



Making the Case for Black Reparations for Children

Lisa A. Gennetian, Ph.D., Christina Gibson-Davis, Ph.D., William A. Darity, Jr., Ph.D.

BACKGROUND

In 2022, among households with at least one resident child under age 18, the typical white household had \$166,000 more wealth than the typical black household.¹ A confluence of factors contributes to the black-white racial wealth difference, including a legacy of economic hardship due to slavery, Jim Crow segregation and violence, and exclusionary education, housing, employment, and related public policies and discriminatory practices. Reparations offer restitution and redress for these enduring harms. For black children, a child-centric reparations-based policy response can work in concert with other types of economic policies, such as access to credit, home and land ownership, and social and human capital investments that can collectively improve black wealth and intergenerational economic mobility for black Americans.

This trio of research briefs offers a framework for children as a focus of any reparation effort. Each of these three briefs showcases an element of a longer paper; for full text and references see Gennetian, L., Gibson-Davis, C., Darity Jr, W. “[A Framework and Policy Case for Black Reparations to Support Child Well-Being in the United States](#)” in *Nature Human Behavior* and [OSF Preprints](#) | [Black Reparations and Child Well-Being: A Framework and Policy Considerations](#).

¹ Gibson-Davis, C. (2024). Survey of Consumer Finances [Unpublished raw data]. Duke University.

Overview

Enslavement, historical racial segregation, and exclusionary policies, as well as ongoing discrimination and anti-black violence, have given rise to disproportionate hardships endured by black people in the U.S. Notably, black Americans with ancestors enslaved in the United States constitute about 12 percent of the nation’s population but possess less than 2 percent of the nation’s wealth. This lack of wealth negatively affects education, economic, and social outcomes for this population. This first of three briefs provides a unique overview of black children’s developmental outcomes relative to white peers across the human development lifespan.

Black-White Differences in Children’s Developmental Outcomes

Black-white differences in children’s outcomes typically focus on one developmental or policy domain (e.g., educational achievement) or on a particular age range. Here, we summarize existing health, education, and social outcome estimates across the child life course from birth to young adulthood (See Figure 1). Strikingly, relative to white peers, outcomes for black children compare unfavorably at every stage of development.

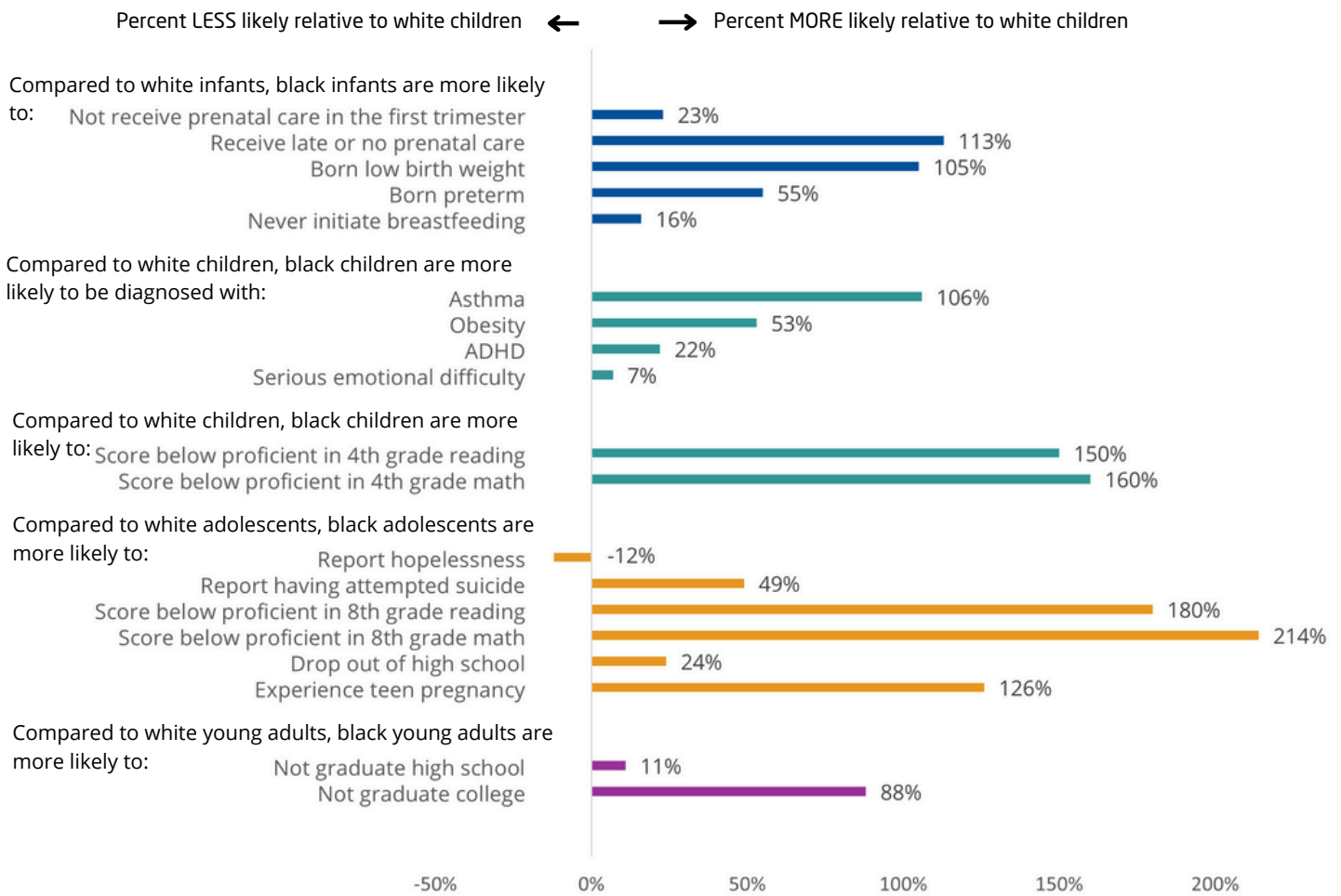
These persistent differences in outcomes across the lifespan capture a spectrum of individual and family-level experiences including those that relate to communities and systems (e.g. public schools, child protective services).

