

# THE GREAT SERVICE DIVIDE

Occupational Segregation, Inequality,  
and the Promise of a Living Wage  
in the Seattle Restaurant Industry

2020



BY  
RESTAURANT OPPORTUNITIES CENTERS UNITED  
RESTAURANT OPPORTUNITIES CENTER OF SEATTLE

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>1</b>	<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>TERMINOLOGY</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION &amp; METHODOLOGY</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>RESTAURANT INDUSTRY: SEGMENTS AND STRUCTURE</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>OCCUPATIONAL SEGREGATION IN SEATTLE</b>
<b>15</b>	<b>MATCHED PAIR AUDIT TESTS</b>
<b>18</b>	<b>WORKERS' VOICES</b>
<b>23</b>	<b>POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS</b>
<b>25</b>	<b>CONCLUSION</b>
<b>26</b>	<b>APPENDIX: ADDITIONAL STORIES</b>
<b>28</b>	<b>END NOTES</b>

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The restaurant industry employs nearly 300,000 workers in Washington, and over 150,000 workers in the Seattle region.<sup>1</sup>

In the coming years, this rapidly expanding sector stands to become the fourth largest employer, providing not only the largest source of minimum and subminimum wage jobs, but also well-paying professional careers. Currently, 22 percent of the restaurant workforce in Seattle earns a livable wage.<sup>2</sup> As one of the largest and fastest growing industries with an expanding supply of life-sustaining jobs, restaurants could offer a sustainable career ladder to thousands of people living in an increasingly precarious economy. This begs the question: sustainable jobs for whom?

With 40 percent of the Washington restaurant workforce composed of workers of color, restaurant professions could provide real pathways to living-wage professions for Black, Latinx, Asian, and Indigenous workers.<sup>3</sup> However, the current structure of the industry denies living-wage opportunities to a large percentage of this diverse workforce.

In order to determine the role of passive or implicit, and active discrimination in hiring practices in Seattle's restaurant industry, the Restaurant Opportunities Centers (ROC) United has partnered with the Seattle Office for Civil Rights to examine restaurant hiring practices and the experiences of workers of color. Utilizing census data to analyze segregation patterns within the industry, matched pair audit tests of job seekers, and interviews and focus groups with restaurant workers, we examined patterns of discrimination in the industry in order to craft proposals to support and encourage the adoption of racial equity practices by employers and the industry at large.

## KEY FINDINGS

### DEFINING THE PROBLEM OF RACIAL SEGREGATION IN SEATTLE RESTAURANTS

- ◆ Racial diversity defines the restaurant industry and its workforce. While workers of color represent 30 percent of the employed population in Seattle as a whole, they represent 46 percent of the employed restaurant workforce.
- ◆ Positions throughout both the “Front of House” (FOH, dining floor) and the “Back of House” (BOH, kitchen) are highly segregated by race and ethnicity. Although workers of color account for 46 percent of the industry’s workforce, workers of color are concentrated in less visible, lower-wage jobs, and are underrepresented in the coveted, highest-paid FOH positions. Only 18 percent of bartenders in Seattle are workers of color.
- ◆ The distribution of workers of color among different positions based on earnings does not reflect the diversity of the industry’s workforce, suggesting inequitable systems of hiring and promotion into higher-paying positions. Twenty-six percent of white bartenders and servers earn a livable wage, compared to 15 percent of bartenders and servers of color in Seattle.
- ◆ Matched pair audit tests of 105 fine dining establishments were conducted, with a total of 100 valid completed audits. Of these, there was no statistical difference in hiring outcomes based on interactions with hosts and management, however evidence of bias in social interactions favoring in-group, or white testers was found in 49 percent of audits, evidence of equal treatment was found in 34 percent of audits, and evidence of treatment favoring out-group, or Black and Latinx testers was found in 17 percent of audits.
- ◆ Of audits showing evidence favoring in-group testers, 6.1 percent resulted in job offers to in-group testers, 18.4 percent resulted in call-backs for in-group testers, 36.7 percent showed strong evidence of bias against out-group auditors, 28.6 percent showed evidence of implicit bias against out-group testers, and 10.2 percent resulted in out-group testers being told to apply elsewhere, either far out of town or in ethnic-themed restaurants.
- ◆ In interviews and focus groups, restaurant workers described firsthand experiences of discrimination from managers, customers, and co-workers, leading to patterns of self-selection bias. Although workers of color experienced overt discrimination, including being asked to consider lower-paying positions other than server or bartender, these experiences ultimately led workers of color to not apply for top-tier positions because management and/or clientele behavior make them uncomfortable, or because they feel they do not match the image of workers in that profession.

IN-GROUP  
TESTERS

6.1%  
RECEIVED  
JOB OFFERS

18.4%  
RECEIVED  
CALL-BACKS

OUT-GROUP  
TESTERS

28.6%  
SHOWED  
IMPLICIT BIAS

10.2%  
TOLD TO  
APPLY  
ELSEWHERE

# || TERMINOLOGY

## MATCHED PAIR AUDIT TESTS OF SEATTLE RESTAURANTS

Results of 100 matched pair audit tests of fine dining restaurants in the city of Seattle.

17%

← TREATMENT FAVORING OUT-GROUP TESTERS

34%  
EQUAL TREATMENT

49%

TREATMENT FAVORING IN-GROUP TESTERS

---

**Discrimination:** Unfair differences in employment treatment or employment outcomes (such as hiring, promotions, earnings) that negatively impact certain race/ethnic groups or genders. These differences may reflect explicit (conscious) bias or implicit (unconscious) stereotypes.

**Occupational Segregation:** Disproportionate rates of representation of race, ethnic and/or gender-based groups in different job titles.

**"White" and "Workers of Color":** "White" is shorthand for non-Hispanic whites, and "workers of color" refers to categories of African Americans/Blacks, Latinos, Asians, American Indians, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders, as well as to mixed race individuals, and other categories, used by the Current Population Survey and American Community Survey.

---

**Livable Wage:** A livable wage is defined here as the income needed for an individual to live at four times the poverty level or higher. The median restaurant worker in Seattle earning a livable wage is single with no children, and the average is single with less than one child. For this report, we can estimate the livable hourly wage to be \$26 per hour in the city of Seattle. Normally, a living wage is defined as the minimum level of earnings needed to support a typical worker.

---

**Matched Pair Audit Testing:** A research methodology that measures the extent of discriminatory treatment exhibited by an employer of two equally qualified job applicants. Applicants (auditors) are matched on as many characteristics as possible, varying only on the observable characteristics being tested, such as race or gender.

**Auditor:** An individual trained to apply for employment, housing, etc. in order to test an establishment's hiring or related practices and ascertain if there is evidence of discrimination.

**Dyad:** A pair of auditors with matching qualifications that visibly differ in only one demographic characteristic, such as race or ethnicity/national origin.

**“In-Group” and “Out-Group” Tester:** An in-group tester, in this case a white tester is the auditor representing the in-group characteristics that are the beneficiaries of discriminatory behavior. An out-group tester, in this case a Black or Latinx tester is the auditor outwardly representing the characteristics that are the subject of discrimination. Characteristics tested can include race, gender, national origin, age, religion, sexual orientation, and so forth.

---

**Occupational Structure:** The relationship between restaurant occupations and the physical location where those occupations are situated within a restaurant, that largely dictate an employee’s ability to earn a livable wage.

**“Front-of-the-House” (or FOH) and “Back-of-the-House” (or BOH):** Restaurant industry terms for placement and function of workers in a restaurant setting. Front-of-the-house generally represents those interacting with customers in the front of the restaurant, including hosts, waitstaff, bussers, and runners. Back-of-the-house generally refers to kitchen staff, including chefs, cooks, food preparation staff, dishwashers, and cleaners.

**“Tier I” and “Tier II”:** Tier I is a term we use to describe the higher-paid positions in both the front and back-of-the-house; Tier II is the term we use to describe the lower-paid positions in both the front and back-of-the-house. Tier I positions offer the highest wages, opportunities for advancement, access to benefits, and clear career paths. Upward mobility from a Tier II position to a Tier I position is the most natural and meaningful form of advancement in this industry. This report primarily focuses on Tier I FOH positions.

---

**Restaurant Segment:** The North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) categorizes the restaurant industry (“Food Services and Drinking Places”) into four segments: full-service, limited service, special food services, such as catering, and drinking places, or bars which serve drinks but not food.<sup>4</sup>

**Casual restaurants:** Also described as “casual dining” or “family style” restaurants, are moderately priced full-service restaurants. They include franchise or chain restaurants, such as Olive Garden or Applebee’s, as well as independently owned establishments. Casual fine-dining refers not to a casual restaurant, rather a fine-dining establishment with a less formal environment.

**Fine Dining:** These are full-service restaurants with a price point per guest of \$40 or more, including beverages but excluding gratuities. Fine-dining restaurants are commonly referred to as “upscale” restaurants, and it is common for fine dining restaurants to have a unique concept (the name, menu, and decor of a restaurant).

**Full service:** These restaurants have table service where the seated consumer orders from a menu.

---

# III INTRODUCTION & METHODOLOGY

## SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESTAURANT INDUSTRY

The significance of the restaurant industry as a principal driver of the economy continues to grow. In the Seattle region, the restaurant industry employs nearly 150,000 workers and is on pace to supplant manufacturing as the fourth largest employer in the coming years (see Figure 1).<sup>5</sup> Although the industry is the largest source of minimum wage jobs, it also provides high-earning jobs to 22 percent of its workforce and has the potential to provide a sustainable career ladder to thousands more workers.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, Seattle's restaurant industry is a key node in regional tourism and hospitality sectors, attracting visitors and multiplying the flow of dollars into the local economy. Both Seattle residents and visitors enjoy eating out, and the restaurant industry reflects the region's vibrant culinary culture. As such, the restaurant industry is a key component of the city's vitality, diversity, and promise.

