

# Research Brief

The Commonwealth’s Official Source for Population and Economic Statistics

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## Women’s History Month 2016: A Snapshot of African American Women in the Keystone State

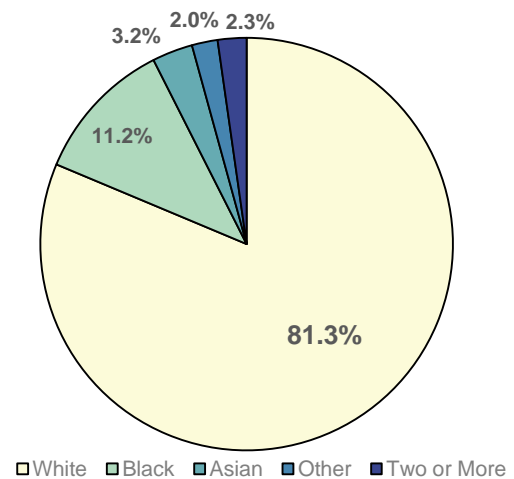
**PENN STATE HARRISBURG** – Pennsylvania has no shortage of remarkable women to celebrate during National Women’s History Month including Betsy Ross, Patti LaBelle, and Rachel Carson. Another notable woman in the state’s history was Rebecca Cole, the second-ever African American female physician in the United States. Born in Pennsylvania in 1846, she attained two medical degrees and became an advocate for women and the poor. She passed away after 50 years of medical practice at the age of 76 in her hometown of Philadelphia, but her legacy is preserved in the successes of African American women across the state. The story of Rebecca Cole’s life presents an opportunity during National Women’s History Month to examine African American women in Pennsylvania and their rates of poverty, educational attainment, and healthcare coverage.

### African American Women in Pennsylvania

There are approximately 6.5 million women in the state of Pennsylvania which is 51.1 percent of the population. Of the women in Pennsylvania, about 5.3 million are White, almost 734,000 are African American, over 207,000 are Asian, and approximately 279,000 identify as Some Other Race or Two or More Races.

Figure 1 depicts the racial composition of women in Pennsylvania where a majority of women are White and African American women make up the second largest percentage of females. White women are a greater proportion of the female population of Pennsylvania (81.3 percent) than the nation as a whole (73.1 percent). African American women comprise just over 11.2 percent of the female population in Pennsylvania compared to 13.0 percent of females in the nation.

Figure 1. Racial Composition of Women, PA: 2014



### Poverty Status

African American women have consistently been one of the poorest subgroups of Pennsylvanians. African American women have much higher levels of poverty than White women. Approximately 30.0 percent of African American women had incomes below the poverty line compared to 11.1 percent of White women. African American women also had higher rates of poverty than African American men (30.0 percent vs. 25.3 percent).

**Figure 2. African Americans Below Poverty by Age and Sex, PA: 2014**

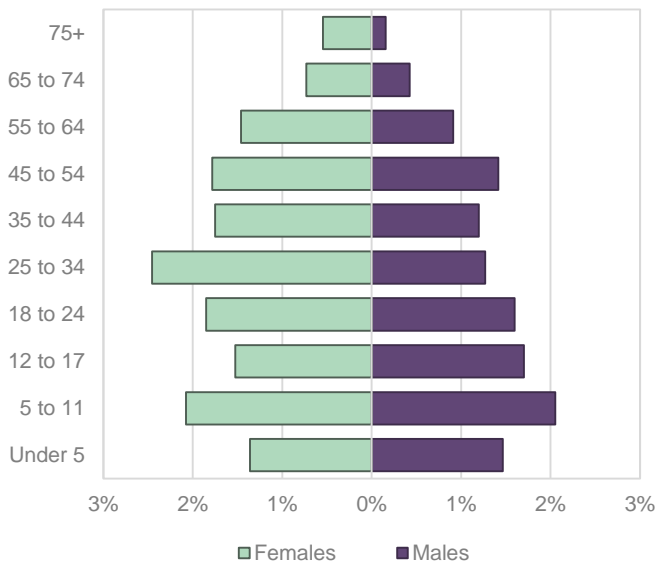


Figure 2 shows the age distribution of poverty amongst African American males and females. African American men and women are equally impoverished in their early life, but once they reach adulthood, women become more likely to have incomes below the poverty line. The poorest age cohorts for African American women are early adults aged 25 to 34 (2.2 percent) and 18 to 24 (2.1 percent) while elderly African American women had the lowest rates of poverty.

