STUDENT BORROWER PROTECTION CENTER

THE SOUTH HAS SOMETHING TO SAY

An Examination of Student Loan Debt in the South
Part One: Atlanta

April 2023

About this report

Background

This paper series is an expansion of the Student Borrower Protection Center's exploration of the geography of student debt disparities and the economic distress that borrowers of color, particularly those who are Black and Latino, face in the student loan market. Research has increasingly shed light on the vast racial disparities present in the student debt crisis. Beyond rising balances and unaffordable monthly bills, student debt has far-reaching effects on the lived experience of student loan borrowers and the communities in which they live.

In 2020, the SBPC published *Disparate Debts*, an examination of racial disparities in student debt burdens and borrower distress across US cities in general and in DC, Philadelphia, New York, and San Francisco in particular. Expanding on *Disparate Debts*, this series, *Student Debt in the South,* leverages previous work to examine the intersection of race and student debt throughout the South, including efforts to highlight the burdens that student loan borrowers face in both cities and rural communities.

In August 2022, President Biden announced his administration's student debt cancellation plan—an historic policy with the potential to completely erase student loan balances for approximately 20 million student loan borrowers and drastically reshape the landscape of student debt in communities across the country. In the matter of weeks, 26 million people across the nation applied for potential relief under this program before overtly political lawsuits were filed and efforts in Congress were made to overturn this historic program. As millions of borrowers await the fate of student debt relief, more is needed to end the national student loan crisis, most especially the systemic racial disparities that define the crisis.

As a part of the Student Loan Law Initiative (SLLI) and in partnership with the University of California Berkeley, we have analyzed proprietary data from the University of California Consumer Credit Panel (UCCCP) data on the far-reaching effects of student debt in several metropolitan and rural areas across the South. The descriptive and demographic insights gleaned from these data help us understand the local effects of rising student debt and borrower distress and to underscore where the student debt crisis disproportionately affects certain communities, particularly communities of color.

The first report in this series focuses on the city of Atlanta, providing a case study on the effects of student debt on the Black middle class and the shifting impacts of student debt on communities of color over the past decade.

For too long, the story of how student debt harms communities of color in every corner of the country has remained untold.

The South has something to say.

About Student Debt in the South

Student Debt in the South is an on-going examination of the far-reaching effects of student debt in sevearl metropolitan and rural areas across the South. This series is a project of the Student Borrower Protection Center in partnership with the University of Califormia Student Loan Law Initiative. This paper, *The South Has Something to Say: An Examination of Student Debt in the South Part One: Atlanta*, was prepared by Katherine Welbeck, Fouzia Sultana, PhD, Mark Huelsman, and Benjamin Kaufman, using the University of California Consumer Credit Panel (UC-CCP), an anonymized dataset of consumer credit information from one of the three nationwide credit reporting agencies.

This report was funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. We thank them for their support but acknowledge that the findings and conclusions presented here are those of the authors alone, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Foundation.

About the University of California Consumer Credit Panel

UC-CCP was created in 2020 through a partnership between the California Policy Lab, the Student Borrower Protection Center, the Student Loan Law Initiative. The UC-CCP has two extracts and this report uses the national extract, which is a 2 percent nationally representative sample of US adults with credit records. The data elements include information about consumers, such as their age, zip code, and credit score, and information about their loans, such as the account type, balance, and payment history.

About the Student Borrower Protection Center

The Student Borrower Protection Center is a nonprofit organization focused on eliminating the burden of student debt for millions of Americans. We engage in advocacy, policymaking, and litigation strategy to rein in industry abuses, protect borrowers' rights, and advance racial and economic justice.

About the Student Loan Law Initiative

The Student Loan Law initiative is a partnership between the Student Borrower Protection Center, the University of California, Irvine School of Law, and the University of California, Berkeley School of Law to develop a body of rigorous research around how to address the student debt crisis.

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Executive Summary

The student debt crisis is, at its core, a civil rights crisis. Research has increasingly shed light on the vast racial disparities and the economic distress that borrowers of color, particularly those who are Black and Latino, face in the student loan market. This report is the first in a paper series expanding upon the Student Borrower Protection Center's exploration of the geography of student debt disparities.

In partnership with the University of California Berkeley, we have analyzed proprietary data from the University of California Consumer Credit Panel (UCCCP) data on the far-reaching effects of student debt in several metropolitan and rural areas across the South. The first report in this series focuses on the city of Atlanta.

- **Majority-Black Atlanta neighborhoods have seen disproportionate growth in student debt burdens.** Consistently over the decade between 2010 and the student loan payment pause in 2020, Black neighborhoods in Atlanta had higher average student loan balances than predominantly white areas. These disparities grew over a ten year period, despite an economy and labor market that slowly and yet steadily improved after the depths of the Great Recession. By 2018, average student debt in majority-Black zip codes was nearly $7,000 more than majority-white zip codes, compared to slightly more than $1,500 in 2010.
- **The pause on student loan payments brought borrower distress to historic lows, particularly in majority-Black Atlanta neighborhoods where distress fell to nearly 1/10th of pre-pandemic highs.** Majority-Black neighborhoods experienced peak borrower distress in 2015, several years after the Great Recession, where nearly 1-in-5 households with student debt (19 percent) fell behind on their student loans. Due to the pause on student loan payments, delinquency rates in these same neighborhoods fell to approximately 2 percent, or roughly 1/10th of 2015 levels.
- **Despite unprecedented short-term benefits from paused payments, borrowers in Atlanta's majority black neighborhoods struggle with runway debts–debts with balances have not declined year-over-year.** In Atlanta, the number of borrowers—especially borrowers in majority-Black zip codes with non-declining balances, or runaway debt—has more than doubled over the past decade. Nationally, prior research has shown that approximately two thirds of Black borrowers see balances climb 12 years after beginning college, compared to only 1-in-9 white borrowers.

In August, President Biden announced an historic effort to cancel student debt broadly, promising to provide debt relief to more than 40 million people nationwide. Shortly thereafter, several sham lawsuits were brought to block broad student debt cancellation. More recently, two Members of Congress have announced efforts to use the Congressional Review Act to overturn the payment pause and President Biden's debt-relief program. As frivolous lawsuits and partisan efforts in Congress seek imperil President Biden's debt relief, this report looks at the distribution and potential of this promised debt relief across Atlanta neighborhoods.