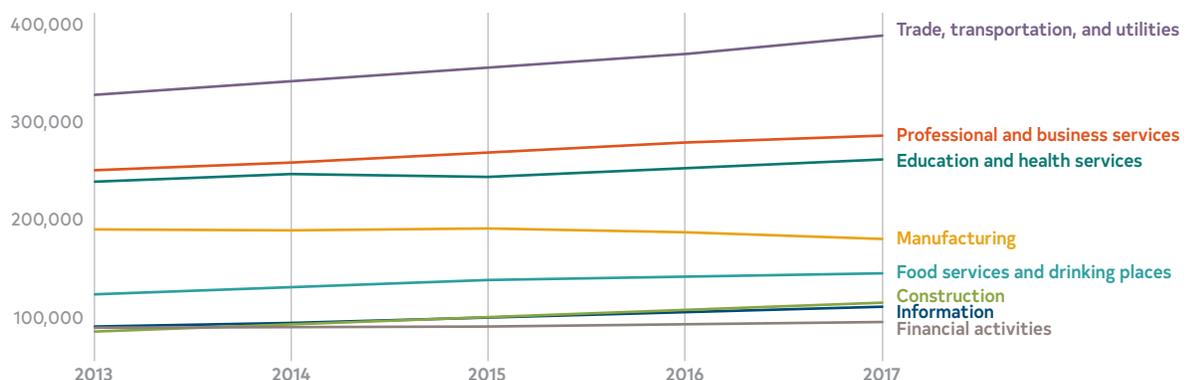
The restaurant sector is projected to grow by 15 percent over the coming decade.<sup>7</sup> As of the last Economic Census, the industry generated \$4.7 billion in revenue, accounting for an estimated \$303 million in sales tax for the state and \$140 million for the city.<sup>8</sup> Seattle de-

pends heavily on the restaurant industry's contribution to the economy and tax base.

Throughout the state, the restaurant industry is a primary employer for hundreds of thousands of workers and a portal of opportunity to immigrants, who often find their first jobs in restaurants and eventually make a career in the industry. This opportunity is of particular importance to the economy of low-wage workers, and can be a source of promise fulfilled or promise denied. The reality is that white workers in Seattle are nearly twice as likely as workers of color to earn a livable wage. Workers of color have over twice the odds as white workers of working in the lower wage occupation of dining room helper (busser and runner), and less than one quarter the odds of working in the higher wage occupation of bartender, compared to white workers.<sup>9</sup> The restaurant industry could provide livable wage jobs to a proportionate number of women and workers of color, yet it disproportionately relegates workers of color and women to poverty level wages and denies them the opportunity to advance into higher earning positions. The restaurant industry has the potential to provide viable opportunities for all.

**FIGURE 1**  
**LARGEST PRIVATE SECTOR EMPLOYERS IN SEATTLE AREA**

All employees in major private industries for all establishment sizes in Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue, WA MSA, NSA, 2013-2017. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages.



# METHODOLOGY

Previous research examining the fine dining restaurant industry in New York, Chicago, Detroit, and New Orleans has found that the industry's advancement opportunities are inaccessible to many workers, and that discrimination and inequality plague the industry, particularly for immigrants, workers of color, and women.<sup>10</sup> Building on these findings, this study provides a deeper analysis of apparent and not-so-apparent inequalities in fine-dining establishments in Seattle. Using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, this study demonstrates that although discrimination continues to impact multiple phases of restaurant employment, from when a worker first seeks entry into a workplace (hiring and placement phase), to how they are treated while working (workplace conditions), and the worker's future in that workplace (promotion or advancement), employers have also made strides in promoting greater racial equity. A concerted effort by the city, industry, and the public can further encourage, promote, and solidify gains in racial equity and personal dignity. We employed several research methods to capture the complexities and subtleties with which discrimination adversely affects the opportunities and employment conditions in restaurants for workers of color and women.

## MATCHED PAIR TESTING

To test directly whether discrimination exists in the upscale restaurant industry, we analyzed the results of matched pair audit tests of 105 fine-dining establishments within the city of Seattle conducted by the Seattle Office for Civil Rights (SOCR) as part of their Civil Rights Testing program. Matched pair testing allows observation of employers' hiring practices when they are not aware of being observed. In this procedure, dyads or pairs of auditors ("testers") applied simultaneously for employment as servers. Within these pairs, the testers differed in only one demographic characteristic, that of race or ethnicity/national origin. Otherwise, the testers had matching qualifications. Hence, a controlled environment was created to observe the effect of a protected class on differences in employment outcomes — who is hired and what position they are hired for. Between August 2017 and November 2018, seven testers arrayed in four dyads completed 105 tests on fine-dining restaurants within Seattle city limits. Tests were all conducted on

the same day, on average two hours and 32 minutes apart, with a minimum of 11 minutes, and a maximum of nine hours and 54 minutes difference. All testers were professional actors.

Testing allows for closer examination of the industry and provides both statistical and anecdotal data. Other methodologies employed in this study also illuminate the attitudes, behaviors, and practices that underlie occupational segregation and discrimination. Vignettes of social interactions that occurred during the matched pair audits illustrating the bias encountered by workers of color are interspersed throughout this report.

## CENSUS ANALYSIS

We examined race and occupational demographics, earnings, and poverty data for currently employed restaurant workers in Seattle derived from the most recently available merged five-year sample (2013-2017) from the American Community Survey to provide the most accurate picture of the existent demographics of opportunity within the industry. We also examined Bureau of Labor Statistics' data for the Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue metropolitan statistical area and other data sets to understand employment and wage dynamics in the industry.

## FOCUS GROUPS

We conducted four focus groups with a total of fifteen restaurant workers in Seattle to examine issues of racial equity facing workers in this industry. The focus group guide was developed based on the lessons learned in a previous report — "Ending Jim Crow in America's Restaurants: Racial and Gender Occupational Segregation in the Restaurant Industry" — and in conjunction with a recent report on racial equity and implicit bias — Building the High Road to Racial Equity: Addressing Implicit Bias in the San Francisco Bay Area Restaurant Industry. The guide includes sections on worker experiences applying to front-of-the-house (FOH) positions, employer hiring practices, and customer attitudes. The interviews in Seattle and in the Bay Area were conducted over a two-year period from September of 2016 to September of 2018. Specific identifying information was removed or changed to protect respondents' identity.



# RESTAURANT INDUSTRY: SEGMENTS AND STRUCTURE



## SEGMENTS OF THE RESTAURANT INDUSTRY

Not all restaurants are created equal. Although all restaurants are in the business of serving their guests a meal, factors such as ambience, type of service, and type of targeted patrons segment the industry into three broad categories which vary markedly with respect to wages, working conditions, and workforce composition. In this report, we categorize those segments as fast-food or “quick-service,” casual full-service, family-style or franchise, and fine-dining, both casual fine-dining and high-end “white-tablecloth.”

At one end of the spectrum, fast-food or quick-service restaurants provide limited table service and are often characterized by low-paying jobs and employment primarily of workers of color and youth.

The next segment, family-style restaurants, includes those that are often considered “casual-dining” with moderately-priced meals and informal environments. This segment includes both chain restaurants and franchises such as Olive Garden or Applebee’s, and smaller, independently owned or family-owned establishments such as neighborhood restaurants.

At the other end of the spectrum lie fine-dining or “white-tablecloth” restaurants. Fine dining is often defined by a price point per customer of \$40 or more including beverages but excluding gratuity. Restaurants within this segment are known for high-quality service, talented — often celebrity — chefs, name recognition or notoriety, and unique restaurant concepts. As a result of the growth of the industry, there is a growing trend of casual fine dining within this segment, with an emphasis on high-quality food and service in a relaxed or thematic setting. Increasingly, “white tablecloth” refers to upscale fine dining at a much higher price point. Although each establishment in this category seems unique, many of these establishments are owned and operated as part of small corporate chains or “mini empires,” both within the city and across the country.

The type of establishment in which a person works significantly affects earnings. Fine-dining establishments offer employment with the highest wages — especially via tips. However, employment discrimination based on race and ethnicity can lead to exclusion from jobs in this segment, and this segment experiences the highest rates of segregation. This segment is therefore most closely studied in this report.

## OCCUPATIONAL STRUCTURE

While a worker's ability to gain employment in a fine-dining establishment significantly increases their earnings potential, a more important determinant of a worker's potential for earnings is the type of position attained in that establishment. A worker's position in a restaurant also shapes how they experience work on a daily basis. The sommelier helping to pair a wine with an entrée has very different duties than a dishwasher cleaning a dirty pot. Each position corresponds to different roles, compensation, and working conditions.

While many restaurants have their own internal structure of jobs and job titles, a common pattern for classifying occupations is applicable throughout the industry.

### MANAGERIAL AND SUPERVISORY POSITIONS

These positions include general managers, assistant managers, wine directors/sommeliers, chefs, and sous chefs. Many of these positions require specific vocational training or experience.