For full text and references, see:

Gennetian, L., Gibson-Davis, C., Darity Jr, W. (2025) *A Framework and Policy Case for Black Reparations to Support Child Well-Being in the United States*. *Nature Human Behavior*. <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41562-025-02189-3>.

Gennetian, L., Gibson-Davis, C., Darity Jr, W. (2024) *Black Reparations and Child Well-Being: A Framework and Policy Considerations*. *OSF Preprints*. <https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/6q2dk>.

Figure 1. Due to a Variety of Social, Public Policy and Economic Forces, Black Children are More Likely to Experience Negative Outcomes than White Children



Key Findings

- Black children from infancy (prenatal to age 1) to adolescence (approximately ages 13 to 18) had worse outcomes in comparison to same-aged white peers on almost all measures.
- Babies born to black mothers, relative to those born to white mothers, were 55% more likely to be born preterm and more than twice as likely to be born with low birth weight.
- In middle childhood (approximately ages 8 to 12), black children were more than twice as likely as white children to score below proficient in reading and math.
- Black children in middle childhood also had worse health outcomes (e.g., obesity rates, asthma prevalence) and behavioral well-being (e.g., prevalence of ADHD or severe behavioral difficulties).
- Black teenagers, relative to white teenagers, were 24 percent more likely to drop out of high school, 50 percent more likely to attempt suicide, and over 100 percent more likely to have a teen birth.
- Reading and math scores for black 8th graders lagged behind their white peers' scores. Black young adults were less likely than white young adults to graduate from high school or attend college.

Additionally, black infants were more than twice as likely to die at birth in hospitals, compared with white infants. Moreover, black children had more than double the rate of foster placement (a representative outcome of child protective services), rate of school suspensions (a representative outcome of public school disciplinary policies), and odds of being arrested as a teen (a representative outcome of the criminal justice system), compared with white children.

Takeaways

Black children have worse outcomes than same-aged white peers on a wide array of measures. These persistent disparities exist across a child's life course and raise important questions about the impact of existing policy efforts and investments to address these gaps, the enduring effect of racial wealth disparities, and the role of child reparations as a complementary strategy for addressing enduring harms that impede wealth and wealth accumulation and acknowledge redress for past harms.



 *Black Reparations for Children*

This research brief is the first of a three-part series highlighting key findings in “A Framework and Policy Considerations for Black Reparations to Support Child Well-Being” published by Nature Perspectives. All three briefs are available online at <https://childandfamilypolicy.duke.edu/news/black-reparations-for-children/>.

The second brief, [Racial Wealth Gaps are Larger among Households with Children](#), describes how the black-white wealth gap is widest for households with children. The third, [A Child-Centric Cross-Disciplinary Framework to Black Reparations](#), offers a cross-disciplinary conceptual framework that suggests a three-pronged child-centric reparations strategy for black children.

Taken as a collective, these briefs motivate and describe an approach to black reparations for children.

For more information on the black-white wealth gap and black reparations in the U.S., see [From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-First Century](#), by William A. Darity Jr. and A. Kirsten Mullen. For more context on black reparations, please also see [The Black Reparations Project: A Handbook for Racial Justice](#).

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