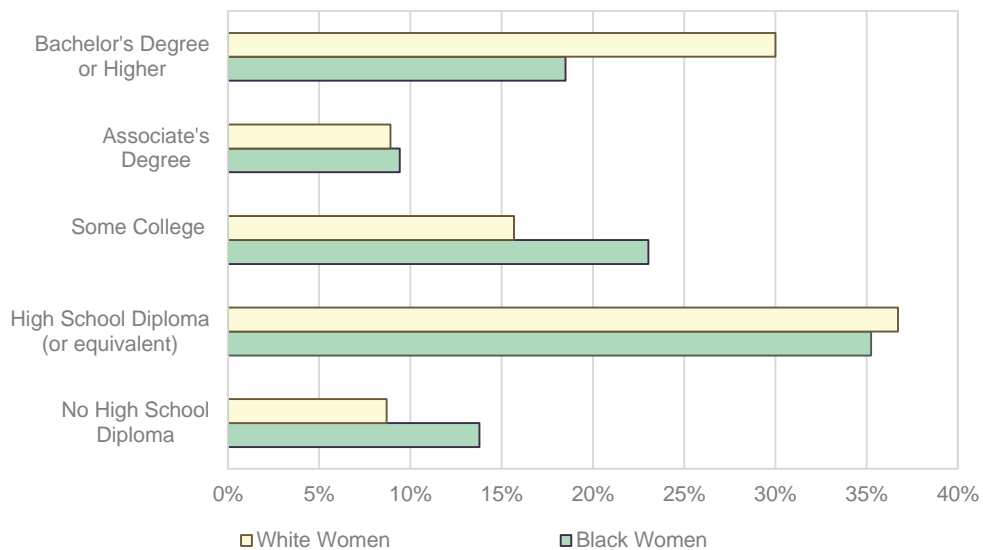
**Educational Attainment**

African American women in Pennsylvania have made gains in educational attainment between 2005 and 2014. In 2005 19.6 percent of African American women lacked a high school diploma. This figure dropped to 13.8 percent in 2014; a decline of 5.8 percentage points over the time period. This loss was accompanied by a 4.0 percentage point gain in the percent of African American females who attained a

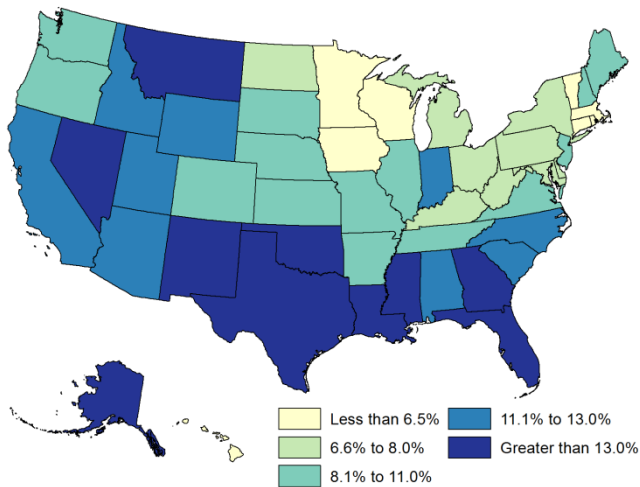
Bachelor’s degree or higher. In 2014, 18.6 percent of African American women attained a Bachelor’s degree or higher as opposed to only 14.6 percent in 2005.

As shown in Figure 3, educational attainment for African American women still lags behind their White counterparts in Pennsylvania with the exception of women with “Some College” and Associate’s Degrees. In 2014, 23.0 percent of African American women attended Some College compared to 15.7 percent of White women. More African American women attained Associate Degrees, 9.4 percent, compared to White women, 8.9 percent.

**Figure 3. Educational Attainment for African American and White Women, PA: 2014**



**Figure 4. Percent of Uninsured Women, US: 2014**



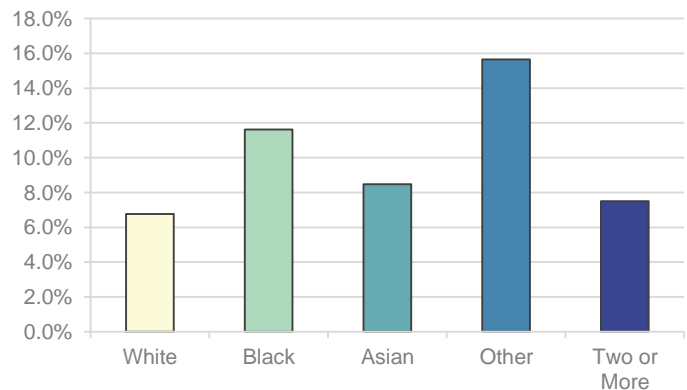
**Women’s Healthcare Coverage**

Figure 4 displays the rate of uninsured women by state in 2014. Low rates were found primarily in the Northeast and Great Lakes regions while high rates of uninsured women were located more in the southern states. Pennsylvania ranked 16<sup>th</sup> in the nation for the lowest proportion of uninsured women (7.4 percent) ahead of states like Kentucky (7.4 percent), Washington (8.0 percent), and New Hampshire (8.2 percent) and behind states like New York (7.2 percent), Michigan (7.2 percent), and West Virginia (7.2 percent). The state with the lowest proportion of uninsured females was Massachusetts where only 2.4 percent of women were uninsured. Conversely, the state with the highest share of females without health insurance was Texas which had 18.3 percent uninsured women.

There are approximately 475,750 uninsured women in Pennsylvania which is 7.4 percent of the female population. Female children and elderly women are least likely to be uninsured in Pennsylvania where 5.2 percent of females under 18 years old and 0.4 percent of women aged 65 or over are uninsured. The highest rates of uninsured women occur in the 25 to 34 and 18 to 24 age cohorts with 13.9 percent and 11.6 percent uninsured, respectively.

Figure 5 shows the comparison of the percentage of uninsured women by race in Pennsylvania. According to the 2014 ACS Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS), African American women in Pennsylvania ranked second highest in proportion of women uninsured after women who identify as Some Other Race. Approximately 85,750 (11.6 percent) of African American women in Pennsylvania were uninsured which is significantly higher than the proportion of White women (6.8 percent).

**Figure 5. Uninsured Women by Race, PA: 2014**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates and Public Use Micro Sample

The Pennsylvania State Data Center is the commonwealth’s official source for population and economic statistics. It is based at Penn State Harrisburg’s Institute of State and Regional Affairs. The Pennsylvania State Data Center is part of the U.S. Census Bureau’s National State Data Center Program.

**Editors: For additional data, contact the Pennsylvania State Data Center’s State Capital Office at 717.772.2710 or for faculty comment on this topic, contact Penn State Harrisburg’s Public Information Office at 717.948.6029.**