



*Enlightened*  
SOLUTIONS

EDUCATION

# Project Noir

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# In 2020, Northeast Ohio was ranked the worst region in America for Black Women.

Has  
anything  
changed?



For the full Project Noir report, head to [projectnoir.org](https://projectnoir.org).



# EDUCATION

## EDUCATED. BUT AT WHAT COST?

**"If you educate a man, you educate an individual; but if you educate a woman, you educate a nation."** <sup>28</sup>



Education is often hailed as a cornerstone of American meritocracy - with hard work, a bit of luck, and natural talent. For Black Women, particularly those who have matriculated through college and post-graduate programs, formal education provides the opportunity for self-actualization, pathways to professional success and socio-economic upward mobility.

However, this promise remains a myth since the barrier for entry is written at the intersections of race and gender for many Black Women and girls across Northeast Ohio.

Many encounter severe and inflexible impediments, seen and unseen. Isolation is a recurring theme, with Black Women often excluded from informal networks of support and career navigation.

Many Black Women and girls are subtly pushed into lower-paying and less prestigious specialties due to a lack of imagination by educators and administrators.

**One of the most significant issues affecting Black Women in education is inescapable microaggressions from educators and peers alike.**

28. Dr. James Emmanuel Kwegyir-Aggrey





# Education Statistics

**63%**

of respondents said they felt that they (or their close family) needed to work harder to get the same grades as fellow students"

**54%**

of respondents said they were excluded or felt excluded from educational advancement opportunities, including professional development"

**53%**

of respondents felt their grades did not fairly represent the quality of their work (for them or their children)"

**49%**

of respondents were "Steered into entry-level careers rather than urged to chase their passion (i.e. they wanted to be a dentist but were told to be dental assistant)"



# Education Statistics

**46%**

of respondents were discouraged in certain classes like math or science

**46%**

of respondents were called angry, aggressive, problematic, or otherwise threatening (for them or their children)"

**44%**

of respondents were expected to educate others on their experience (e.g. professor asking them to explain race dynamics)"

**43%**

used textbooks or other learning materials that tell a biased viewpoint (using terms like "transport" instead of "enslavement")



# Education Statistics

**41%**

of respondents have been subjected to comments about hairstyle or other features by educational professionals (for them or their children)"

**35%**

of respondents had educational professionals refuse to answer questions or call on their raised hand in class when attempting to participate in class

**33%**

of respondents were excluded from informal gatherings like study groups with classmates, lunches with professors, or additional outings etc

**30%**

of respondents have been subjected to comments about how they (or close family including child) dress by educational professionals"



# Education Statistics

**29%**

of respondents were denied extensions, re-submissions, bathroom breaks, grace periods, or other informal benefits afforded to others

**22%**

of respondents had a teacher or professor refuse tutoring or additional support (for them or their children)

**19%**

of respondents were stopped by police or security inside an educational institution (for them or their children)"

**11%**

Regarding a child or children in their care, respondents have been threatened that educational providers would call child services or other authorities"





# Education Themes

“

## DISCOURAGEMENT

**“My startup business was belittled and called **ridiculous** by my professor in front of my peers at a college - which led me to shelve it immediately.”**

”

Discouraging Black Women and girls through the biased limitations imposed by educators and institutions stifles the potential of Northeast Ohio, making it the responsibility of academic institutions to root out harmful individuals and practices.

**Regularly facing negative academic reinforcement erodes self-esteem, diminishes academic ambitions, and outright dismisses potential.**

Discouraging Black Women and girls through the biased limitations imposed by educators and institutions stifles the potential of Northeast Ohio, making it the responsibility of academic institutions to root out harmful individuals and practices.

**Educators, whether consciously or unconsciously, often distort the quality and value of instruction and feedback provided to Black Women and girls.**

The absence of support and validation from educators dampens passion for life-long learning and also decreases earning potential for Black Women and girls — ultimately contributing to regional economic instability within our region.

“A professor in college told me I **wasn't good enough** to be an engineer.”

PROJECT NOIR 2024 PARTICIPANT



# Education Themes

## ISOLATION

Isolation is a hurdle for Black Women and girls in educational settings, in both formal and informal ways. They frequently encounter exclusion from peer and expert-created networks and opportunities that are essential for academic and professional advancement. In addition, Black Women often find themselves excluded from mentorship opportunities and critical decision-making circles.

