

Name of Student

Instructor's Name

Course Title

Date

Social Injustice

Racial discrimination against the Black community in American society is continued for centuries. Shackled by the chains of slavery to subjection to segregation laws to discriminative policies against the Black community, African Americans have always been on the marginalized end. Consequently, racial, and ethnic violence against the community, unfair distribution and access to economic opportunities, and discriminative social policies have always rendered Blacks subjugated in society. The systematic discriminations are especially visible in the economic sector, where the lack of proper access to economic opportunities have trapped the African American in a perpetual cycle of poverty and misery. In addition, the negative stereotypes attached to the community and the unconscious bias against African Americans lead to economic disparities in the region. Black women, in this case, occupy a double-marginalized position where they not only experience marginalization because of their gender but the economic suppression intensify the problems they experience in society. Michelle Tea's *Without A Net: The Female Experience Of Growing Up Working Class* encompass numerous personal narratives by the African American women who have highlighted their struggle with economic limitations and being a Black female in the American society. Two narratives extracted from the book titled "Another Year Older and Deeper In the Debt" by Rachel Ann Brickner and "The Sound of Poverty" by Eileen Myles focus around the economic struggle by the Black females and lack of economic opportunities available to them. A comparative analysis of the narratives encompassed by Michelle Tea's work along with a

detailed historical analysis of the economic policies and ease of access to economic opportunities available to African American communities reflect that a systematic ethnic and racial bias is working against this community for centuries which needs to be addressed by improving the regulatory vigilance and revised institutional policies that minimize the racial inequities in the economic sector.

Poverty and racial and gender discrimination are closely tied with each other where the marginalization of the individual in the economic sector paves way for racial and sexist violence against individuals in the community. For women in the United States, the economic disparities that are associated with poverty lead to increased discrimination and inequality for women's rights, notably for African American women. A total of 15.9% of the population is living in poverty in the United States, according to the United States Census Bureau (Bureau). Another study concerned with finding the poverty rates in the American region revealed that one-third of the population in the country (about 48 million people) had an income under the current poverty threshold as per the economic survey conducted in 2017; thus, there is a growing need to combat the stereotypes that affect the African American woman population. The Journal of Marriage and the Family published a study about African American mothers living in poverty in Chicago, which found that in addition to being significantly more likely to experience long periods of welfare dependency, African American mothers living in poverty in Chicago neighbourhoods are more likely to have children in their household that are still in poverty (Thiede et al.). Even though the research is decades old, the current U.S. Census report, the federal minimum wage, and the percentage of poverty in the United States all support the conclusions. The federal minimum wage now stands at \$7.25 per hour (Capolarello). Excluding the taxes and other deductions, an African American woman who is the head of the family may make around \$217.50 for a 30-hour workweek or \$11,310 a year if she works at the federally allocated minimum wage. As a consequence, young females coming from an impoverished

background also find it unable to enter professional field since they lack the funds to pursue higher education from recognized universities. Reliance on student loan further complicates the situation for the Black females since the wage gap existing in the society followed by the racial and gender bias operating against the Blacks also makes it impossible for them to break free from the cycle of poverty. "Another Year Older and Deeper in Debt" explores a similar concern by the writer Rachel Ann Brickner where she opens up her narrative with lines, "I tell you a story of a girl who's afraid of money" (Tea). Money, by Brickner, is associated with misery and constant hard work that brings little to no results for people from her class. Brickner expands on her statement by narrating the life she has as a child where she saw her father working "twelve hours a day in the sun" and her mother doing multiple jobs and yet they were still trapped in the shackles of financial limitations and misery. From a young age, she was taught to keep her expenses balanced and "never let the balance go below zero" (Tea). Throughout the story, one sees multiple instances where the central concern throughout her life was managing her finances.

Like numerous other accounts presented by Michelle Tea's *Without A Net: The Female Experience Of Growing Up Working Class*, growing up with an economic limitation is the prime struggle experienced by Brickner. The youth of Brickner was filled with the struggle with money and keeping her debt to the minimum instead of enjoying her youthful days without any worry or misery. From her school years to choosing the college for her, she had to take cautious steps: "she'll pick the school that's closest to home, only thirty minutes away. It's in the city, so she can get there on her own without a car. Besides, with small scholarships and grants, it's the cheapest option. The dorms, the campus, the classrooms are her escape plan" (Tea). The economic disparity that women like Brickner experienced in society is the consequence of the wage gap and economic limitations available to the Blacks in the community. African American and Latino populations often have a net worth deficit when

compared to white and Asian American populations (Reina and Aiken). Systemic racial and gender-based discrimination is especially difficult for women who are disproportionately impacted by socioeconomic disparity. Gender and race-based discrepancies in earnings and job outcomes remain widespread because more women have entered the workforce, which creates both dual- and single-income homes and results in two groups having unequal chances of advancement in the workplace. And, sadly, women's capacity to accumulate money over the course of their lifetimes is impacted by this. Consequently, Black women spend their whole lives worrying about managing their finances with no time to relax. The ending lines of the story, "tell me what you expect for her. Tell me how you think her story ends" (Tea) reflect that the situation of black females is not going to change for a long time to come unless the root cause of economic poverty is not addressed adequately and properly.

