

A Precarious Time

Black Labor Day 2025

Coalition of Black Trade Unionists
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Labor Day 2025 seems like a good time to ask a long neglected question: What is the State of Black Work Life in America?

Precarious.

Whiplashed by the daily grind and Donald Trump's relentless War on Blackness, worklife for most Black folks is about vigilance to cope with the unexpected and resilience to overcome barriers meant to constrain or exploit our presence.

We know we're in a dangerous moment when the President of the United States would minimize "how bad slavery was." To whom, sir? And this is the man who has seized control of the National Museum of African American History and Culture. What could possibly go wrong here?

Fact check: Donald Trump has made the federal government hostile to Black workers, and he has stoked that hostile posture beyond the government. Consequently, America is on edge, putting Black workers in a vulnerable position. Black workers are leaving jobs at twice the rate of white workers, hoping to escape toxic racial bias.

State of Black Worklife

Black worklife remains a test of resiliency and protecting our humanity from evil jesters seeking revenge. Hard work, we do, working two or three jobs to make ends meet on thin paychecks that don't stretch far enough to even pay for a \$10 dream. And recent economic reports bring bad news to Black workers: Black unemployment surged to its highest level (7.2%) since the dark days of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, white workers are keeping a significantly lower rate of 3.7%, creating an employment gap that's nearly double.

Contributing to the employment crisis of Black workers is the drastic reduction of the federal workforce and the impact of Trump's disastrous tariff policies.

It's really hard to process the damage that has been done in just EIGHT months. Since Trump signed an executive order banning diversity, equity and inclusion in all federal agencies and programs, his War on Blackness has escalated:

- He fired Carla Hayden, the first African American librarian at the Library of Congress, for no cause other than her complexion.
- He tried but failed to fire Gwynne Wilcox, the black former chair of the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB).

- Today, he is trying remove Lisa Cook, a noted economist and black member on the powerful Federal Reserve Board
- But Trump's hostility toward Black people goes far beyond his attacks and obsession with DEI. He and his authoritarian alter ego, Elon Musk, have severely gashed and slashed the federal workforce. The hemorrhaging of federal jobs has been felt disproportionately by African Americans:
- Nearly 1 out of 5 federal workers is Black.
- Many of the agencies targeted for harsh cuts have the highest percentage of Black workers, such as the Department of Education (28%).
- More than 226,000 Black women lost their jobs during Trump's DEI purge.

Trump intensified his brutal black attack when he illegally stripped millions of federal employees of their union contracts that guaranteed their wages, job safety, and benefits. In spite of being denied access to tens of millions in dues money, their unions have been going toe-to-toe with the Trump regime to reverse his anti-union actions. This is blatant retaliation. And it magnifies the hardship felt by federal workers, who are going through the trauma of sudden firings or reassignments, missed bill payments and anxiety about their future.

Their fight is our fight. And the fight for labor rights is also our fight for racial justice. Union representation remains the most powerful means by which Black workers can earn fair wages, secure affordable healthcare and build wealth and retirement security – the foundation of stable families and thriving communities. The value of union membership will grow in Black worklife as living costs creep higher and higher.

Job Crisis for Black Women

But the spotlight this Black Labor Day must fall on a largely untold story about Black women being pushed out of the labor force at a record pace.

- Nearly 300,000 Black women have been bounced from the workforce in the past three months.
- This mass exodus has its roots in the massive DEI purge, the impact of higher tariffs on small businesses that hire Black women, growing automation, and exclusion from booming tech jobs.
- For example, the share of Black women who worked in the federal government plunged nearly 33% over the past year.
- And more than 518,000 Black women *still* have not returned to the workforce since the COVID-19 pandemic began in 2020.
- Subsequently, the real unemployment rate for Black women is slightly above 10 percent.

As economist Katica Ray summarized the economic fallout from the employment crisis of Black women, “When these women are pushed out of the workforce, entire families lose their economic foothold, threatening housing stability, consumer spending and educational outcome for children. These are not isolated setbacks – they are systemic losses.” The shockwaves of Black women’s job turmoil is just starting to be felt. We must treat this as the canary in the coal mine: even bigger trouble looms ahead.

Young Black Workers: Stressed and Stranded

So, how are young black workers faring in these turbulent times? The worklife of young black workers is a ball of anxiety, because the labor market is failing them. They face barriers like chaotic work schedules, rent pressures, transportation expenses, child care issues, gender bias, transphobia, DEI backlash, and student loan headaches. These challenges can trigger feelings of being isolated with dreams crushed by a crooked system that stigmatizes their many shades of Black pride. Not surprisingly, the national Black-White unemployment gap among young adults is 2 to 1. We ignore this tinderbox of ambition and frustration at our own risk.

Wellness Matters More

To close, we look at a new trend in black worklife that is starting to take hold. From first grade to the first real job, Black folks have been lectured by parents, teachers and elders that we must “work twice as hard” as our white counterparts to achieve our goals in the classroom, on the job, in life. That instilled what is now called a “hustling mentality.” Always prepping, always stressing over deadlines or the next job or the next assignment. Life centered on work led to burnout without a real identity or personal motivation.

But more Black workers are prioritizing wellness and purpose in their worklife. The value of family and friends means more. The value of good health means more. The value of inner peace over hustling for a paycheck means more. Chasing dreams and not being chased by deadlines leads to a more balanced, sustainable worklife.

One thing is certain: Black worklife will keep evolving to keep pace in a volatile world where Black labor still carries the torch for equality and freedom.