



Justice League of Greater Lansing Michigan

Reparations Scholarship Recipient — 2024

Braelyn Jackson-Pointer • Grand Ledge High School

What is your understanding of the *Racial Wealth Gap* in America?

The ever-growing wealth gap in America has affected numerous Black households including my own. It all stems back to slavery and the reconstruction era. When Black Americans were freed from slavery, their oppression did not stop there. White supremacy was widely institutional and impacted the accessibility of employment and education for Black Americans. It took generations for Black people to get out of extreme poverty and even to this day poverty is still prevalent.

In the South, after slavery ended, Black people were discriminated against in multiple ways. When one hardship ended another began with the Jim Crow era. Living by “separate but equal” did not provide Black people the opportunities to rise from struggle. Jim Crow laws limited the accessibility and quality of transportation, schools, cemeteries, hospitals, and many other aspects of life for Black people. Often when Black communities began to thrive, they were targeted and destroyed as was the case in Tulsa, OK. The most divisive institutional cornerstone was the educational system. By impacting availability, quality of environment and resources, and safety within the educational system, Jim Crow laws sought to ensure a lack of solid education. Lack of access to a solid education directly impacts employment opportunities and the ability to overcome poverty.

In an attempt to overcome poverty, many Black Americans moved North. The great migration included the move of millions of Black people from the South to the North during the 1910s through the 1970s. There were many factors to this mass migration, including worker shortages, fear of racial violence, and encouragement from the Black press. While in some cases this gave people the opportunity to flourish, it kept others in a slightly better but still poor circumstance. While moving up North was in many ways better than the South, racism still very much existed. Even in the North riots occurred and unjust violence broke out.

My family was a part of the great migration. My grandmother moved to Michigan from Arkansas after having her first child and getting pregnant with her second. It took my ancestors 4 generations from slavery to have their first college graduate and took 3 generations to be able to get out of poverty. Although my mother grew up in poverty dependent on public assistance, she became the first to graduate college in our family. She became the first to obtain a graduate degree, which was not without hardship. It was thanks to her and my family five generations back that I have had the opportunity to get the education I have and will continue to pursue in the future.

To close the ever-widening wealth gap between White Americans, education is a key factor. Getting Black students a solid foundation to build themselves on will ultimately help them succeed. I am very grateful I have had the opportunity to receive a great education. While success is subjective, my version of success is Black people not being disproportionately more impoverished. Education also does not mean everyone must go to college after high school. Education to me is truly knowing all the opportunities that students could take that could not be in a traditional college setting. Students could pursue trades, community college, the military, and many other avenues. Students should be introduced to many different career paths and opportunities to help guide them in the future.