BLACK WOMEN IN THE UNITED STATES & KEY STATES, 2022
Black Women Leading the Quest to Rebuild Hope, Achieve Justice, Equity & Equality:

*Building Power*Protecting Voting Rights*Saving Democracy*

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THE NATIONAL Coalition on Black Civic Participation

BWR BLACK WOMEN'S ROUNDTABLE
A signature program of the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation

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Special Note
The essays included in the 2022 BWR Annual Report are the expressed views of the contributing writers and not of the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation, Black Women's Roundtable, or the supporters of this report.

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PRESIDENT & CEO'S LETTER

Dear Readers,

This past year has presented Black women with a number of challenges, opportunities and historic milestones. While we faced an unprecedented time in our nation's history, we were also reminded of the enormous strength and resilience that comes from our rich history of organizing and solidarity.

Black women continue to be a powerful force in all aspects of our society and culture. As many have noted, Black women were the driving force in shifting political power in 2020 and beyond, steering the nation toward achievements and unprecedented progress that many would have thought unthinkable just a generation ago. That progress has also led to Black women breaking a number of glass ceilings and becoming the firsts in a number of influential policy positions: from the first-ever Black woman Vice President of the United States, to the consequential appointments of the nation's first Black women to lead the Office of Management Budget, Council of Economic Advisors and even the Supreme Court of the United States.

In 2022, we are seeing Black women on the front lines of so many critical issues. Not only are we at the table, but we are setting the agenda for the entire nation. And this is all a consequence of our ability to build power, spread awareness and center our lived experience in the popular consciousness and in our political demands. When we show up, Black women make all the difference in building a world that is more just, more equal and more representative. That progress doesn't only impact our families, but it works to make all communities stronger.

As we look ahead on that journey of progress, our 2022 BWR Report is focused on Black women leading the way in rebuilding hope, achieving justice, equity, and equality, building power, protecting voting rights, and saving democracy. The 9th edition of this annual report focuses on lifting the policy priorities that impact the lives of our families and communities. Our contributors represent an intergenerational group of some of our nation's most powerful Black women leaders and experts in their fields---who not only outline the problems facing Black women, but also share solutions and policies designed to address them at their core. This year's report also includes a special section where Black women share their personal stories on the importance of representation and the historical significance of having a Black woman nominated to serve on the United States Supreme Court.

The findings of this year's report provide us with the policy solutions, analysis and calls to action required to address the core problems affecting our communities. As you read through the various pages of this report, you will note the wide array of expertise and importance of having Black women voices address our nation's most fundamental issues. From the threats to our democracy, to the increasing attacks on voting rights, the backlash of white supremacy and the lingering health and economic consequences of the pandemic, the insights offer clarity and a much needed perspective about how various pillars of our society can address the top concerns facing our sisters.

My mentor, the great Dorothy Height said, *"We have to improve life, not just for those who have the most skills and those who know how to manipulate the system. But also for, and with, those who often have so much to give but never get the opportunity."* Those are words that I aspire to live by and principles that the Black Women's Roundtable holds dear to its core. As you read through the ideas and solutions laid out in this report, I implore you to adopt that sentiment and understand that hope is an action word – that the policies and analysis you will read are intended to inspire and instill optimism and dialogue for a better future.

The National Coalition on Black Civic Participation and Black Women's Roundtable are committed to lifting the voices of these brilliant policy makers, thought leaders and subject matter experts. This accomplished group of experts continues to make history on a daily basis.

As this report is being published, it must be acknowledged that the first ever Black woman nominated to serve on The United States Supreme Court is on track to clear her confirmation in the U.S. Senate. Throughout the process, Black women leaders and allies played a critical role in ensuring the future justice was given a fair and just hearing. We advocated, created awareness and elevated the policy discourse to ensure that Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson's qualifications, integrity and character were unimpeachable.

