the city.

### **Demographic Trends**

The first consideration in understanding the needs and problems of women of color is that two-thirds of all women and three-fourths of all women under 15 are women of color. By contrast, women 65 and over remain predominately white. These proportions, which are the basic indices for the city's dependency ratio, are particularly important as they provide: (1) a guide for examining groups that are out of the labor force and generally need government assistance, and (2) a general indication of the future labor force that will be needed to ensure a viable economy. The integration of today's young women into the economy will be particularly important.

These trends should have figured into major policy considerations for the last ten years. However, few analysts and planner paid close attention to them.

### **Birth and Fertility Rates**

There are distinct differences in trends in the birth and fertility rates of women of color and white women and the ages at which they give birth. Highlights of our study reveal that:

- Sixty-two (62) percent of the live births to women of color were to women under 30. By contrast, 59 percent of white women were 30 and over when they gave birth.
- Nearly seventy (68) percent of the Latinas who gave birth were under 30, as were 61 percent of the Black mothers and 50 percent of Asians.

- Forty-one (41) percent of white children were born to mothers younger than 30.
- Fourteen (14) percent of Latina mothers and 12 percent of Black mothers were teenagers (19 and under) when they gave birth. Two (2) percent of both Asian and white women who gave birth in 2000 were teenage mothers.
- In 2000, Latinas had the highest fertility rate (73.8 per 1,000), a decline from 93.5 a decade earlier. The rate for Asian women declined to 72.2 from 87.6 in 1990 and for Black women to 61.3 from 74.7. By contrast, the fertility rate for white women increased to 61.9 from 55.1.
- The birth rate for New York City in 2000 was 15.7 per 1,000 live births, a decrease from 19.1 in 1990. Asian women had the highest birth rate of any group (19.2), followed by Latinas (18.7) and Black women (15.4). By contrast, the birth rate for white women was 13.1.
- The teenage birth rate for Latinas was 66 per 1,000 live births compared to 47 for Blacks and 13 for whites and Asians.
- Although, 44 percent of live births were to unmarried women in the city in 2000, 92 percent of these births to unmarried women were to women of color. Slightly more than two thirds (68 percent) of Black births were to unmarried women and 65 percent were to Latinas.

### **Poverty**

The magnitude of the needs of women of color can be gauged by their share and proportion in poverty. In 2000, seventy-three (73) percent of all women in poverty were women of color. Thirty-seven (37) percent of all Black women, one-third of all Latinas, 32 percent of Native American women, and 20 percent of Asian women were in poverty, compared to 12% of white women.

Most of these women in poverty are concentrated in just a few areas of the city:

- Thirty (30) percent of Asian women in poverty are living in three community districts – Chinatown, Flushing and Bensonhurst.

- Thirty-nine (39) percent of Black women in poverty are living in Harlem, Crown Heights, East New York, Bedford Stuyvesant, Brownsville, and Jamaica Queens.
- Thirty-seven (37) percent of Latinas in poverty are living in the South Bronx, Washington Heights and Bushwick.
- Thirty-six (36) percent of Native American women in poverty live in Upper Manhattan, the South Bronx and East New York.
- Thirty (30) percent of white women in poverty reside in four community districts in Brooklyn – Greenpoint-Williamsburg, Bensonhurst, Borough Park, and Gravesend-Sheepshead Bay.

Although there is wide debate about the origins and nature of poverty, the high incidence of poverty in these areas situates them in many ways within the concept of internal colonization/enclaves that was highlighted by social scientists in the 1960s and 70s. These concentrations of poverty also include a large share of the city’s TANF recipients. In a companion report on *Race and Gender and Welfare Reform*, we found that 15 of the city’s 59 community districts accounted for 54 percent of all TANF recipients. In addition, these areas included:

- Over 60 percent of the city’s SURR schools
- Forty-five (45) percent of the city’s children under 5 living in poverty
- Half of the children entering foster care
- Nearly 40 percent of the infant deaths
- Forty-two (42) percent of all the arrests
- Forty-five (45) percent of the homicide deaths
- Half of the HIV-related deaths

Even though these communities have the highest concentration of poverty and families on TANF, they also include people and families from a range of social and economic levels. In fact, 40 percent or more of all Blacks and Latinos live in these areas.

This indicates the need for approaches to community development that build on the diversity of community members. Continued budget cuts will put additional strain on social services and on the limited resources of families, community organizations and faith-based institutions.

