



Five Takeaways

from

The AALAM/UWMCED Index of African American Well-Being in the Nation's Largest Metropolitan Areas

2024 Edition

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The AALAM/UWMCED *Index of African American Well-Being* synthesizes the latest available data on employment, income, poverty, homeownership, educational attainment, business leadership, and health outcomes into a composite index ranking each of the 50 metro areas on the well-being of their Black communities. The purpose is to benchmark how well African Americans are faring in Milwaukee compared to each of the nation's largest 50 metropolitan areas, as a crucial gauge of Milwaukee's progress towards AALAM's goal "to redefine Milwaukee as a top-ranking city for African Americans." The report contains a rich trove of data documenting the state of Black Milwaukee and Black communities across the country. Here are five big takeaways:

1. **The Leaders and Laggards:** The five top performing metropolitan areas for African American well-being on the 2024 edition of the index were: Austin (1), San Jose (2), Phoenix (3), Seattle (4), and Atlanta (5). The five worst were: Chicago (46), Buffalo (47), Pittsburgh (48), Cleveland (49), and Milwaukee (50). Although a few metros, like Phoenix, Atlanta, and Portland showed enough improvement on various indicators over the past four years to move into the top-ten, the bottom of the rankings remains largely unchanged.
2. **As on the 2020 Index, Milwaukee continues to rank last among the nation's 50 largest metropolitan areas on the 2024 Index of African American Well-Being, by a large margin.** On 14 of the 44 indicators comprising the *Index*, Milwaukee ranked last or next to last, by far the worst performance of any of the metro areas in the index. Black Milwaukee's worst results are income and poverty; employment; educational attainment; and measures of racial disparities: on each of these, Milwaukee ranked 50th among the 50 metro areas. A key statistic: Black median household income in Milwaukee, adjusted for regional cost-of-living differences, is less than half that of top-ranked Black San Jose's (and only 43 percent that of the median white, non-Hispanic household in Milwaukee). On most indicators, Milwaukee remains a long way from being a "middle-of-the-pack" metro area for African Americans, let alone a "top ten" city.
3. **Community health indicators remain troubling in Black Milwaukee, and some appear to have worsened from the pandemic.** Milwaukee's African American infant mortality rate (46th), teen mother birth rate (49th), and low birth-weight baby rate (49th) all rank near the worst of the nation's 50 largest metropolitan areas, although the rates themselves have remained stable or slightly declined over the past decade. The Milwaukee Black infant mortality rate is nearly five times the rate for the white, non-Hispanic population. The mortality rate in Black Milwaukee from what has been called "deaths of despair"—largely driven by deaths from alcohol and drug abuse—has doubled since 2017, an unprecedented surge likely attributable to pandemic-related social dislocation.
4. **African Americans remain underrepresented at the top echelons of Milwaukee private sector leadership,** and that situation has worsened over the past 15 years. In 2021, Blacks were represented in executive or senior management positions at less than one-fifth their weight in Milwaukee's working-age population. Milwaukee ranked 6th worst of the 50 largest metros on this metric.
5. **Although the "top line" findings for Black Milwaukee in the 2024 Index are abysmal, there are some promising "green shoots" in the recent data, signs of progress that could be harbingers of future improvement.** Between 2017-22, for the first time in 30 years, real median income rose for Milwaukee's African American households, by 7.1 percent (two percentage points higher than the white, non-Hispanic increase during those five years). Poverty fell slightly, the share of Blacks holding high school and college degrees rose, and Milwaukee's notoriously high segregation rate declined modestly over the last decade. We should not overstate these shifts. None were sufficient to move the needle on where Milwaukee stands nationally in the well-being of the Black community, and it remains to be seen whether these trends are durable. Nonetheless, it is encouraging to see improvement on several indicators of African American community well-being in Milwaukee, for the first time in many years.

Chart 1: 2024 Composite Index of African American Well-Being in the Nation's 50 Largest Metropolitan Areas