Throughout this process, we have learned that policy and advocacy go hand-in-hand. We were affirmed that true justice and equality in this country can only happen when every branch of our democratic institutions reflect the diversity and lived experiences of all Americans. Black women have been among the fiercest allies of our democratic institutions. We have showed up time and again to defend the core values that make this democracy function. At a time where those very democratic foundations have been under attack, that tradition has served our nation well. Some may even argue that is has been the bedrock of our democracy.

In Solidarity,

Melanie L. Campbell
President & CEO, NCBCP, Convener, Black Women's Roundtable

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Black Women Leading the Quest to Rebuild Hope, Achieve Justice, Equity & Equality; Building Power, Protecting Voting Rights, and Saving Democracy is the theme for the Black Women's Roundtable's (BWR) Ninth Annual Black Women in the United States and Key States, 2022 Report. This year's report continues BWR's groundbreaking series which each year, provides in-depth analysis, insights, and policy-centered recommendations, all meant to illuminate the needs and conditions of Black women, their families and communities, throughout the nation while also providing direction on how to improve the overall well-being of Black women and families across a wide array of issues.

The BWR Report is designed to annually share the vision, voices, wisdom, and distinct perspectives of a diverse and multi-generational group of Black women on the challenges, victories and opportunities they face, and provides civic engagement, organizing and policy solutions to rebuild hope, achieve justice, equity and equality. The contributors to this year's report provide insights on the eight sections listed below.

Black Women Owning and Building Power: From the Ballot Box to the Halls of Political Power

- Black women have been deeply affected by the pandemic and they are looking for relief.
  Black women will not accept the inequities in housing, jobs, access to capital, health care, education disparities, and other aspects of their lives. They are looking for 2020 election commitments like police reform to be addressed by this administration. They are also looking for candidates in 2022 to commit to helping the administration and Congress address concerns that especially impact Black women and Black children.

- Black women want policy solutions that are race and gender centered.
  Student loan indebtedness may be viewed as a race and gender neutral, but statistics show that Black people are more greatly impacted by heavy student loan debt. Black women are pursuing higher education at higher rates and "are force to take out loans in a disproportionate manner."

- Black women have been making gains in electoral power at the local, state and federal levels, and the 2022 elections provide opportunities for additional gains.
  There has never been a Black woman governor in the United States, but at least six Black women are presently running for governor. There are opportunities for Black women to increase their numbers in state legislatures, but much may be dependent on the redistricting maps that are drawn and approved by judges.

- The 117th Congress is the most diverse Congress in history, and Black women possess their largest numbers.
  Disappointments are being expressed about the lack of progress to reflect the makeup of Congress. Of the 10,000+ bills introduced, less than 100 have become law. "Only eleven directly address the needs of Black women and their families…"

- Black women are taking the stage in foreign affairs.
  A new area where Black women have stepped into the national spotlight is in the foreign affairs arena. What Black women are doing on the world stage was referred to by one author as "Black Girl Magic.

- Vice President Kamala Harris is being dispatched to deal with international crises such as in the Ukrainian conflicts, and she is being backed up by the U.N. Ambassador, Linda Thomas-Greenfield.

Black Women's Leadership in the Fight for Voting Rights and Saving Democracy from Peril

- The Black vote is being diluted by gerrymandering that is taking place in the drawing of congressional and state legislative maps.
  Black women see the passage of new voting laws as an assault on democracy. They see the need for Americans to challenge these laws that are testing the future of democracy in the U.S.

- The challenge of overcoming the effects of gerrymandering and voter suppression efforts in 2022 will be related to running good candidates and having the right messaging.

- The pandemic has exacerbated some problems and highlighted others such as childcare, quality health care and student debt. Candidates much be ready to address these and other issues that impact the daily lives of African Americans.