- **Borrowers in majority-Black neighborhoods will receive an outsized benefit from President Biden's planned effort to cancel student debt.** Today's report shows that because borrowers in majority-Black neighborhoods are more likely to fall behind on a student loan, any action to cancel a substantial share of student debt will disproportionately strengthen the credit profiles of borrowers in these neighborhoods. Further, this report shows that because borrowers in majority-Black neighborhoods generally owe higher student loan balances, a typical borrower in a majority-Black neighborhood is more likely to receive more total dollars in student debt relief.
- **Borrowers in majority-Black neighborhoods will remain more deeply indebted than their peers in majority-white neighborhoods.** Because borrowers in majority-Black neighborhoods owe substantially higher student loan balances than borrowers in majority-white neighborhoods, debt cancellation will leave a greater share of borrowers in majority-Black neighborhoods deeply in debt. Specifically, today's report finds that roughly 1-in-7 borrowers in majority-Black neighborhoods now owe more than $100,000 in student debt—a rate 50 percent greater than borrowers in majority-white neighborhoods.

Scoping the State of Student Debt in American Cities

At the time of the Biden Administration's public pledge to broadly cancel student debt, more than 45 million Americans collectively owed more than $1.7 trillion dollars in student loan debt. With balances ballooning over the past decade, student debt has reached crisis levels. While the Administration continues to fight specious lawsuits and the Department of Education prepares to administer promised debt cancellation for millions, the damage of the student debt crisis over the past decade cannot be understated.

The myth that student debt is "good debt" is a dangerous one that ignores the legacy and continued policy decisions that have created a reliance on debt as a means to economic opportunity.

While often presented solely as a stumbling block for millennials and growing concern for Gen Z, the effects of student debt are vast and touch the lives of a broad and diverse swath of Americans. Student loan borrowers have been forced to defer or delay dreams of homeownership, retirement savings, and even family formation.[1] Student loan balances hang over the heads of millions of young borrowers entering the workforce, parents struggling to pay down their debts while ensnared by their children's student loan debt, and older adults fearing their balances will prevent them from retiring despite years spent in repayment.[2] This crisis is devastating and far-reaching, and has contributed to widening inequality across the American economy.

The Good Debt Myth

The myth that student debt is "good debt" is a dangerous one that ignores the legacy and continued policy decisions that have created a reliance on debt financing as a means to achieve economic opportunity through higher education.[3] With research increasingly exposing the toll of student debt on communities, particularly the way in which it disproportionately burdens Black and Latino borrowers, the very notion that student debt could be considered "good debt" ignores the lived experiences of millions of student loan borrowers who struggle under this debt burden.

The student loan system has been plagued by decades of documented breakdowns and abuse, leaving many borrowers denied access to their entitled relief and left indebted longer than they should have.[4] Student debt drastically affects borrowers' ability to build wealth, compounding the effects of the racial wealth gap.[5]

Student Debt in Communities of Color

The student debt crisis is, at its core, a civil rights crisis. The nation's debt-financed higher education system is indicative of larger systemic failures driven by the longstanding effects of discrimination in labor, housing, and other credit markets.[6] The student debt crisis is not only an outgrowth of racial discrimintation and exclusionary economic policy, but it also perpetuates the systemic barriers that prevent meaningful progress towards racial equity.[7]

The student debt crisis is, at its core, a civil rights crisis. The nation's debt-financed higher education system is indicative of larger systemic failures.

The intergenerational nature of wealth creation in the United States means that Black and Latino students—who are less likely to be able to tap into familial wealth to pay for school—often must take on more student debt in order to access higher education.[8] As a result, more than 90 percent of Black students and 72 percent of Latino students who complete four-year programs take on student debt to pay for their postsecondary education as compared to 66 percent of white students who borrow for school.[9] Further, across all school sectors, Black students take on more debt to attend school.[10]

Black borrowers, most especially Black women, face many of the heaviest burdens resulting from student debt.[11] Black women are not only more likely to take on student debt as a result of the racial wealth gap, but are also less likely to see equal salary gains as compared to their white and male counterparts.[12] The insidious nature of labor market discrimination also means that Black women earn less than their white peers and also take on more debt to earn credentialing necessary to secure that employment. Similarly, Latinas at every education level, including those with Bachelor's and Advanced degrees, earn far less than white non-Hispanic men,[13] and in general earn less than men and women of all races.[14]

Because student debt represents an outsized portion of borrowers' monthly income and increases the costs of other forms of credit, the effects of larger and non-amortizing student loan balances further limit asset accumulation and accelerate wealth gaps for Black and Latino borrowers.[15] Student debt represents a significant burden on borrowers' monthly balance sheets, and struggles in repayment further heighten economic distress, most especially for Black and Latino borrowers who disproportionately face hardship in repayment.

For many Black and Latino borrowers who are left owing significantly more than they originally borrowed years into repayment, student debt is just another insidious debt trap. Approximately 66 percent of Black borrowers owe more than they originally borrowed 12 years after beginning college, while only 1-in-9 have fully repaid their debt.[16] Similarly, 20 years after beginning repayment, the median Black borrower still owes approximately 95 percent of their original balance, whereas the median white borrower has paid down nearly 95 percent of their balance.[17]

Black and Latino borrowers also face delinquency and default at disproportionately high rates. Nearly a third of Black borrowers and a fifth of Latino borrowers have defaulted on a student loan within six years of starting school as compared to one tenth of white borrowers.[18] These numbers are especially distressing when examining default disparities geographically.[19] Student loan borrowers in the most racially segregated communities across the country are up to five times more likely to fall behind on a student loan than borrowers in the whitest areas.[20]

The economic consequences of default are particularly onerous for borrowers as it may result in administrative wage garnishment, federal benefit offset, and tax refund withholding, in addition to negative credit reporting.

While not explicitly limiting access to higher education, these phenomena have drastically shaped the way that borrowers of color who seek postsecondary education—particularly those that are Black, Latino, and/or come from low-wealth households—experience access to opportunity and economic mobility.

Policy Pathways to Student Debt Relief

The crisis of student debt broadly, and in communities of color specifically, did not come about overnight. A series of overlapping crises resulting from a decline in funding for public higher education, lax enforcement against predatory institutions and actors, and shoddy and illegal practices by the student loan industry have all contributed to mounting debt burdens.[21] These were active choices made based on broader economic assumptions about the need for more credentials at all costs; that student debt was inherently "good debt;" and on wildly incorrect and race-blind assumptions that student debt was primarily a phenomenon for a wealthier and more privileged class of households. A series of policy failures created the current state of student debt and only a set of meaningful policies grounded in equity can curb this crisis.