### **Unemployment**

Unemployment rates are only a partial measure of economic distress. However, they have been an important barometer of the problems facing women of color, particularly Black women and Latinas, who had the highest unemployment rates during the prior decade. Although the rates for the two groups have declined, they remain much higher than the rate for white women. In 2000, the city's unemployment rate was 6.1 percent, but the rates for Latinas and Black women were 8.6 and 7.8 respectively. The rate of 5.3 for white women was below the city's average. The Bureau of Labor Statistics does not collect similar information on Asian women.

### **Employment**

Despite the widening array of job opportunities in the 1990s, women of color often remained segmented in low paying jobs and industries with limited mobility. Our examination of EEOC data from private sector industries with 100 or more employees reveals that Black women and Latinas are concentrated in health services, business services and banks. Asian women are more diversified.

While 19 percent of all white females were employed as officials and managers, only 10 percent of Asian women, 7 percent of Black and Native American women, and 6 percent of Latinas were employed in these positions. By contrast, 25 percent of white women were clerical and office workers but 35 percent of Black women and 33 percent of Latinas had clerical and office worker jobs.

Similar segmentation patterns prevail in the Mayoral agencies. Although Black females constituted 21 percent of the mayoral workforce in 2000, nearly 35 percent of them worked in social work and children's services, as did 28 percent of all Hispanic and Asian women. By contrast, only 17 percent of white women worked in these agencies.

The clearest manifestation of the continued occupational segregation is the concentration of Black women in clerical jobs in the Mayoral agencies. In 2000, Black women constituted half (53 percent) of all the clerical jobs. Latinas constituted 14 percent of clerical workers.

Overall, nearly two-thirds (63 percent) of the top administrative jobs in the Mayoral agencies were held by white males and 15 percent by white females. Taken together, women of color accounted for only 14 percent of these top-level jobs.

### **Income**

The persistent joblessness and job segmentation of women of color contributes to the gap in family incomes. In 2000, the median family income for Hispanic families was \$28,949, less than half (46 percent) of white families. Black family income was \$35,409 or 56 percent of that of white families. Asian families had a family income of \$41,887 or 67 percent of white families. The gaps are starkest in Manhattan, where white families enjoyed an income of \$119,525 compared to \$25,939 for Hispanic families, \$27,744 for Black families, and \$37,605 for Asian families.

### **Education**

Access to good paying and stable jobs for many women of color is complicated by their lack of access to higher education and the high proportion of women of color – particularly Latinas – who have not completed high school. Among Latinas 25 and over in 2000, 46 percent had less than a high school education and only 11 percent had completed a Bachelor's degree or higher. Twenty-nine (29) percent of Black women had less than a high school education and 16 percent had completed a Bachelors degree or higher. Among Asian women, there is a bifurcation between those who had completed college and those who failed to complete high school. While 35 percent of Asian women had obtained a Bachelor's degree or higher, 32 percent had less than a high school diploma. Only 16 percent of white women failed to complete high school and nearly 4 of every 10 white women had a Bachelor's degree or beyond.

White women's dominant share of advanced degrees is revealing: in 2000, 55 percent of the women 25 and older with a Bachelors degree were white, and 65 percent of those with a graduate degree were white women.

### **Arrests and Incarceration**

Poverty and lack of access to jobs are associated with the high arrest and incarceration rates of Black women and Latinas.

Eight-five (85) percent of all women arrested in 2000 were Black women and Latinas, and Black women's arrest rates are the only ones that have increased for either males or females since 1995. The arrest and incarceration rates for Black women are higher than those for white males.

The leading causes of arrest among Black women and Latinas are controlled substances, assault, larceny and prostitution.

Slightly more than 9 of every 10 (84 percent) of the women arrested and sentenced to prison from New York City were Black women and Latinas in 2001. Three causes accounted for nearly three-fourths of all incarcerations for Black women: controlled substances, causes not identified, and prostitution. Seventy-five (75) percent of Latinas were incarcerated for the same reasons.

The increased share of teenage women 16-24 sent to prison is a cause for concern. Between 1995 and 2001 the proportion of incarcerated young women from New York City increased from 15 to 19 percent. Black teenagers made up the dominant share of these women. In 2001, nearly 63 percent of the teenagers were Black and 27 percent were Latinas.

### **Health**

If in 1990, politicians and analysts had given more attention to the growing share of women of color in the city's population, they could have identified many of their health problems and concerns, particularly HIV-AIDS. Black women and Puerto Rican women make up 80 percent of all the deaths to HIV disease.

Other health problems and needs that could have benefited from early attention are diabetes, cancer and homicide -- particularly for Black women – and, tellingly, infant mortality rates.

Infant mortality rates for the city declined significantly from 1990 to 2000, however, the rates among Black women and Puerto Rican women continue to exceed both local and national averages. Ultimately, this has been one of the clearest manifestations of a lack of commitment from the city to these invisible women.