The central theme of poverty, income inequality and economic limitation continues throughout the book, *Without A Net: The Female Experience Of Growing Up Working Class*, with each narrative touching upon similar issues which highlights the widespread prevalence of poverty among African American community and the frustration of the Blacks with the cycle of economic inequalities they are stuck in for a long time. The second narrative by Eileen Myles titled "The Sound of Poverty" explores the similar struggle and frustration of the working class of the Black community because of the economic injustices that are prevalent in the community. The opening lines of the narrative, "tell me what you expect for her. Tell me how you think her story ends" (Tea) stands reflective of the author's anger and passive aggression concerning her economic circumstances as a Black female. Poverty holds a direct relationship between an individual's behaviour, productivity and worldviews. Individuals who grew up in poverty are far more likely to be unable to carry out their daily tasks than those who were not poor when they were younger. Socioeconomic status also overrides the impact of poverty on health at other periods in life when it is taken collectively (Assari and Moghani Lankarani). When

employment and wages grow more insecure, or public assistance becomes less available, then the within-year variability in income will increase, possibly cancelling out the benefits of a rising average income. According to recent research by Christopher Bollinger and James P. Ziliak, it seems that single-mother households have seen an increase in their income volatility over the last two decades (Ziliak et al.). However, blacks and whites with identical levels of education face huge disparities in the likelihood of getting and keeping work. Race, therefore, seems to be the main determining factor in income disparities, since Blacks and Whites tend to have such different rates of employment access (Chetty et al.). Despite this, black women have an employment gap compared to their white counterparts because of their gender, rather than their ethnicity (Cajner et al.). In addition to objecting to the restrictive economic circumstances available to the African Americans, the story also explores the struggle of the African Americans in keeping up with the popular traditions to remain inclusive in society. Already standing at the marginal end, African Americans have to face the added trouble of adopting and adapting to the popular culture to keep up with the evolving culture and traditions. For example, Myles highlights how she and her siblings use to hate “powder milk” or any other popular brand whether it involves buying ice-creams, jellies or other snacks. Similarly, she narrates her hate for butter as it was “too rich” but in college, she had to “had to develop a taste for butter” because didn’t want to embarrass herself by her “preference for blandness” (Tea). Gender discrimination within the African American community is another instigator of the economic limitation that had enveloped the working class of Blacks (Julien). The gender discrimination with ‘females’ only counted as an economic burden where the females had no motivation to put efforts into their education or career development since they find no encouragement or appreciation from their own family: “We were just there. My brother was considered a brain and he got good grades somehow and I didn’t but it didn’t matter, because I was a girl. So right from the beginning it seemed that being female was another occasion of

poverty” (Tea). The economic limitations combined with the gender discrimination, make it more challenging for Black females to find a career opportunity of their own to develop. For example, in the narrative, Myles expresses that her dream of joining the school marching band was shattered since her mother declined to buy her any musical instruments, needed to join the band: “Why would my mother waste the money on a horn I wouldn’t play” (Tea). The narrative ends on a similar note, like that of Rachel Ann Brickner’s “Another Year Older and Deeper in Debt” where both the writers have ended their note on despair and exasperation over their inability to turn over their miserable youth and experiences they had as poor, Black females.

In conclusion, the economic restraints and unfair wages because of their doubly marginalized status of Black women for belonging to a marginal gender and race keep them trapped within a cycle of poverty and financial crisis. They are social norms followed by the restricted financial reserves available keep these women from seeking any professional education or career instead they are taught to repress their dreams for they are only ‘females and an added burden to their families as we saw in the case of Myles who was not provided with the musical instruments to join the school band whereas his brother enjoyed the perks of having the ‘brain’ in the family. Similarly, the added debt in the case of Ann Brickner kept her career choices limited where she had to constantly worry about paying her debt off. The struggles of the two narrative writers combined with the racial and income disparities that exist in the society against the African American females reflect that there is a dire need to revise legal policies and social attitudes to break the stereotypes attached with Black females and provide them with equal opportunities to improve their living standard. The only way for policymakers to ensure that black women get equal pay is to work on strategies that kept a strict check and accountability to combat racial and gender prejudices that impact earnings. Black women will benefit from these changes since it will provide them with stronger legal safeguards and better information about pay practices, promote more openness and

accountability. It can also allow Black women to discover new methods of discrimination, including strengthening legal safeguards to make explicit the existence of intersectional legal claims to combat wage discrimination and introducing additional safeguards to safeguard against caregiver discrimination.

OWLISDOM.COM

Work Cited

- Assari, Shervin, and Maryam Moghani Lankarani. "Poverty Status and Childhood Asthma in White and Black Families: National Survey of Children's Health." *Healthcare*, vol. 6, no. 2, Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute, 2018, p. 62.
- Bureau, Census. *Statistical Abstract of the United States*. Statistical Abstract of the Un, 2009.
- Cajner, Tomaz, et al. *Racial Gaps in Labor Market Outcomes in the Last Four Decades and over the Business Cycle*. FEDS Working Paper, 2017.
- Capolarello, Steven. "A Case for Abandoning the Federal Minimum Wage." Available at SSRN 3799545, 2021.
- Chetty, Raj, et al. "Race and Economic Opportunity in the United States: An Intergenerational Perspective." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, vol. 135, no. 2, Oxford University Press, 2020, pp. 711–83.
- Julien, Danielle E. St. *Locating the Black Middle Class: Race, Class, and Public Policy in the 1970s*. State University of New York at Binghamton, 2020.
- Reina, Vincent, and Claudia Aiken. "Fair Housing: Asian and Latino/a Experiences, Perceptions, and Strategies Fair Housing." *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences*, vol. 7, no. 2, RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences, 2021, pp. 201–23.
- Tea, Michelle. *Without a Net: The Female Experience of Growing up Working Class*. Seal Press, 2003.
- Thiede, Brian C., et al. "Marriage, Work, and Racial Inequalities in Poverty: Evidence from the United States." *Journal of Marriage and Family*, vol. 79, no. 5, Wiley Online Library, 2017, pp. 1241–57.
- Ziliak, James P., et al. *Trends in Earnings Volatility Using Linked Administrative and Survey Data*. US Census Bureau, Center for Economic Studies, 2020.

OWLISDOM.COM