The economic catastrophe brought about by the Great Recession, the COVID-19 pandemic, and current economic headwinds brought about by inflation have hit hardest many of the same communities that are already being harmed the most by rising student debt.[22] Across America, student debt distress tracks largely across racial and economic lines,[23] and research shows the racial composition of a borrower's neighborhood is closely correlated with their likelihood to struggle in repayment on their student debt.[24] Our previous research into student debt in American cities shows that borrowers in racially segregated communities of color are up to five times more likely to fall behind on a student loan than borrowers in the whitest areas, a disparity that in many ways replays the worst aspects of the mortgage and financial crisis a decade ago, as well as the waves of job losses rendered by the COVID-19 shutdowns over the past few years.[25]

Crises resulting from a decline in funding for public higher education, lax enforcement against predatory institutions and actors, and shoddy and illegal practices by the student loan industry have all contributed to mounting debt burdens.

Increased public awareness of the injustices underpinning this crisis mounted calls for broad-based debt cancellation and reform to the broken student loan system.[26] The movement for far-reaching student debt relief reached a fever pitch as a growing body of research has continued to expose the toll of student debt on communities and the national economy and elected leaders adopted calls for executive action on student debt in their policy proposals.[27]

In response to years of demands from student loan borrowers, in August 2022 President Biden fulfilled a key campaign promise by announcing that his administration would cancel $10,000 in federal student loan debt for borrowers with individual incomes less than $125,000 or $250,000 for married couples or heads of household. Additionally borrowers who received a Pell Grant at any time to help fund their education can claim an additional $10,000 (or $20,000 total) in cancellation. The increased cancellation for Pell recipients will ensure greater cancellation for Black borrowers; Black students are over twice as likely as white students to receive Pell Grants.[28] Although nearly 40 percent of student loan borrowers are eligible to have their debt wiped out entirely upon implementattion of the Executive Action, many millions more remain indebted.

In parallel to national trends, across cities, racial disparities in student debt—who is required to take out loans for higher education, who is able to repay, and who experiences runaway balances, default, and delinquency—are both a cause and a consequence of long-standing systemic racism.[29] The outcomes these disparities generate—themselves already manifestations of systemic racism—deepen economic distress and financial exploitation of Black consumers and their communities.[30] The difference in lived experience between borrowers in majority-white and majority-nonwhite neighborhoods is stark, and provides an opportunity for federal, state, and local policymakers to use all tools available to ensure our system of student lending and higher education financing is far more equitable than has been the case for generations.

Welcome to Atlanta

Once dubbed "the city too busy to hate," Atlanta has been lauded for its diversity and economic progress in the southeast, and in the nation more broadly. In that regard, Atlanta has also become somewhat synonymous with Black prosperity and achievement.[31] While Atlanta has undoubtedly been home and given rise to aspirational levels of Black wealth,[32] the best of branding and business acumen cannot fully recast insidious discrimination that contributes to vast racial disparities and a persistent racial wealth gap.

Despite these banners and platitudes marking the city's progressive posturing on race and economic opportunity, beneath the surface lies a hidden story about the unprecedented growth of student debt over the past decade and how this crisis perpetuates racial inequity and cuts into pathways for economic mobility.

Atlanta stands out for having particularly high levels of income inequality,[33] where households in the top five percent of income earned 18 times as much as households in the bottom 20 percent.[34] Black homeownership rates in Atlanta lag substantially behind white peers,[35] in part a product of unconscionable mortgage denial rates that work to perpetuate racial discrimination in housing.[36]

For renters, the situation is similarly bleak. Even prior to the pandemic, families in Atlanta faced rising rents and living costs that eat into household budgets. In 2019, nearly half (48 percent) of all Atlanta-area renters were "cost-burdened," meaning they paid over 30 percent of their income in rent.[37]

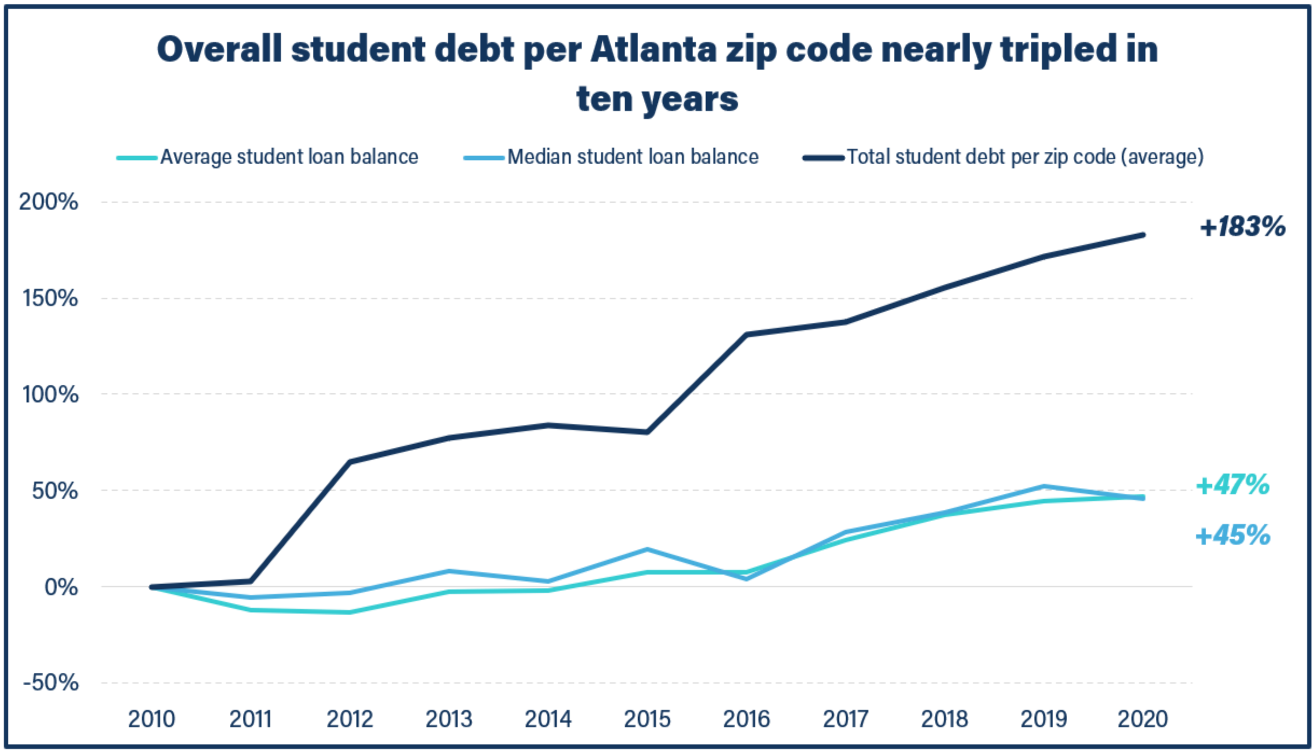
For families wanting to access higher education, Georgia policymakers have exacerbated these inequities by consistently cutting public higher education budgets. In fact, since its peak in 2001, per-student higher education appropriations in the Peach State have fallen by a staggering 43 percent.[38] In part as a result, Georgia families over the past few decades were forced to pay higher tuition, as well as mandatory fees that were created to backstop budget cuts.[39]