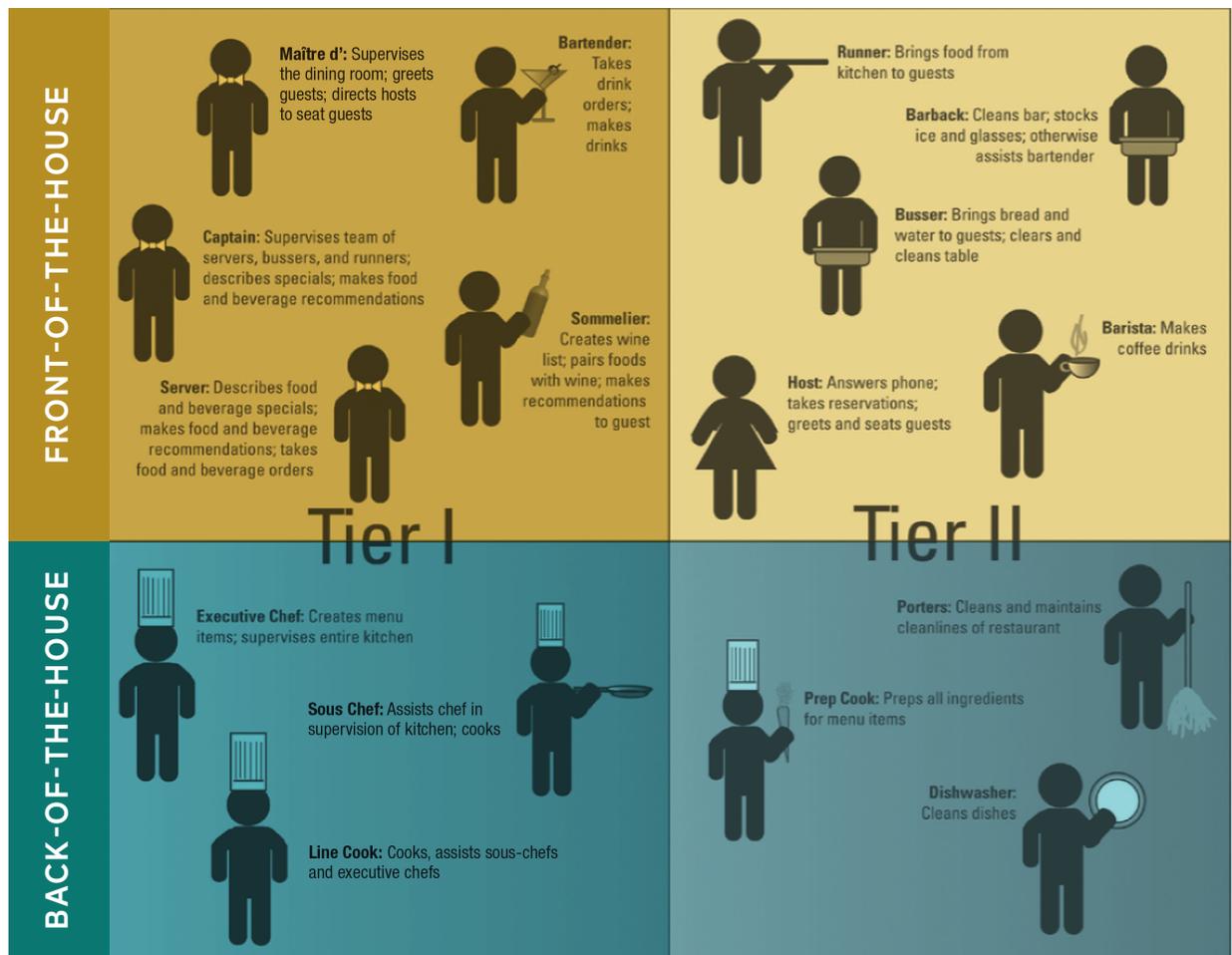
### FRONT-OF-THE-HOUSE (FOH) POSITIONS

These positions involve direct customer contact, and include hosts, maître D's, bussers, food runners, servers, captains, bartenders, and barbacks.

### BACK-OF-THE-HOUSE (BOH) POSITIONS.

These positions involve no direct guest contact, and include cleaners, dishwashers, prep cooks, line cooks, and chefs.

**FIGURE 1**  
**TIER I AND TIER II POSITIONS IN THE**  
**FRONT AND BACK-OF-THE-HOUSE**





## WORKPLACE HIERARCHIES, TIER I AND TIER II

Both FOH and BOH contain positions that can be categorized into tiers based on compensation and other aspects of job quality, which we refer to as Tier I and Tier II within both FOH and BOH. This study closely examines the differences in outcome associated between these two tiers, and the outcomes associated with Tier I FOH positions in fine dining. As Figure 2 demonstrates, Tier I positions include those like servers and bartenders in FOH, and chefs and sous chefs in BOH, while Tier II positions include those like bussers and runners in FOH, and prep cooks and dishwashers in BOH.

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF POSITION

Analysis of wages in a previous survey of restaurant workers in Seattle encapsulating various segments of the restaurant industry, reveals important distinctions with respect to wages among both the type of restaurant and the type of position when comparing white workers and workers of color. Overall, restaurant workers of color report median wages of \$2 per hour less than white restaurant workers. Among full-service workers, white men earn \$4.81 more per hour than men of color, and \$5.28 more per hour than women of color when comparing median wages, and white women working in tipped occupations report that they earn median wages \$3.01 per hour higher than women of color.<sup>11</sup> The segment and position workers occupy have a dramatic impact on their earning potential.



# OCCUPATIONAL SEGREGATION IN SEATTLE

## BOTH INTERVIEWED, WHITE TESTER PRIORITIZED FOR HIRING

On a Thursday in October, a Black male tester and a white male tester in their twenties applied for employment at a fine-dining restaurant in Seattle. Both testers met with the general manager (GM) who reviewed their resume and briefly interviewed them on the spot. The GM asked the Black tester if he was interested in a FOH or BOH position, what shifts he was interested in, what he studied at school, and explained that servers often quit. The GM then told the Black tester he would contact him if a spot became available. The GM later that day asked the white tester if he was interested in a full-time position and then told him that he would be placed at the top of the list for consideration as soon as a position was available. The restaurant had just hired two new servers.

## DIVERSITY, NOT EQUITY, DEFINES DINING

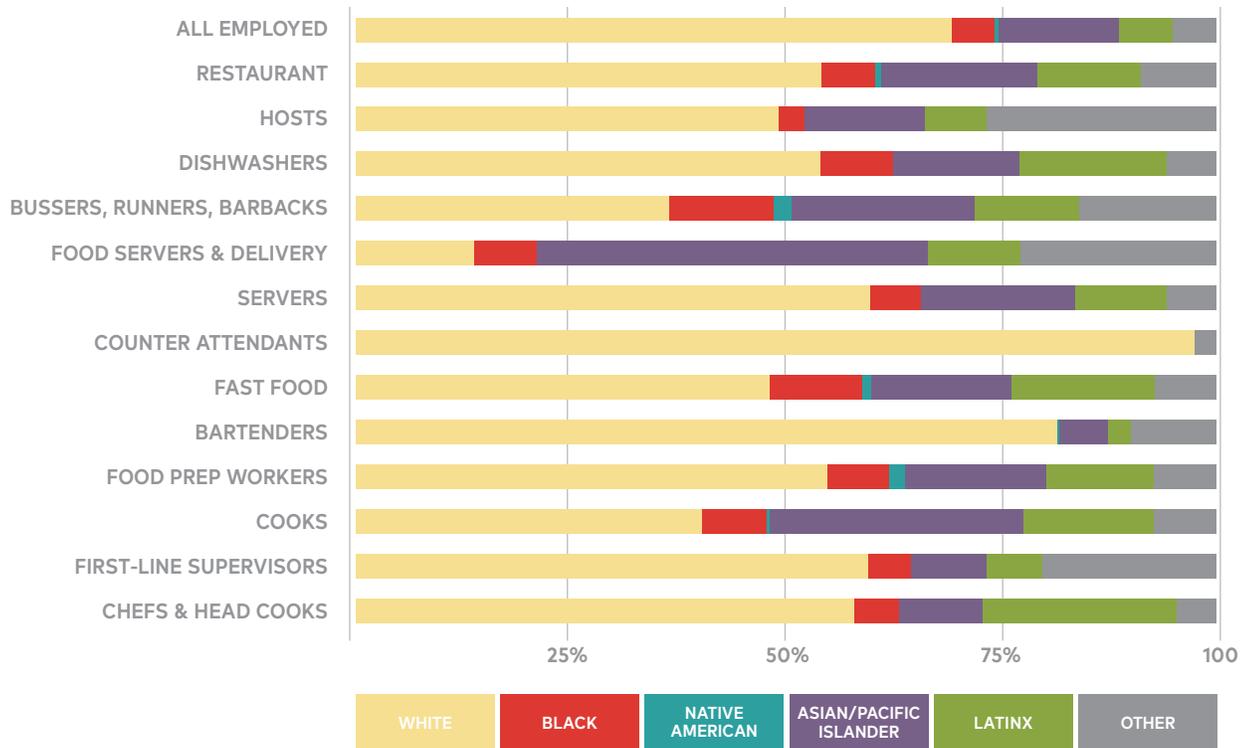
Racial and cultural diversity define the restaurant industry and its workforce. Although the industry-at-large is over-represented by small and mid-sized chain conglomerates, restaurants representing every concept and ethnic cuisine imaginable dot the Seattle landscape and expand the culinary habits of many diners. However, the rich tapestry of diversity found in the restaurant industry does not translate into equal opportunity and equal treatment for women and workers of color. Positions throughout both FOH and BOH are highly segregated by race, ethnicity, and gender. Although workers of color and women account for close to half of the industry's workforce, workers of color are concentrated in less visible, lower-wage jobs, and both are underrepresented in the coveted, highest-paid FOH positions. The distribution of workers of color by position has significant long-term economic consequences exacerbated by a lack of opportunities for training, advancement, and overall working conditions.