**This isolation extends to being denied access to exclusive study groups, industry mixers, and informal social circles that provide key resources and support.**

This exclusion can significantly limit access to career guidance, and peer support - all of which are vital for progression. The resulting feelings of alienation hinder Black Women's ability to fully engage with and benefit from the fullness of their educational experiences.

"In grad school, I was chastised for **daring to disagree with the professor** in front of my peers.

When I persisted, the discussion was abruptly ended by the professor, and we were ordered to take a break."

PROJECT NOIR 2024 PARTICIPANT

"As a Black Woman, I've often been made to feel **invisible in the classroom**, as if my thoughts and perspectives don't matter."

PROJECT NOIR 2024 PARTICIPANT





# Education Themes

## EXPECTATION TO EDUCATE OTHERS

**Black Women and girls frequently encounter an unspoken expectation to educate their peers and educators on complex gender and racial issues, often on the spot and without proper psychological support.**

This burden becomes especially challenging when they are asked to provide up-to-date insights in environments where their experiences are subject to scrutiny, dismissal, or outright questioning.

The expectation to **always be the "expert"** hinders Black Women and girls from fully concentrating on their own academic goals.

Lastly, the burden of educating others can lead to Black female experiences being publicly 'impeached' by both classmates and educators alike.





# Education Themes

## DRESS “CODES” + SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Dress codes are often enforced more strictly and subjectively on Black Women and girls compared to their peers.<sup>29</sup>

**This selective enforcement, often justified as maintaining educational professionalism, disproportionately targets Black Women and girls.**

Black Women and girls are often subjected to a higher level of scrutiny regarding their attire, which can be used as a tool for racial profiling and sexual harassment.

This double standard creates a hostile and uncomfortable environment, detracting from their educational experience and imposing dangerous barriers to personal, mental health and academic success.

**“During college, I had a professor who routinely sexually harassed me and asked me out on dates during class and while I was their student.”**



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29. “DRESS CODED: Black Girls, Bodies, and Bias in D.C. Schools.” National Women’s Law Center, 24 Apr. 2018.





# Education Themes

## ACADEMIC STEERING

One of the most insidious challenges facing Black Women and girls in Cleveland's educational system is the phenomenon of academic steering.

As explored in Project Noir 2020,<sup>30</sup> educational steering involves subtle, yet pervasive, attempts to divert Black Women and girls from their chosen academic or career pathways, driven by both misogynistic and racist assumptions.

From an early age, Black girls may find themselves pressured by counselors and educators to pursue traditionally “pink-collar” feminine-coded,<sup>31</sup> lower-paying professions. Educational steering confines professional horizons and perpetuates a cycle of underrepresentation in high-paying and influential 21st-century industries.

**“When I was in high school, my Honors Geometry teacher came up to my desk and told me I'd be “perfect” as a preschool teacher.**

**He tried to discourage me from pursuing my plans to become a physician or engineer.”**



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30. Nkemere, Chinenye, and Studenic, Bethany. “Project Noir 2020” Enlightened Solutions, 2021.

31. “Pink-Collar Worker.” Wikipedia.



# Closing Thoughts

## BRAIN DRAIN + COMPETITION CREATION

**Undereducating Black Women and girls in Northeast Ohio due to bias jeopardizes broader economic stability of the entire state of Ohio — period.**

When race and gender-based barriers prevent Black Women and girls from reaching their full educational potential, it not only hinders their entry into prestigious fields but also deprives Northeast Ohio of future high earners, innovation, and economic power.

Discouragement is a major Project Noir 2024 theme, we believe will exacerbate Northeast Ohio's brain drain,<sup>32</sup> as talented Black Women (and families) are driven to seek opportunities elsewhere.<sup>33</sup>

This deprives Ohio of talent, creative business ventures, and a viable tax base in major urban-suburban areas like Youngstown,<sup>34</sup> and Akron.<sup>35</sup>

If limited opportunities persist, Black Women may be compelled to move to Southern,<sup>36</sup> sunbelt regions or coastal cities where their intersections and skills are more valued, social and romantic prospects are more robust, and career advancement is more transparent.



32. Brain Drain: refers to the movement of highly skilled or educated individuals from a region in search of better career opportunities, higher wages, or improved living conditions. This phenomenon can significantly impact the economic and social development of the area left behind.