The effects of these misguided policy decisions coupled with decades-long failure of federal relief can be seen over time in Atlanta.

Findings: The Student Debt Crisis in Atlanta

Using data from the University of California Consumer Credit Panel, we can see that student debt in Atlanta, as in so many other communities across the country, has grown exponentially since the Great Recession. In fact, the number of student loan borrowers and the average student loan balance in the city have nearly doubled over the past decade.

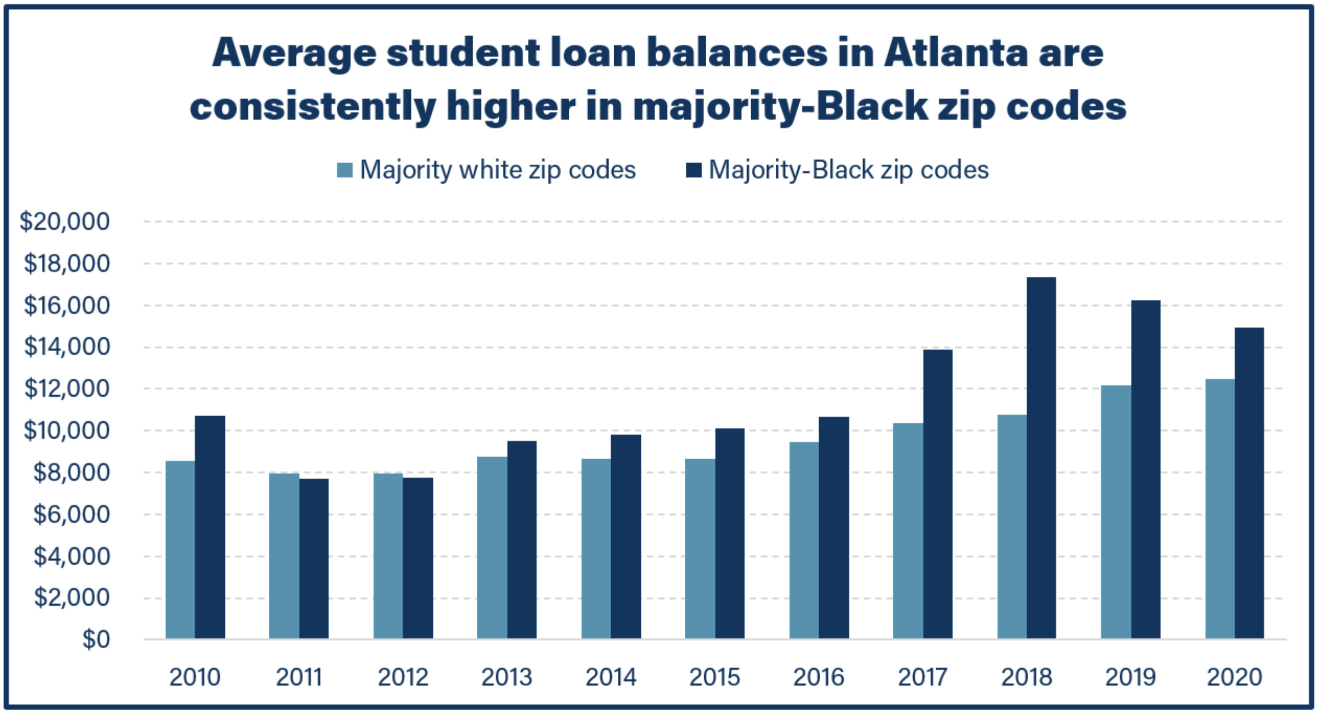
Figure 1: Overall Student Loan Balance in Atlanta



While the number of Atlantans with college and graduate-level education has increased over this same period of time, the area's mean household income has shown relatively slower growth. Mirroring trends nationally, households are increasingly shouldering the burden of student debt. Student debt is associated with broader financial distress.[40]

Consistently over the decade between 2010 and the student loan payment pause in 2020, Black neighborhoods in Atlanta had higher average student loan balances than predominantly white areas. These disparities grew over a ten year period, despite an economy and labor market that slowly and yet steadily improved after the depths of the Great Recession. By 2018, average student debt in majority-Black zip codes was nearly $7,000 more than majority-white zip codes, compared to slightly over $1,500 more in 2010 (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Average Balance in Majority-Black vs. Majority-white Zip Codes