## RACE AND ETHNICITY

Although workers of color account for close to half of the industry's workforce, a large proportion of these workers are concentrated in the fast-food and family-style segments. As Figure 3 illustrates, workers of color are overrepresented in positions such as delivery and room service (86%), runners, bussers, and bar-backs (63%), in fast food occupations (52%), and as cooks (60%). Workers of color are also dramatically underrepresented as counter attendants (2%), a Tier II FOH occupation exemplified by interaction with the public. They are underrepresented in supervisory positions (40%), as bartenders (18%), and servers (40%). The large majority of FOH Tier I positions are occupied by white workers. White workers occupy 82 percent of bartender positions, and close to 60 percent of all server and supervisory positions. White workers also hold 98 percent of

**FIGURE 3  
RESTAURANT  
DEMOGRAPHICS  
BY RACE**

Demographics of the restaurant workforce by race in the city of Seattle. American Community Survey, 2013-2017.



counter attendant positions. Although counter attendants' wages are similar to those of other Tier II positions, counter attendants share other non-wage job characteristics of Tier I positions, such as direct customer contact, as well as greater opportunity for advancement through social networks with management. However, it should be noted that both hosts and dishwashers, Tier II positions in the FOH and BOH respectively, broadly match the demographics of the restaurant workforce. Nationwide, host positions tend to be overrepresented by white workers, and dishwasher positions tend to be overrepresented by workers of color. A concerted effort to advance hosts, as well as bussers, runners, barbacks, and BOH occupations into server and bartender positions would create expanded opportunities for workers of color in the industry.

**GENDER**

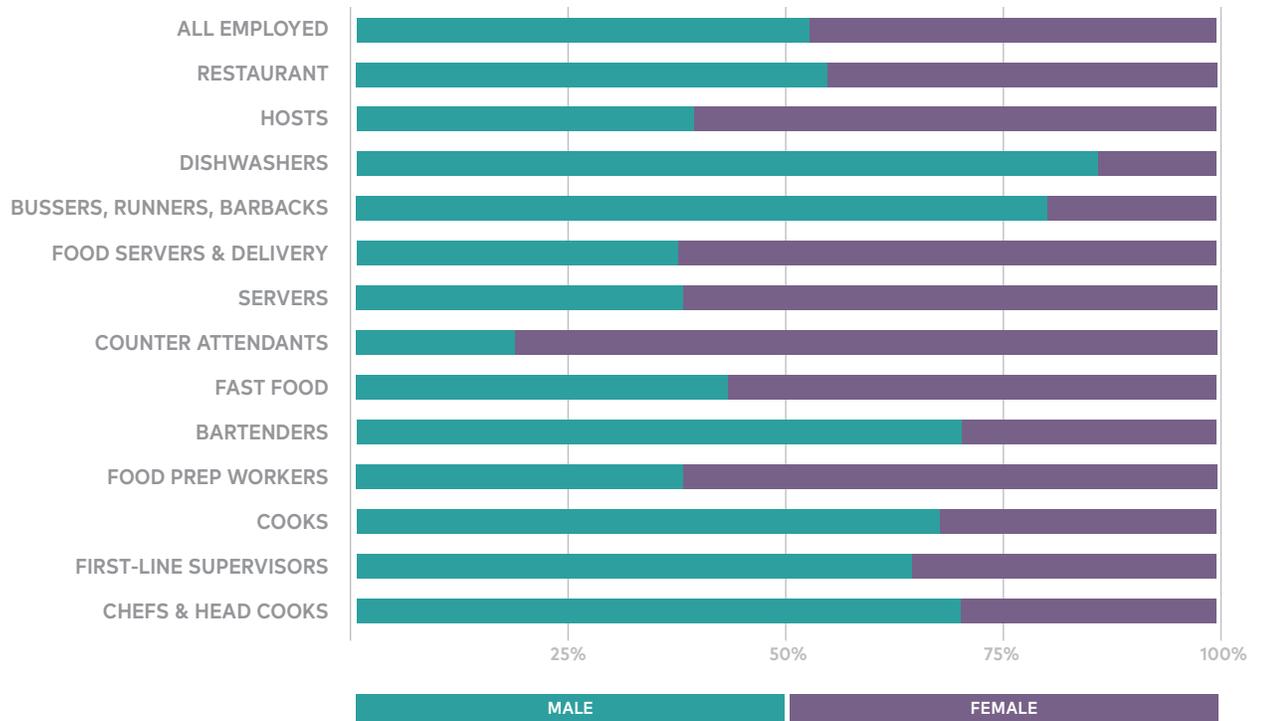
Women account for a little over 47 percent of the total workforce and 45 percent of the restaurant workforce in Seattle, but the demographic parity does not extend to earning potential. As shown in Figure 4, female workers are underrepresented in the industry's highest-paid jobs. Positions in the Seattle restaurant industry are highly gendered,

**WHITE TESTER WAS CALLED BACK TO SCHEDULE AN INTERVIEW, BLACK TESTER WAS NOT**

On a Monday in November, a Black male tester and a white male tester in their twenties applied for employment at a fine-dining restaurant in Seattle. Both spoke with a host, who took their resumes and asked them to call back to speak with the general manager. The host asked the Black tester if he had previous experience as a server and asked the white tester if he was interested in a full-time or part-time position. The Black tester called back to schedule an interview with the GM and did not receive a return call. The GM called the white tester directly to schedule an interview.

**FIGURE 4  
RESTAURANT  
DEMOGRAPHICS  
BY GENDER**

Demographics of the restaurant workforce by gender in the city of Seattle. American Community Survey, 2013-2017



**LATINA TESTER INTERVIEWED,  
WHITE TESTER OFFERED INTERVIEW**

On a Saturday in August, a Latina female tester and a white female tester in their twenties applied for employment at a fine-dining restaurant in Seattle. The Latina tester met with the owner who interviewed her, reviewed her resume and references, and told her she was only looking to fill part-time night shifts and stated that parking was very expensive so tester would need to make sure she could arrange transport if hired. The owner told the tester she was “lovely” and said she would e-mail her and cc the hiring manager to follow-up. The white tester subsequently met with the hiring manager who reviewed her resume, told her they were looking to fill part-time brunch shifts, and told her she would interview her the following week.

with men holding 65 to 70 percent of chef, supervisory, and bartender positions, all Tier I FOH positions with the highest earning potential. Women are markedly overrepresented in positions involving food preparation, and Tier II FOH service positions. Women hold 57 to 63 percent of fast food, food preparation, delivery and room service, host, and server positions. Although servers are FOH Tier I positions, as seen in Figure 8, women are underrepresented in the highest earning Tier I FOH positions. In a striking demonstration of gender norms, women hold 82 percent of counter attendant, 14 percent of dishwasher, and 20 percent of busser, runner, and bar-back positions.

**THE ROLE OF RACE  
AND GENDER ON WAGES**

Even though the restaurant industry is the largest employer of minimum wage workers, and five of the ten lowest paid occupations in the Seattle region are in the restaurant industry, 22 percent of restaurant jobs in Seattle are livable wage jobs, providing incomes at over four times the poverty level, and an additional 34 percent of restaurant occupations provide an income at over twice the poverty level allowing basic needs to be met.<sup>12,13,14</sup> However, this means 44 percent

of the workforce earns wages that are not sufficient to meet basic needs, and race and gender play a pivotal role in determining one's ability to obtain and hold a livable wage position.

Only 16 percent of workers of color enjoy an income greater than four times the poverty rate, compared to 27 percent of white workers (see Figure 5). This disparity is repeated among the Tier I FOH positions of bartender and server (see Figure 6). Workers of color are more likely to earn precarious wages, and this likelihood only increases in the most lucrative positions of bartender and server. Over 40 percent of bartenders and servers of color are likely to earn a wage insufficient to meet their basic needs, and nearly twice as high a percentage of servers and bartenders of color earn poverty level wages (22%) as their white counterparts (13%). This situation is even starker for women. Nearly 50 percent of women servers and bartenders earn a wage insufficient to meet their basic needs, compared to 24 percent of men (see Figure 8.)

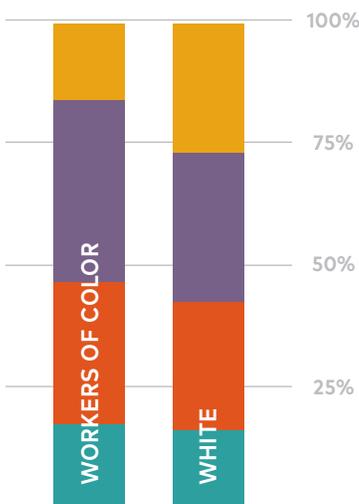
Even though workers of color make up 46 percent of restaurant workers, they only account for 31 percent of all workers earning the average wage for a full-time year-round worker

**BOTH INTERVIEWED,  
WHITE TESTER OFFERED A JOB**

On a Friday in December, a Black female tester and a white female tester in their twenties applied for employment at a fine-dining restaurant in Seattle. Both testers spoke with the general manager, who reviewed their resumes and briefly interviewed both testers. The GM told them the restaurant was not hiring servers at the moment. The GM encouraged the Black tester to apply at a fine dining restaurant far north of the city. The GM joked with the white tester and asked if she had a flexible schedule, if she was interested in a position as host, and if she could start immediately. The GM referred to both testers as "sweetheart" at the end of the interview.