33. Gabriel, Margo. "These Black Women Moved to Europe for a Better Life — Did They Find It?" 4 Nov. 2022.

34. McCormack, Richard. "The Social Costs of Deindustrialization." YSU, 5 May 2020.

35. Akron, Ohio. United States Census Bureau, 2020.

36. Frey, William H. "A 'New Great Migration' Is Bringing Black Americans back to the South." Brookings, 12 Sept. 2022.



# PROJECT NOIR 2024 CALL TO ACTION

Enlightened Solutions believes Northeast Ohio will be a national leader in racial and gender equity — especially for Black Women.

This Call to Action is a starting point, based on Project Noir research and themes. We can transform our region through these ideas and more; yet we need all industries—from elected officials to individuals—to commit and meet the moment.

Join us.

## Elected Officials (Local, County, Regional, State and Federal)

### Immediate Actions

**Partner with Enlightened Solutions** to craft longitudinal data-driven policies addressing pay inequity and workplace discrimination.

**Draft and support legislative policies** addressing pay inequity, workplace discrimination, and healthcare disparities.

### Ongoing Advocacy Ideas

**Champion** accountability measures for hiring practices and pay transparency.

**Form** a Healthcare Equity Oversight Committee to monitor progress and propose new policies.

**Establish** a Workplace Equity Certification Program.

## Workplaces

### Immediate Actions

**Collaborate with Enlightened Solutions** to analyze workplace discrimination through legal frameworks.

**Invest in internal equity programs** focused on the needs of Black Women.

### Ongoing Advocacy Ideas

**Advocate** for stronger protections against workplace discrimination.

**Establish** a Workplace Equity Certification Program offering financial benefits for equitable practices.

## Healthcare

### Immediate Actions

**Implement data collection protocols** focused on the health outcomes of Black Women.

**Commit publicly to equity goals for Black Women**, outlining specific objectives and timelines.

### Ongoing Advocacy Ideas

**Partner with Enlightened Solutions** for longitudinal data-backed research studies on health disparities.

**Advocate** for funding for hospitals implementing health equity initiatives.

## Education

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### Immediate Actions

**Create awareness Campaigns** to address the targeted gender and racial challenges faced by Black Women and girls.

### Ongoing Advocacy Ideas

**Establish** education equity task forces involving faculty, students, and external experts.

**Advocate** for the expansion of mental health services tailored to Black Women and girls.

**Establish institution-wide task forces** dedicated to addressing race and gender-based disparities by location.

## Philanthropy and Community Groups

### Immediate Actions

**Support Project Noir fundraising** for longitudinal, data-driven research and equity initiatives.

**Engage with Enlightened Solutions** to align efforts with broader philanthropic trends.

### Ongoing Advocacy Ideas

**Promote** Project Noir 2024 through local and national platforms.

**Collaborate with Enlightened Solutions** on events discussing outcomes of Project Noir 2024 and next steps by industry.

## Individuals

### Immediate Actions

**Promote** and spotlight Project Noir 2024 themes.

**Post** and tag @WorkEnlightened on social media and use the hashtag #ProjectNoirCLE to connect with others.

### Ongoing Advocacy Ideas

**Co-host advocacy events** with Enlightened Solutions to explore key themes.

**Advocate** for policy changes addressing disparities in workplaces, healthcare, and education.

**Donate** to Enlightened Solutions via Project Noir research to further their impact.

## Media

### Immediate Actions

**Launch dedicated features** focusing on the experiences of Black Women in Northeast Ohio.

**Partner with community organizations** to co-produce accurate, impactful content.

### Ongoing Advocacy Ideas

**Diversify** newsrooms to authentically reflect community challenges and successes.

**Facilitate** public discussions featuring Black Women leaders and experts.







# Listen to Project Noir Podcast Clips

Find  
"Project Noir by Enlightened Solutions"  
on these podcast platforms:



SPOTIFY



RSS



APPLE

Featuring the **anonymous, re-recorded lived experiences of Project Noir 2024 participants**. Each short podcast clip offers a creative way for listeners to engage with the Project Noir 2024 report.

We want to make sure that each experience is not reduced to mere statistics; each vignette captures the emotional and personal nuances that statistics alone cannot convey.

#ProjectNoirCLe





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# Connect



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