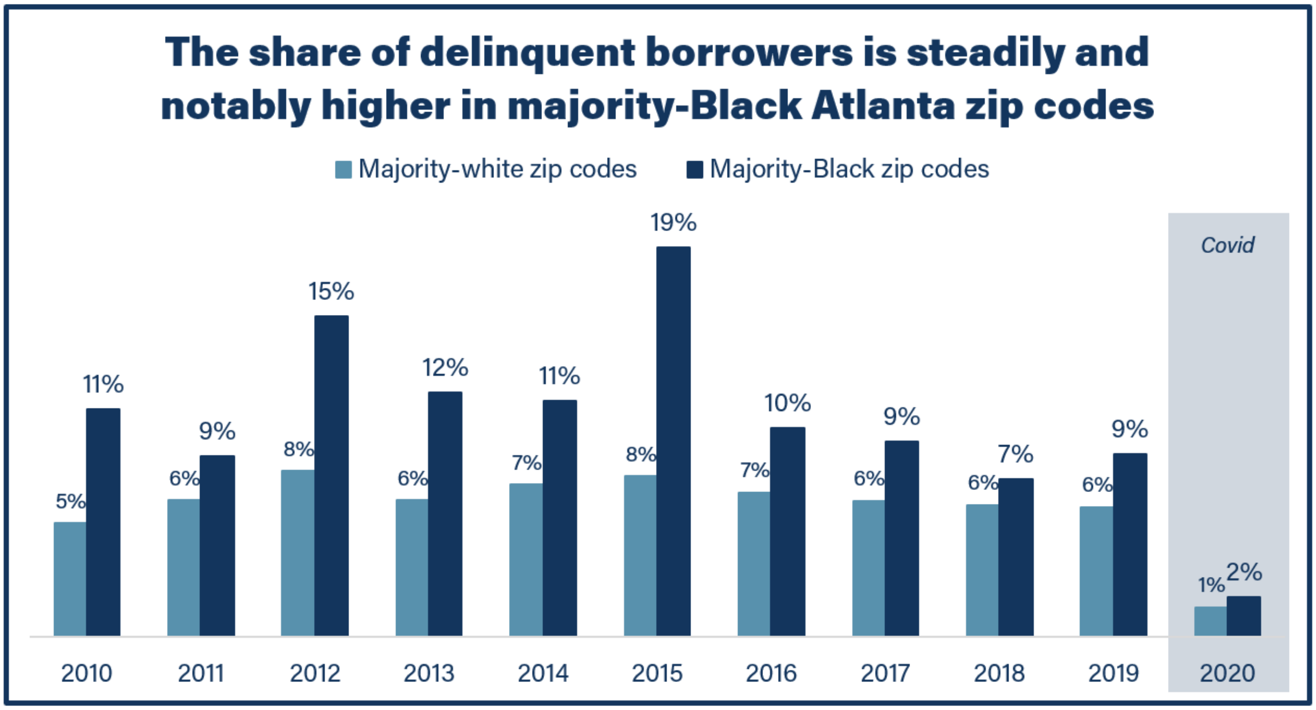


Yet the growth in the number of student loan borrowers and their ballooning balances tell just one part of the story of the student debt crisis in Atlanta.

Two key measures of student loan borrower repayment distress are delinquency and default. Student loan borrowers become delinquent when their student loans are more than 30 days past due, and borrowers enter default once their student loans are more than 270 days past due. Default is particularly detrimental to the financial health of borrowers. Not only does it indicate some level of struggle in repayment, but also carries incredibly punitive consequences for borrowers and families. Defaulting on a student loan can affect a borrower's ability to find steady employment, maintain a professional license, or rent a home or apartment, and borrowers in default can face punitive collection tactics, have their wages garnished, Social Security checks seized, and lose out on vital tax benefits.

Of note, 2020 saw the lowest periods of delinquency in Atlanta between 2010 and 2020, almost certainly attributable to the fact that student loans were paused beginning in March 2020. Delinquency rates are consistently higher among majority-Black zip codes, in some years more than doubling the delinquency rates of majority-white zip codes (Figure 5).

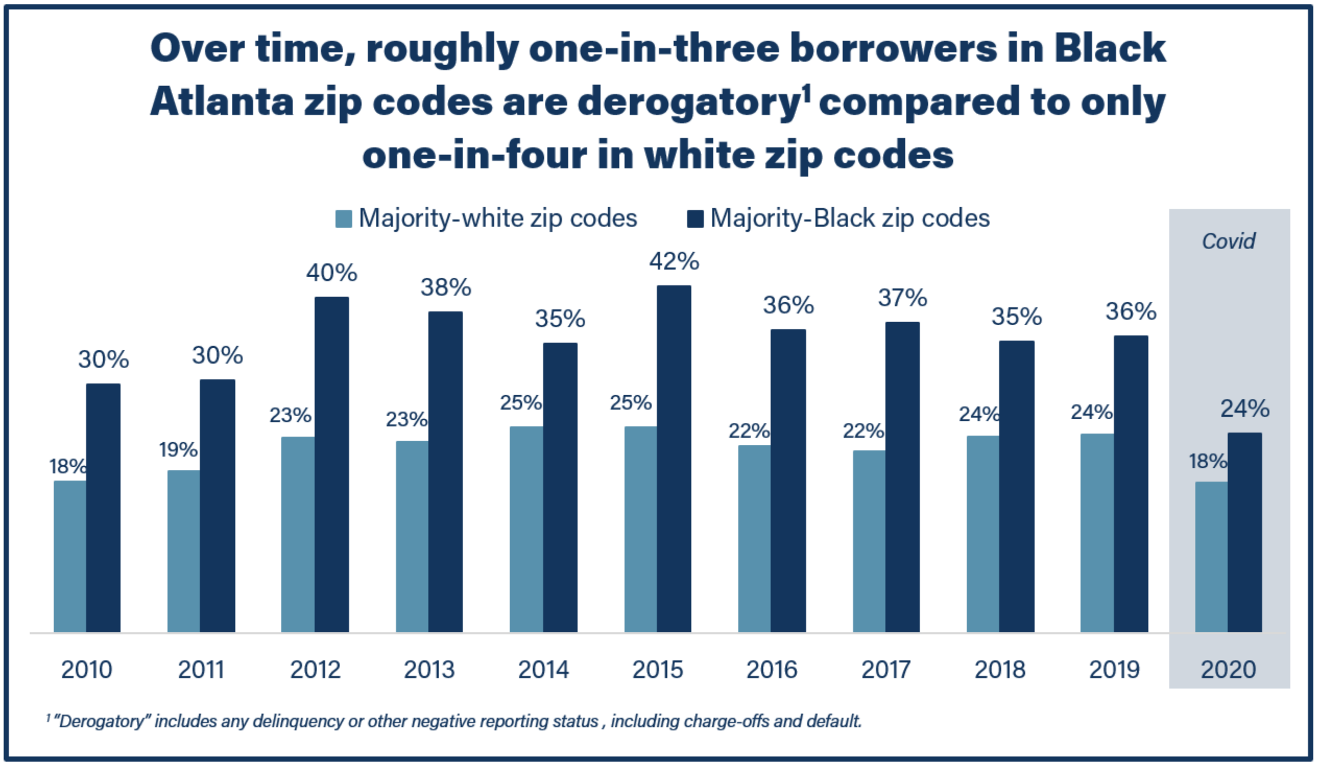
Figure 3: Delinquency and Default Rates in Majority-Black vs. Majority-white Zip Codes



In fact, student debt distress in majority-Black neighborhoods spiked in 2015, several years after the height of the Great Recession, while delinquency rates among majority-white zip codes remained relatively stable up until the pandemic and student loan payment pause.