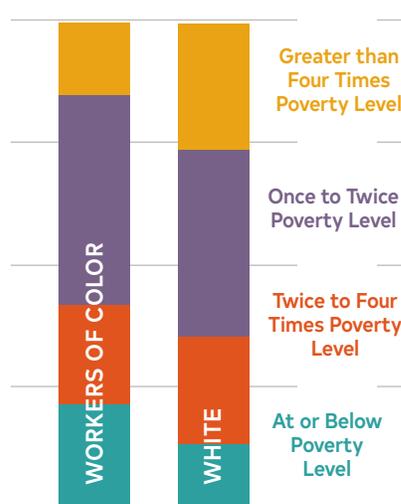
**FIGURE 5  
RESTAURANT POVERTY  
LEVELS BY RACE**

Poverty by race among restaurant workers in the city of Seattle. American Community Survey, 2013-2017.



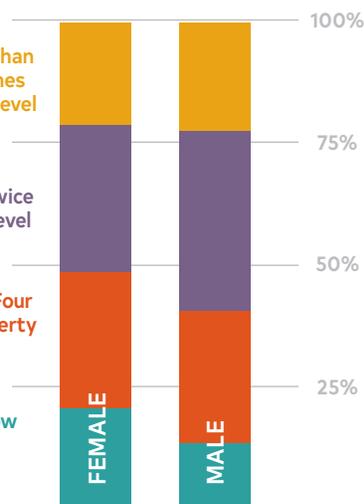
**FIGURE 6  
BARTENDER AND SERVER  
POVERTY LEVELS BY RACE**

Poverty by race among Tier I FOH workers in the city of Seattle. American Community Survey, 2013-2017.



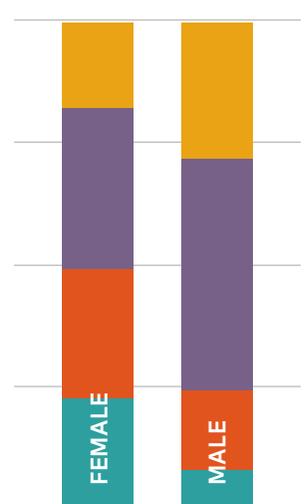
**FIGURE 7  
RESTAURANT POVERTY  
LEVELS BY GENDER**

Poverty by gender among restaurant workers in the city of Seattle. American Community Survey, 2013-2017.



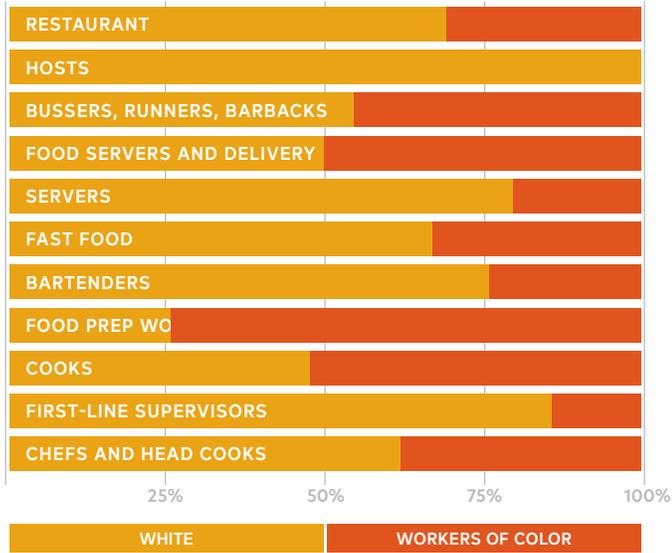
**FIGURE 8  
SERVER AND BARTENDER  
POVERTY LEVELS BY GENDER**

Poverty by race among Tier I FOH workers in Seattle. American Community Survey, 2013-2017.



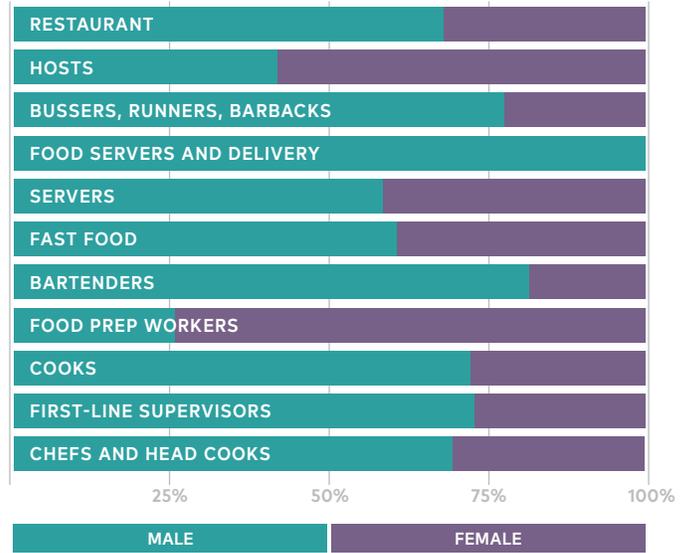
**FIGURE 9**  
**RACE DEMOGRAPHICS OF FTYR**  
**ABOVE AVERAGE WAGE EARNERS**

Race demographics of restaurant workers earning an above-average wage for full-time year-round restaurant employment in Seattle. American Community Survey, 2013-2017.



**FIGURE 10**  
**GENDER DEMOGRAPHICS OF FTYR**  
**ABOVE AVERAGE WAGE EARNERS**

Gender demographics of restaurant workers earning an above-average wage for full-time year-round restaurant employment in Seattle. American Community Survey, 2013-2017.



**LATINA INTERVIEWER STEERED TO APPLY ELSEWHERE**

On a Sunday in October, a Latina female tester and a white female tester in their twenties applied for employment at a fine-dining restaurant in Seattle. Both were told their resumes would be put on file in case a position opened up. The Latina tester was encouraged to apply at a restaurant nearby.

in the restaurant industry (see Figure 9). They only account for 20 percent of servers, 24 percent of bartenders, and 14 percent of first-line supervisors earning an above average wage. This story repeats itself for women who make up less than a third of above average wage earners, and only 40 percent of above average earning servers, even though they account for over 60 percent of servers (see Figure 10.)

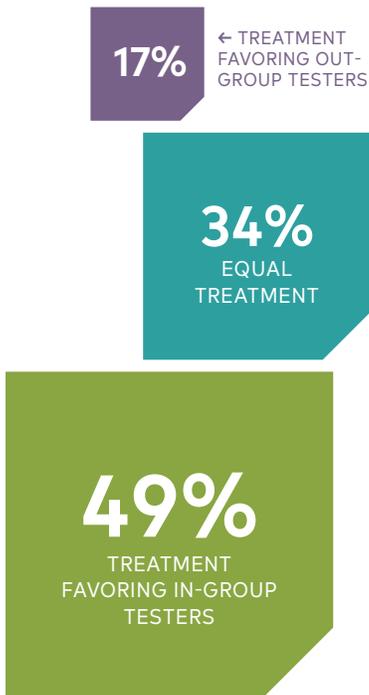
Restaurant workers in Seattle are among the highest earning around the country, and earn more at every decile than most of their counterparts in other states and cities, yet the occupational and wage disparities faced by women and workers of color mirror those of workers elsewhere and relegate these workers to economic hardship at disproportionate rates. A variety of factors play a role in this dynamic, including openly discriminatory hiring, training, and retention practices, implicit bias among employers and restaurant patrons leading to unfavorable hiring conditions for workers of color and women, absence of networking and training opportunities for many disadvantaged worker populations, and self-selection among workers leading them to remove themselves from the hiring pool due to the resulting stereotype threat and impostor syndrome. The restaurant industry has an opportunity to address these disparities to ensure a more vibrant and dynamic restaurant workforce and industry.



# MATCHED PAIR AUDIT TESTS

**FIGURE 11**  
**MATCHED PAIR AUDIT**  
**TESTS OF SEATTLE**  
**RESTAURANTS**

Results of 100 matched pair audit tests of fine dining restaurants in the city of Seattle.



In order to examine the role of overt discrimination in hiring practices in upscale restaurants where the majority of livable wage opportunities are centered, the Seattle Office for Civil Rights conducted matched pair audit tests of 105 fine-dining establishments in Seattle. From August 2017 to November 2018, seven testers visited 105 fine-dining restaurants within Seattle city limits and applied for a FOH position. Two-person teams, or dyads, were formed consisting of persons of the same gender and similar age, appearance, and manner, differing only in race or ethnicity.

Testers were selected, trained, and credentialed to appear equally qualified for the server positions they sought. Each team was carefully matched for physical and non-physical characteristics. Resumes were developed to give members of each team equivalent education, restaurant experience, and other work experience, with the person of color's credentials slightly stronger to eliminate ambiguity in interpreting test results. Testers were provided training in key fine-dining restaurant skills, and teams were coached together so that personal attributes, such as presentation style and demeanor, were similar and so that responses to employers' questions would be similar.

A comprehensive list of 170 fine-dining establishments in Seattle was compiled from multiple publicly available databases including Zagat, Yelp, and Open Table, from which establishments were randomly selected along with priority testing of restaurants advertising that they were actively hiring. A test was defined as completed if both testers succeeded in (a) informing the employer that they were seeking a job and (b) revealing their race to the employer by their appearance. Immediately after completing an interaction with an employer and without speaking with their testing partner, testers recorded their experiences on a structured questionnaire. No employer appeared to suspect that any tester was not a bona fide job applicant, however on five occasions tests were aborted due to familiarity of the tester with other employees on site at the test location. In total, 100 valid tests were conducted, with five tests excluded due to irregularities in the testing procedure.

The matched pair audit tests found 49 instances of bias in social interactions that favored in-group testers. In three cases, in-group testers were given a job offer when their out-group dyad was not. In nine cases, in-group testers were called back for a second interview, while their out-group dyad was not. In 18 tests, there was clear evidence of the out-group tester receiv-



**BOTH TESTERS TOLD TO APPLY ONLINE,  
WHITE TESTERS RESUME WAS TAKEN  
DIRECTLY TO GENERAL MANAGER**

On a Wednesday in November, a Black female tester and a white female tester in their twenties applied for employment at a fine-dining restaurant in Seattle. Both spoke with front-of-the-house staff who informed them that all applications were collected online and handed them a business card with instructions. The white tester's resume was taken to the general manager to see if they were available for an interview, but the tester was told the GM was currently in a meeting.

ing poorer treatment than their in-group counterpart, and in an additional 14 tests there was evidence of implicit bias to the detriment of the out-group tester. Additionally, five out-group testers were invited to apply elsewhere, either at restaurants far outside the city limits, or in ethnic-themed restaurants in adjacent neighborhoods. Only out-group testers were invited to apply elsewhere. A total of 34 tests showed evidence of equal treatment, and 17 tests showed evidence of favorable treatment towards the out-group tester.

In total, evidence of bias in social interactions favoring in-group testers was found in 49 percent of audits, evidence of equal treatment was found in 34 percent of audits, and evidence of treatment favoring out-group testers was found in 17 percent of audits. Of audits showing evidence favoring in-group testers, 6.1 percent resulted in job offers to in-group testers, 18.4 percent resulted in call-backs for in-group testers, 36.7 percent showed strong evidence of bias against out-group auditors, 28.6 percent showed evidence of implicit bias against out-group testers, and 10.2 percent resulted in out-group testers being told to apply elsewhere.

It should be noted that, in contrast to tests conducted in other cities, we did not find statistical evidence of discrimination in hiring offers in favor of the in-group (white) testers. Potential reasons for this include that there were seven testers arrayed in four dyads, or matched pairs, re-

sulting in one female dyad conducting 58 tests and one male dyad conducting 36 tests. It is possible that there were subjective unmeasured individual characteristics in the out-group testers in those two dyads sufficient to overcome implicit and explicit bias in hiring practices. Although all testers were actors rigorously trained by SOCR and ROC United, tester experience ranged from extensive to no previous FOH serving experience.

It is also possible that since the SOCR testing program targeted the majority of fine-dining restaurants in Seattle, knowledge of the testing was obtained by employers leading to a change in behavior. As noted above, there were multiple instances when in-group testers were treated favorably and out-group testers experienced discrimination, and these are described anecdotally in the next section, however these instances did not impact the statistical analysis of hiring practices. It is possible, of course, that restaurant workers of color in Seattle experience less discrimination when compared to their counterparts in other cities, but the existence of patterns of discrimination in outcomes is readily visible in the demographics of the industry and can be seen in the fact that nearly half of all tests were found to favor in-group testers, and only 34 percent of tests found equal treatment of in-group and out-group testers. One final potential explanation, described qualitatively via focus groups of workers, is that there is a preference for "lighter-skinned" tokenism in hiring. When combined with the industry's high rate of turnover, discriminatory experiences on the restaurant floor, and workers' of color reluctance to apply for positions they have been historically excluded from, this tokenism allows opportunities for only a small group of highly qualified workers of color. This possibility is further discussed in the section that follows.

#### GENERAL MANAGER SHOOK WHITE TESTER'S HAND ONLY

On a Wednesday in November, a Black male tester and a white male tester in their twenties applied for employment at a fine-dining restaurant in Seattle. Both spoke with a general manager, who accepted their resumes and said he would review them and get back to them. The GM shook the white tester's hand and asked if he was "making the rounds."

#### ONE TESTER INFORMED THAT INTERVIEWS WERE BEING SCHEDULED, OTHER WAS NOT

On a Friday in December, a Black female tester and a white female tester in their twenties applied for employment at a fine-dining restaurant in Seattle. The Black tester was greeted by a manager who was busy, but took the tester's resume and said they would be in contact if needed. The white tester met with a front-of-the-house staff who took her resume and informed her that interviews were being scheduled for the following week.



# WORKERS' VOICES

Though racial discrimination in hiring, retention, and promotion is a common experience for workers, it is rarely overtly expressed as discrimination. Indeed, many restaurant owners are often unaware that the recruitment, hiring, and promotion practices that are common within the industry are driving racial inequities and leading to employment barriers for workers of color. When questioned about this phenomenon, many employers stated that they were unable to find a sufficient number of qualified applicants. Others circumvented this critique by defending the diversity of their workforce as a whole

without taking into account demographic differences by position and earning potential.<sup>15</sup> In order to better understand how workers make sense of the racialized disparities rampant in their work environment, ROC-United conducted four focus groups with a total of fifteen current restaurant workers in Seattle and combined them with details recounted by hiring audit testers.

Key themes that emerged pointed to experiences with informal hiring practices preferencing well-networked applicants, overt employer discrimination, as well as more subtle barriers posed by employer practices and protocols. Equally salient were barriers that workers placed on themselves and that coworkers placed on each other, including both white workers who were seeking to maintain their status as well as workers of color who were resentful of the advancement of other workers of color. Some workers also said that guest preference is an important factor. Other common barriers such as the lack of transportation, commuting among multiple jobs, and extra childcare needs were acknowledged by many.

## THE WHITE TESTER ENCOURAGED TO CONTACT GENERAL MANAGER DIRECTLY

On a Friday in January, a Black female tester and a white female tester in their twenties applied for employment at a fine-dining restaurant in Seattle. The Black tester gave her resume to a host. The white tester gave her resume to a host who told her she would pass the resume along to the general manager. The host also gave the white tester the GM's business card and encouraged her to email the GM directly.



## PROFILE: JORDAN BROWN

Jordan Brown is 28 years old and originally from Buffalo, New York. He moved to Seattle to reunite with friends who urged him to come with promises of good jobs and the opportunity to save money, so they could eventually open a business together. Jordan came with 12 years of experience in the industry; he started as a dishwasher and prep cook, but has spent most of his years as a server in fine dining, some bistros, and often in casual dining or gastropubs.

*"My most vivid memory as a server was when I worked at a showplace called the Tralf. I got to see some wonderful performances; one was Benjamin Booker, it was magical. I had never heard of him before that night." Other positive memories come with great tips. "A lot of positives. I've gotten 50 percent tips before. Birthday tips have always been awesome. In Chicago it was really cold and the restaurant was empty, a regular who was a lawyer gave me a \$100 tip on a \$40 bill."*

But, over the years, Jordan has learned how he is perceived as a dark-skinned Black man and is cautious about how and where he seeks work. "Mostly, I feel anxiety. I think growing up in the 90s, walking into things I felt like racism was dead, but doors kept getting slammed in my face. It took a while and it took white people telling me, white people who were watching who told me. The color of my skin is almost always a thing. Appearance as far as my hair. At one place, if I didn't keep my hair in a fade, they didn't like it, but anyone not black could do anything with their hair."

*"When looking for work, I won't apply to places because of the experience of other people of color who I've watched, or because I've known someone racist there was in a position of power or there was sexual harassment happening. Let me put it this way, restaurants don't need a glassdoor.com. We all know. If it's big enough, we know."*

In Seattle, Jordan has been enthusiastically invited to interviews based on his resume, only to be told that he's not the right fit once the hiring manager sees him. He recently received an email following up on an interview suggesting that he was a better fit for a prep cook position, even though his resume was entirely based on his serving experience. "Unless my management has been other people of color, it's always played a part. A lot of times when I've had white managers, they always favor white men. I've watched it happen - watched someone come in and apply who is perfectly fine and they end up giving the job to someone with no experience who ends up being a mediocre worker."

*"It happens constantly. Chicago, New York, everywhere. I've even had women and other minorities do that. I interviewed at a black owned restaurant and it was weird, the guy had a person of color as his chef, but I later found out that he never hired Black people. His response to being questioned on this was that he was looking for a higher end clientele and he couldn't be a savior for everyone."*

Sometimes, the barriers don't end after getting the job

*"I find that sometimes we don't get the help or the investment that other people do. I've watched it happen. I've even gotten berated for trying to teach a white male something that he didn't know how to do because it made him 'feel bad,' even though the bartender told me I'd said nothing wrong. Work mules. We are the work mules. [White workers] get asked if they want to sit down. Crazy stuff. A black woman I worked with experienced so much harassment and asked to take a break to go outside, and was labeled as lazy."*

*"Myself, I prefer diversity. I just hate the same thing every day. I don't like being in a room*

*"I find that sometimes we don't get the help or the investment that other people do. I've watched it happen."*

*with only black or only white people, or 100 percent period, it makes me uncomfortable, no matter who it is. I usually try to make sure I apply at a place that is a little more diverse — that's newer, now that I'm older. I've been the only black person and that's not fun — don't let something come up missing! I've literally quit the same day someone's tips were missing and I kept getting asked about it when it was least likely that it could be me. I was the only Black person there. And when it was revealed that I didn't do it, the manager said, 'Oh, don't make this about race!'"*

*"I've had customers who seemed uncomfortable with me serving them at first, and I ended up being their favorite — either through some Black servant fantasy, or I did break down their barriers. I've been questioned about my wine recommendations and had guests seek suggestions from a white coworker. Loved it when my bartender would respond, 'You should ask Jordan, he knows better than me.'... it became a thing for us."*

*"I wish this wasn't a thing and wish I didn't know that racism is still a huge thing, because I was a lot happier before... when I thought it was 'just me.'"*

#### WHITE TESTER ENCOURAGED TO CONTACT GENERAL MANAGER DIRECTLY

On a Friday in January, a Black female tester and a white female tester in their twenties applied for employment at a fine-dining restaurant in Seattle. Both were met by FOH staff who accepted their resumes. The Black tester was told to apply online and was not greeted with a smile or eye contact. The white tester was told to email the general manager directly and was asked about her recent experience.