As SBPC and others have shown, growing average debt balances and negative borrower outcomes like delinquency and default are not the only markers of student debt distress. Due to a broken and inequitably designed federal student loan repayment structure, student borrowers can face runaway debt balances that turn federal student loans into a debt trap. As mentioned above, Black borrowers often experience ballooning balances despite making monthly payments, which can impact their long-term credit outlook, ability to build wealth, and even their mental and physical health.[41]

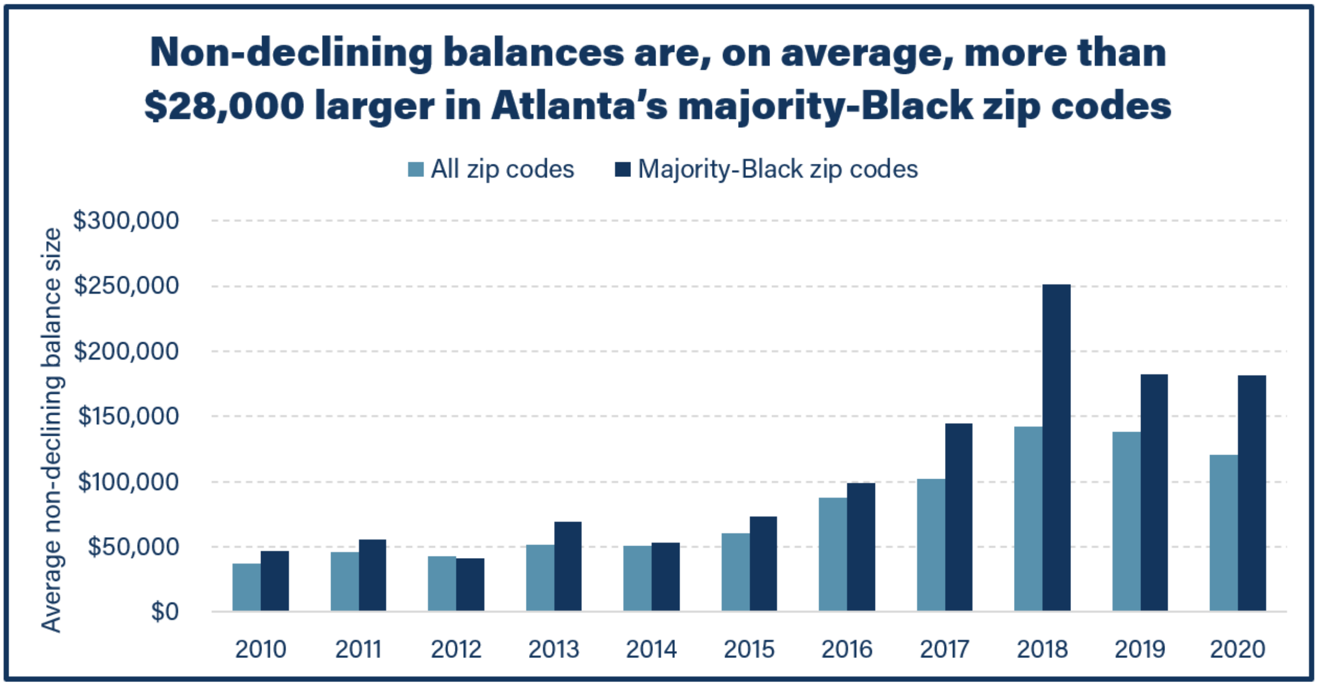
Figure 4: Student Loan Borrower Distress over Time in Majority-Black vs. Majority-white Zip Codes



In Atlanta specifically, the number of borrowers—especially borrowers in majority-Black zip codes with non-declining balances, or runaway debt—has more than doubled over the past decade.

Finally, we begin to see evidence that student loan debt is affecting the ability of borrowers to build wealth, specifically housing wealth. While homeownership rates among student debtors have long lagged behind non-debtors, the decline in homeownership among student debtors in Atlanta is relatively stark. In fact, the percentage of student debtors with a mortgage within majority-Black neighborhoods in Atlanta declined from over a quarter (27 percent) in 2010 to just over 16 percent in 2018 before rebounding modestly just before the pandemic.

Figure 5: Non-Declining Balances over Time in Majority-Black Zip Codes



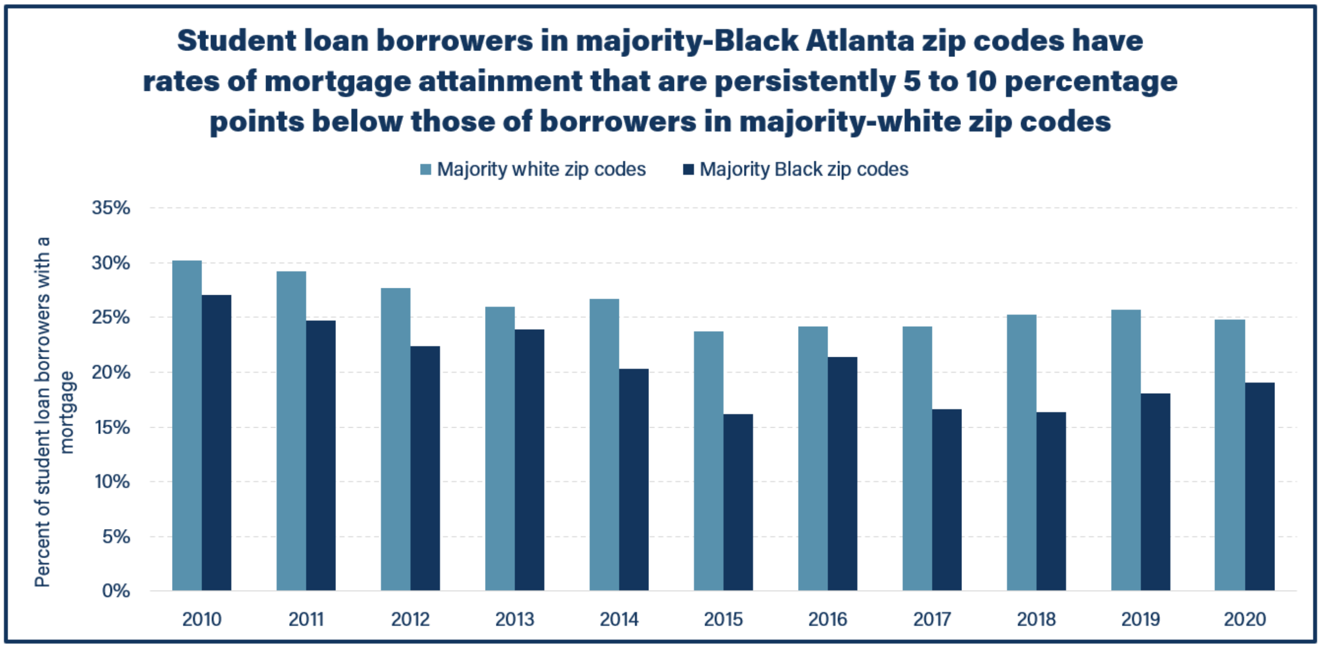
Evaluating the Financial Effects of Student Debt Cancellation

As noted above, in August 2022 President Biden announced an historic effort to cancel student debt broadly, delivering immediate debt relief to more than 40 million people nationwide. This new effort pledges to cancel $10,000 in student debt for student loan borrowers other than the highest earners and additional $10,000 in student debt ($20,000 in total) for borrowers who previously received a Pell Grant.

If implemented, the effect of this effort on Atlantans will be transformative. As announced, President Biden's newly announced student debt relief promises to make between 24 percent and 44 percent of Atlanta student loan borrowers debt-free and substantially reduce the student loan burden of an additional quarter of all Atlantans with student debt.[42]

This debt relief comes as Atlantans' student debt burdens have grown substantially over the past decade. The share of borrowers owing more than $10,000 increased from 63 percent to 76 percent between 2010 and 2020, and the share owing more than $20,000 increased from 41 percent to 66 percent. In addition, the share of borrowers owing more than $100,000 more than doubled over the same time period.

Figure 6: Rates of Mortgage Attainment over Time among Student Loan Borrowers



When implemented, this promised debt relief would disproportionately benefit majority-Black zip codes in at least two ways. First, because borrowers in majority-Black zip codes are more likely to fall behind on a student loan, any action to cancel a substantial share of student debt will disproportionately strengthen the credit profiles of borrowers in majority-Black neighborhoods. Second, because borrowers in majority-Black zip codes typically owe higher balances, a typical borrower in a majority-Black zip code is more likely to receive more debt relief in total than a typical borrower in a majority-white zip code.

These outsized benefits, however, are just a reflection of a student debt crisis that is more severe for borrowers in majority-Black zip codes, as described above.

When fully implemented, this new policy will leave between one quarter and one half of all borrowers in Atlanta debt free, but a majority of Atlantans with student debt will still face student loan bills if payments resume as planned in 2023.[43] Although this debt relief will disproportionately benefit borrowers majority-Black zip codes, more borrowers in these zip codes will have remaining student loan balances even after this new student debt relief is fully implemented. Further, borrowers with remaining balances in majority-Black zip codes will disproportionately be borrowers with very high balances.

Figure 7: Distribution of Student Loan Balances over Time

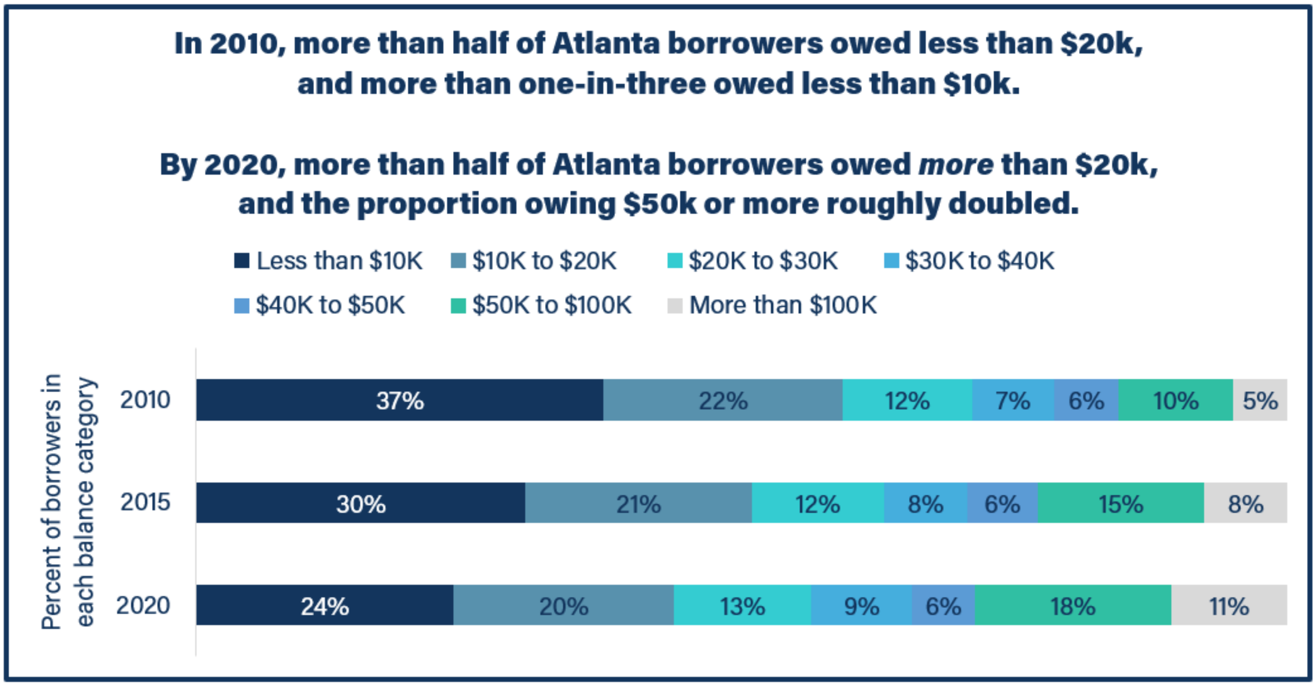
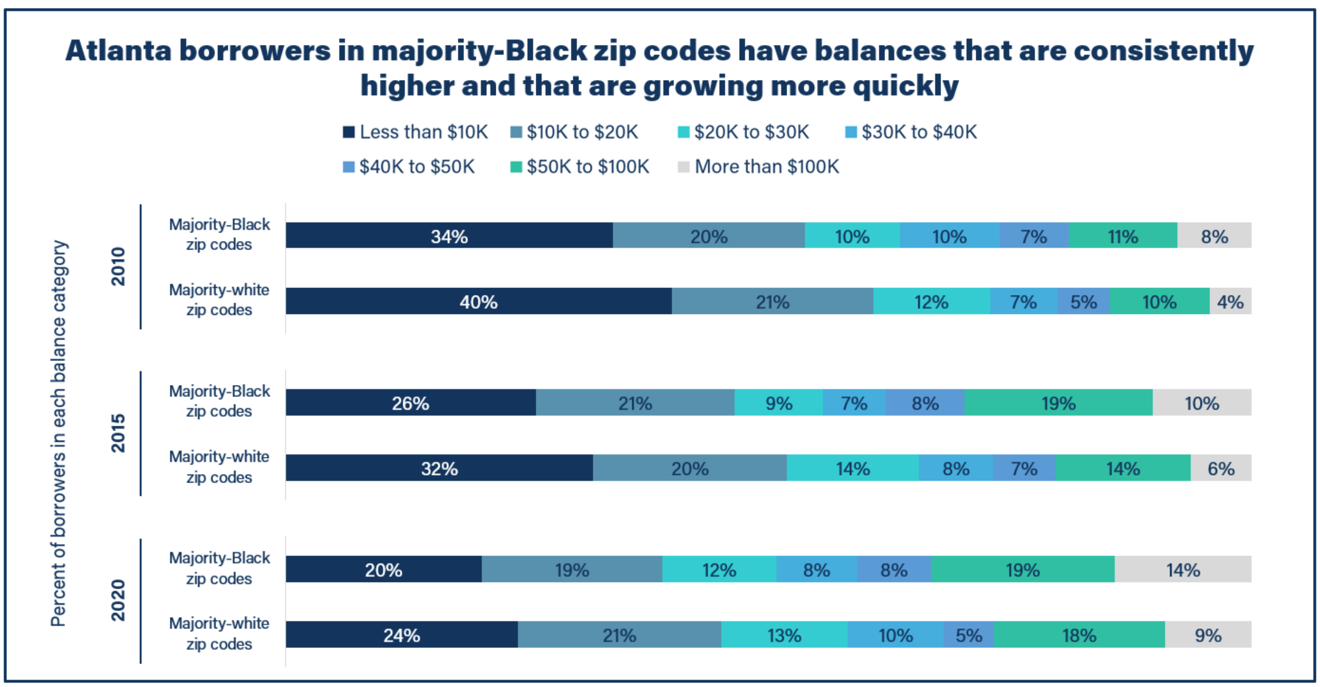