## NETWORKS FACILITATE HIRING

The primary theme that emerged from our conversations involved how hiring decisions are largely based on networks and who one knows. Without those networking opportunities it is very difficult to gain the experience necessary to be considered for an opening. Several workers explained, "The very first job that I got, I was recommended by my brother," and "most of the jobs I've had in the industry, it was because someone who already worked... they recommended [me] into that position." One manager in one of the focus groups noted, "I've been talking to managers and owners a lot lately, asking: "How do we [stop] just hiring from our friend group?"... "It doesn't matter if it's a luxury restaurant or cocktail bar, all of the key positions, you're trying to hire people you already know." Once one has built up experience, it isn't enough to take a resume to highlight one's experience, as another worker noted: "People want something or someone they trust. I did the walk around, dropping resumes at places a couple of times... I've never dropped off a resume again. I [only] apply for positions that are open."

## EMPLOYER BIAS

Another theme that emerged from the focus groups involved employer bias, both subtle and overt. "The racism that is involved in our industry isn't the kind that is actively

hurtful, it's passively hurtful and painful," said one worker. "I don't see a lot of people of color in serving positions. Maybe budget, but not at higher-end restaurants," noted another.

When workers of color are on the floor, they are more likely to face disciplinary sanctions, "People are quicker to discipline workers of color," noted one participant. One African American manager who noted that she could see workers of color breathe a sigh of relief when they saw her explained, "As we think about encouraging more workers of color to enter these positions where they're not normally [present], we don't have a lot of workers of color with experience ... they're going to stand out and any errors they make are going to stand out. So how do we support them and prepare restaurants for meetings and provide ongoing trainings? It's not just about hiring people in the door, but keeping them." She also noted near constant turnover when they did hire workers of color, in part due to the unfair discipline:

"I finally got an African American in FOH one day and he came to work sick one day, hung over... I let the new manager know... and he was extremely passive aggressive... bussing his tables for him, slamming things down. It was very unfair because we had white employees that would come in and be 1000 times worse... clearly intoxicated from the night before, and it was just okay... we didn't see many black folks in there honestly."

Workers observed that management already knows who it wants for a position, "It's the old school mentality of women on the floor, women in the front of the house, and men are the managers." One worker noted, "Owners don't explicitly say it, but they feel certain races are not a good fit for certain positions." The exceptions, in workers' minds, stand out: "At [one restaurant] the owner is a woman of color, and she has tried to hire for diversity and we have a pretty diverse clientele. She had a lot of press for being a South Asian businesswoman in the neighborhood."

## RESTAURANT PATRON PREFERENCE

Participants in the focus groups noted that clientele play an important role in how workers are treated. One white server who was bussing noted, "I was just helping deliver food to the table. I was the white guy so [customers] wanted to talk to me, not the African American manager."

### WHITE TESTER ENCOURAGED TO APPLY

On a Friday in January, a Black female tester and a white female tester in their twenties applied for employment at a fine-dining restaurant in Seattle. Both were met by FOH staff and told that interviews would be occurring shortly. The white tester was greeted warmly and asked about her background.



### WHITE TESTER INVITED TO AN INTERVIEW

On a Sunday in March, a Black female tester and a white female tester in their twenties applied for employment at a fine-dining restaurant in Seattle. The Black tester was met by a host who asked if she had experience tending bar. The white tester was greeted by back-of-the-house staff who offered a short, rushed interaction. The white tester was called back for an interview, while the Black tester was not.

### WHITE TESTER INTERVIEWED, OFFERED A STAGE

On a Tuesday in May a Black male tester and a white male tester in their twenties applied for employment at a fine-dining restaurant in Seattle. The Black tester left his resume with a FOH staff. The white tester was directed to the hiring manager who conducted a brief interview and invited the tester to come in on Friday for a stage (work trial).

### WHITE TESTER TOLD HER RESUME WOULD BE GIVEN DIRECTLY TO MANAGER

On a Friday in June, a Black female tester and a white female tester in their twenties applied for employment at a fine-dining restaurant in Seattle. Both were met by a FOH staff who accepted their resumes. The white tester was told her resume would be given to the manager.

One worker of color complained about restaurant patrons treating workers as exotic oddities. "If you are the only person of color working FOH at a bar or restaurant, there's a general curiosity about you. People notice you and ask questions to figure you out." While another complained about patrons doubting their fine-dining skills, "I curated the wine list, and they can't fathom that a Black person could be doing such a thing... 'Oh, you speak so well,' they say. There's an expectation that a person of color can't have refined taste or enjoy things that aren't necessary to life, such as cocktails or luxury items."

At times, workers acknowledged the issue of customer preference but saw it as the natural order of things, as one worker stated: "People are more comfortable being served by somebody that looks like them."

## STEREOTYPE THREAT, IMPOSTER SYNDROME, AND WORKER RESENTMENT

Many workers shared the common experience of being required to train new, white workers for a higher-paid position but never being considered for that position themselves — for example, bussers and runners training a newly hired server, or long-time servers training white workers to take on a management role.

While qualified workers did object to being passed over for positions, many expressed a desire to avoid advancement opportunities in a manifestation of "imposter syndrome" and "stereotype threat," both common occurrences for women or people of color who do not fit the stereotypical image for certain positions. "Imposter syndrome" is a thought pattern in which one doubts one's accomplishments and has an ungrounded fear of being exposed as unqualified or incapable, whereas "stereotype threat" refers to the fear of confirming negative stereotypes about one's identity group.<sup>16</sup> These workers said they did not want to pursue advancement out of concern that they would be viewed as underqualified or "not the right fit" for the position, regardless of their actual skillset.



# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS



## WHITE TESTER INVITED TO INTERVIEW

On a Sunday in July, a Black female tester and a white female tester in their twenties applied for employment at a fine-dining restaurant in Seattle. Both were met by a host who accepted their resumes. The white tester received a phone call and an invitation for an interview from the general manager, but the Black tester did not.

Restaurant Opportunities Centers United has developed a suite of policy recommendations to promote equitable outcomes in the restaurant industry. A selection of these recommendations are highlighted here.

In order to racially desegregate the restaurant industry, many more restaurants need to engage in the process of interrogating and transforming their recruitment, hiring, and retention pathways to proactively counter bias and discrimination. We need policymakers to leverage their influence, in conjunction with committed restaurant owners, restaurant patrons, and workers. Without the pressure of these vital players, industry-wide change will likely be gradual and intermittent.

Employers, in particular, can advance racial equity through, “Adding Racial Equity to the Menu: An Equity Toolkit for Restaurant Employees,” a toolkit created by Restaurant Opportunities Centers United (ROC United), Race Forward, and the Center for Social Inclusion. The toolkit provides interested employers with step-by-step resources to assess, plan, and implement steps towards greater racial equity on the job. The toolkit allows employers to track the level of occupational segregation through straightforward worksheets that can be used to measure change in segregation over time. The toolkit also allows employers to dig deeper and create action-based plans around racial equity assessments and work plans; recruitment, outreach, and advertising; the application and hiring process; and promotions and training. The toolkit was created with the input and support of committed restaurateurs who tested and piloted the multiple steps outlined therein. The toolkit provides useful strategies for combating implicit bias, encouraging employers to make reasoned thought-out decisions using suggested rubrics, and avoiding spur-of-the moment decisions in the pressure-cooker atmosphere of a busy kitchen. Employers can obtain the toolkit and use it independently, or can reach out to ROC United for assistance in crafting a plan to advance racial equity in their restaurants.

WHITE TESTER INTERVIEWED,  
INVITED TO A FOLLOW-UP  
INTERVIEW NEXT DAY

On a Wednesday in July a Black male tester and a white male tester in their twenties applied for employment at a fine-dining restaurant in Seattle. Each tester handed in his resume to a FOH staff. The white tester was invited to meet the general manager who conducted an interview, inquired about availability, wine knowledge, and prior experience. The GM invited the white tester to return the following day for a formal interview.

Policymakers can advance greater racial equity across the industry by passing legislation that provides incentives to restaurants that are willing to engage in the intensive process of transitioning to a more equitable workplace. After thorough research through a partnership with the Harvard Law School Food Law and Policy Clinic, ROC United and Race Forward identified three primary incentive structures for policy makers to consider: tax, licensing, and recognition incentives. The city of Austin, Texas, for example, has adopted a Business Expansion Incentive Program that provides economic incentives in the form of property tax reimbursements and a percentage of wages reimbursement to employers who pay their employees at least the city of Austin's living wage (currently \$15 per hour), and operate locally, hire workers with barriers, or relocate workers within the city limits. The city of Oakland, CA is considering a recognition program that would certify progress towards racial equity for employers who could demonstrate such. ROC United has developed an online program in cooperation with UC Berkeley Haas School of Business to certify employers interested in decreasing segregation and wage inequity in their business that utilizes the tools in the Racial Equity Toolkit to walk employers through racial equity assessments, education and training, stakeholder engagement, action plan development, and action plan implementation.