Figure 8: Distribution of Student Loan Balances over Time in Majority-Black vs. Majority-white Zip Codes



Lawsuits and Partisan Efforts in Congress Imperil Relief for Student Loan Borrowers in Atlanta

President Biden's student debt cancellation plan would offer student loan borrowers in Atlanta billions of dollars of debt relief, including potentially hundreds of millions of dollars for many of city's predominantly Black neighborhoods. Shortly following President Biden's historic debt cancellation announcement, the President's political opponents filed a series of sham lawsuits in efforts to thwart much-need student debt relief. In March 2023, two Members of Congress announced efforts to use the Congressional Review Act to overturn President Biden's debt relief plan alongside the federal student loan payment pause. These frivolous suits and partisan efforts in Congress not only aim to block transformative relief for tens of millions of student loan borrowers, but would also have an outsized effect in majority-Black communities that bear a disproportionate burden of the student debt crisis.

Figure 9: Atlanta Zip Codes Expected to See the Most Relief from Pending Student Debt Cancellation

ZIP CODE	PENDING STUDENT DEBT RELIEF	BLACK % OF POPULATION	INCLUDES PORTIONS OF. . .
30349	$162,743597	92%	College Park, South Fulton, East Point, Union City, Williamsburg Park
30281	$132,746,038	43%	Stockbridge, Windhaven Plantation, Rex, Woodhaven Estates
30331	$131,748,392	95%	Adamsville
30058	$131,032,509	93%	Lithonia, Stonecrest, Redan, Swift Creek, Collinsville
30252	$130,434,378	22%	McDonough

Conclusion

Borrowers across the country and across all of American higher education take on and struggle under historic and ever-increasing debt burdens. Student debt is an economic crisis, not merely a symptom of runaway college costs. Ending the student debt crisis is a matter of equity and a matter of justice. Student debt exacerbates existing inequities. America's persistent racial wealth gap means that students of color, especially those that are Black and Latino, are more likely to have student debt, borrow in higher quantities, particularly so for Black borrowers, and face more struggles in repayment—growing balances, delinquency, and default.

If implemented, President Biden's historic cancellation plan would provide transformational relief to tens of millions of borrowers across the country. Nearly 20 million people stand to see their balances completely erased while many more will feel the ease of this financial burden. However, this progress is only a start. Millions of student loan borrowers—including the majority of borrowers in Atlanta—will continue to receive student loan bills and struggle under the weight of this debt, increasing the likelihood of economic strain over the course of their lives. The Biden Administration must ensure a swift and efficient implementation of debt cancellation and continue to fix existing programs that are meant to provide borrowers with access to debt relief.

Education is supposed to be a tool for social mobility, and student loans were marketed as a way for Americans to invest in themselves and their families in order to achieve their dreams. But research among borrowers in communities across America has overwhelmingly established that the student debt crisis is hampering economic opportunity for millions, especially borrowers of color. Atlanta is a city that tells us so much about what it means, and what is needed, to build a vibrant multiracial middle class, and unfortunately as we see across the country, student debt continues to get in the way of that goal.

Endnotes

[1] *See* Sarah Kessler, *Student Debt Is Killing Entrepreneurship*, Yahoo! News (June 22, 2018), https:// finance.yahoo.com/news/student-debt-killing-entrepreneurship-133719117.html; Robert Bozick and Angela Estacion, *Do Student Loans Delay Marriage? Debt Repayment and Family Formation in Young Adulthood*, 30 Demographic Res. 1865 (2014), available at https://www.demographic-research.org/volumes/vol30/69/.

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[42] Note that Figure 7 does not filter by income. However, given that more than 95 percent of student loan borrowers will qualify for at least some relief under President Biden's relief plan and that a disproportionate share of those who will not qualify are high-balance borrowers, it is reasonable to conclude that the overall distribution depicted in Figure 6 and analysis thereof is reflective of the distribution of Atlanta borrowers who will get relief under the President's plan. *See* https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/08/24/fact-sheet-president-biden-announces-student-loan-relief-for-borrowers-who-need-it-most/.

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