Restaurant patrons play the most crucial role in advancing racial equity. The restaurant industry has been transformed by the public's demand for organic, local, and sustainable food. The public must also prioritize treatment of workers, and in particular, racial and wage equity when choosing restaurants. ROC United has developed a tool, the Diners Guide, that allows restaurant patrons to see how restaurants fare on wages, benefits, and racial equity. The public should use this tool to encourage restaurants they frequent to participate in certification programs to demonstrate public demand for worker rights. An official recognition program would then serve as an incentive for restaurateurs to demonstrate to the public their commitment to racial and wage equity. The findings in this report, supported by the vignettes interspersed throughout, clearly show that these and other steps are necessary to achieve racial equity in the restaurant industry.



# CONCLUSION



WORKERS OF COLOR  
ACCOUNT FOR

**46%**

OF THE INDUSTRY'S  
WORKFORCE

**The restaurant industry has the potential to provide livable wage jobs to a plurality if not a majority of its workforce.** However, even though Seattle's restaurant industry is racially diverse, demographic data derived from the US Census demonstrate severe racial and ethnic segregation by occupation. Although workers of color account for 46 percent of the industry's workforce, workers of color are concentrated in less visible, lower-wage jobs, and are under-represented in the coveted, highest-paid FOH positions. For example, only 18 percent of bartenders in Seattle are workers of color and are nearly half as likely as their white counterparts

to earn a livable wage. Matched pair audit tests of restaurant hiring practices found that a plurality of applicants of color experience unfavorable treatment during the hiring process, and during interviews and focus groups restaurant workers described a pattern of discriminatory behavior in their interactions with managers, customers, and co-workers. These experiences ultimately lead many workers of color to avoid seeking higher-earning opportunities in the industry. A concerted effort is needed to support employers committed to racial equity, to ensure workers are supported as they seek employment opportunities, and to build demand among consumers for racial equity in their dining decisions.



# APPENDIX: ADDITIONAL VIGNETTES

## WHITE TESTER WAS TOLD RESUME WOULD BE GIVEN DIRECTLY TO GENERAL MANAGER

On a Friday in August, a Black female tester and a white female tester in their twenties applied for employment at a fine-dining restaurant in Seattle. Both were met by FOH staff who accepted their resumes. The Black tester was told to apply online. The white tester was ensured her resume would be handed directly to the general manager.

---

## WHITE TESTER OFFERED JOB AS SERVER, BLACK TESTER ASKED TO CONSIDER A POSITION AS A BARISTA

On a Friday in August a Black male tester and a white male tester in their twenties applied for employment at a fine-dining restaurant in Seattle. Both testers were interviewed by the hiring manager who inquired about availability, prior experience, and explained the pay structure. The hiring manager asked the Black tester if he would be willing to work as a barista, a lower paying position, and told him to call back that evening. The hiring manager offered the white tester a position as a server at the end of the interview, and did not mention the barista position.

---

## BLACK TESTER INTERVIEWED WITH NO FOLLOW-UP, WHITE TESTER WAS INVITED TO INTERVIEW MULTIPLE TIMES

On a Friday in August a Black male tester and a white male tester in their twenties applied for employment at a fine-dining restaurant in Seattle. The Black tester was interviewed by the general manager and HR rep, who discussed his availability, past experience, skills, wages, and tip structure. They then told the Black tester to apply online, and he received no additional follow-up. The white tester left his resume with a server, and received three emails, two from an assistant manager, and one from the GM, asking him to apply online in order to schedule an interview.

---

## WHITE TESTER WAS INTERVIEWED BY GENERAL MANAGER, BLACK TESTER WAS NOT

On a Friday in October, a Black female tester and a white female tester in their twenties applied for employment at a fine-dining restaurant in Seattle. The Black tester left her resume with a FOH staff who told her she would give it to the general manager. The white tester was invited to meet the GM who reviewed her resume, told her they were hiring for lunch, and promised to get back to her.

WHITE TESTER MET WITH GENERAL MANAGER,  
BLACK TESTER WAS NOT

On a Thursday in October, a Black female tester and a white female tester in their twenties applied for employment at a fine-dining restaurant in Seattle. Both testers left their resumes with a FOH staff. The white tester was invited to meet the general manager, who told her they were not hiring but would keep her information on file.

---

WHITE TESTER WAS GIVEN APPLICATION TO COMPLETE,  
BLACK TESTER WAS NOT

On a Friday in October, a Black female tester and a white female tester in their twenties applied for employment at a fine-dining restaurant in Seattle. Both testers left their resumes with a FOH staff. The white tester was given an application to fill-out. The application included questions about criminal background.

---

WHITE TESTER WAS INVITED TO CONTACT GENERAL MANAGER,  
BLACK TESTER WAS NOT

On a Thursday in October, a Black female tester and a white female tester in their twenties applied for employment at a fine-dining restaurant in Seattle. Both testers left their resumes with a FOH staff. The white tester was given the general manager's business card and encouraged to contact them directly to discuss open server positions.

---

BLACK TESTER WAS ASKED WHERE SHE LIVED,  
WHITE TESTER WAS ASKED ABOUT MORNING-SHIFT

On a Friday in October, a Black female tester and a white female tester in their twenties applied for employment at a fine-dining restaurant in Seattle. Both testers met with the hiring manager. The hiring manager asked the Black tester where she lived, and asked the white tester if an 8am to 2pm Monday to Friday shift would work for her.

---

BOTH TESTERS INTERVIEWED, BLACK TESTER INTERVIEWED  
EXTENSIVELY ON WINE KNOWLEDGE

On a Wednesday in November, a Black male tester and a white male tester in their twenties applied for employment at a fine-dining restaurant in Seattle. The Black tester was given an application to fill out at home. The white tester was asked to fill out an application on the spot to give to the manager, and was given a business card with the manager's name and contact information. Both testers were invited to apply the next day and were questioned extensively by the hiring manager. Unlike the white tester, the Black tester was not provided an application page testing knowledge of wine and liquor, and instead was asked to rank wine according to body and varietal. The restaurant had recently hired two servers and told both testers to apply again in March.

# END NOTES

- 1** Bureau of Labor Statistics, May 2018 Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates for the United States, Washington, and Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue metropolitan statistical areas.
- 2** Restaurant Opportunities Centers (ROC) United analysis of American Community Survey 2013-2017. IPUMS-USA, University of Minnesota, [www.ipums.org](http://www.ipums.org). High earning or livable wage is defined here as earning four-times the poverty level or more. The median worker in that category was single with no children, and the average was single with less than one child. For this report, we can estimate the livable hourly wage to be \$26 in the city of Seattle.
- 3** *Ibid.* Statewide, workers of color comprise 28.3 percent of the entire workforce.
- 4** The restaurant categories described in this report are similar to the NAICS categories, with the addition of a distinction within full service between "fine dining" and "casual restaurants." Distinguishing these two categories proves critical to our analysis because job quality, employer practices, and patterns of ethnic and racial employment and occupational segregation differ across the two segments.
- 5** Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employees and Wages for Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue Metropolitan Statistical Area, 2013-2017.
- 6** Restaurant Opportunities Centers (ROC) United analysis of American Community Survey 2013-2017. IPUMS-USA, University of Minnesota, [www.ipums.org](http://www.ipums.org). High earning is here defined as earning four-times the poverty level or more. See also Bureau of Labor Statistics characteristics of minimum wage workers.
- 7** Restaurant Opportunities Centers United analysis of Long-Term Occupational Projections 2016-2026 and Short-Term Occupational Projections 2018-2020, Projections Central: State Occupational Projections, Projections Managing Partnership, weighted by Average Annual Openings. Derived from Occupational Employment Projections, Bureau of Labor Statistics.
- 8** US Census, "2012 Economic Census." Available at <http://www.census.gov/econ/>. Estimate uses 6.5% sales tax for the state and 3% for the city.
- 9** See note 2.
- 10** Restaurant Opportunities Centers United, 2004. *The Great Service Divide*. New York, NY: ROC United.
- 11** *Behind the Kitchen Door: The Highs and Lows of Seattle's Booming Restaurant Economy*, 2015. New York, NY: ROC United.
- 12** Bureau of Labor Statistics, March 2018. Report 1072: Characteristics of minimum wage workers, 2017.
- 13** Bureau of Labor Statistics, May 2018 Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates for the Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue metropolitan statistical areas sorted by median wage.
- 14** See note 2.
- 15** *Ending Jim Crow in America's Restaurants: Racial and Gender Occupational Segregation in the Restaurant Industry*, 2015. New York, NY: ROC-United.
- 16** Edwards, C. W., 2019. Overcoming Imposter Syndrome and Stereotype Threat: Reconceptualizing the Definition of a Scholar. *Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education*, 18 (1). <https://doi.org/10.31390/taboo.18.1.03>.



# THE GREAT SERVICE DIVIDE

Occupational Segregation, Inequality,  
and the Promise of a Living Wage  
in the Seattle Restaurant Industry



**ROC United**  
275 7th Ave, Suite 1703  
New York, NY 10001  
212.343.1771



**ROC Seattle**  
1402 Third Avenue, Suite 201  
Seattle, WA 98101  
206.369.9995



Sponsored by  
**Seattle Office for Civil Rights**

Research for this publication was generously  
supported by the **W.K. Kellogg Foundation**  
and **Annie E. Casey Foundation**