- Many states responded to the 2020 electoral victories where Black women demonstrated their leadership skills by passing legislation designed to repress Black voter turnout.
  Black women have serious concerns about changes to state election laws and redistricting that are designed to dilute the Black vote. After victories at the state, local and federal elections in 2020, Black women recognize that they will have to work even harder to retain offices and gain others in 2022.

Black Women Owning Their Power in the Judiciary

- We need to seek justice for all.
  In seeking justice for all, we need to grow acceptance, diminish discrimination; embrace diversity, gain respect for each other and shutdown divisive tactics.

Building Hope & Justice in the Criminal Justice System for Black Communities

- The failure to pass the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act has been a big disappointment to many.
  The death of George Floyd played out in front of national and international eyes. The movements that developed after his death led to optimism that the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act would become law. With the failure of the Senate to pass this Act, some Black people may have become discouraged, but there is a need to continue fighting for not just police reform but comprehensive criminal justice reform.

- There is a need for a systemwide review and overhaul of the criminal justice system.
  There is a need for a paradigm shift on fixing the criminal/legal system in the United States. Even though the criminal justice system is primarily a local and state government function, there is a need for reform at all levels.

- The delivery on the promise of appointing a Black woman to the Supreme Court is viewed as a big victory.
  Black women are elated that a Black woman has been nominated for the Supreme Court and that the President did not renege on his campaign promise.

Race, Gender, Economic & Environmental Justice: Equity and Equality

- Black women worked throughout the pandemic, but also experienced enormous job losses
  While Black women have been on the front lines as essential workers during the height of the pandemic, and maintained the longstanding trend of having the highest labor force participation rate of any women in America, they still experienced huge job losses during the pandemic, as the number of employed Black women fell by 2.6% between February 2020 and January, 2022. This was the largest decline experienced among all white, Latino and Black workers.

- Raising wages for Black women is necessary, but not sufficient
  Black women continue to suffer a double wage-gap. In 2020, Black women working full-time year-round earned on 64 cents for every dollar earned by her white male counterpart. But while raising wages is critical for improving the economic well-being of Black women, it's not enough.

Black women remain concentrated in the care and serving sectors. Two sectors of our economy that not only notoriously provide low wages, but also, provide little or no benefits that could help Black women address care needs for themselves or their family. Also, the continued double-edge sword of race and sex discrimination make it more likely that Black women experience discrimination at work.

- Black families still fall victim to environmental injustice
  A Black family making $50,000 per year is more likely to live next to a toxic facility than a white family making $15,000 per year.

  Seventy-one percent (71%) of Black families in America live in counties in violation of federal air pollution standards.

Rebuilding Hope for Racial, Gender & Health Justice, Equity & Access

- Structural racism and discrimination within the healthcare field impacts the quality of care received by Black women.

- Black women report feeling that their health concerns were dismissed and the level of care they received was inadequate as a result of racism. Some women reported extremely demeaning treatment and discriminatory experiences with medical providers.

- Black women are at risk of dying from cervical cancer, a preventable disease, at disproportionate and alarming rates due to a dearth of gynecological care, rural hospitals, and a lack of access to reproductive healthcare services, transportation, and affordable health insurance.

- The Black Women's Roundtable "Listen" to Black women on Clinical Trials, COVID-19 and Flu Vaccines

- BWR members participated in a series of listening session to share their opinions on clinical trials, COVID-19 and flu vaccines. Of those participants, nearly half had been asked to participate in clinical trials, but less than half of those asked actually participated.

- Three (3) out of five (5) listening session participants indicated that they or their family member had contracted COVID-19, while 84% said that they plan to or had already received the COVID-19 vaccine.

- Of those who were unvaccinated, they indicated that they chose to forgo vaccination because they either believed not enough time was invested in researching the vaccine, they preferred holistic approaches rather their vaccines to boost their immune system, or they did not believe enough information was publicly available on clinical trial results specify on Black women.

Race & Gender Justice, Equity & Equality in Education

- <u>The War Against Critical Race Theory Must be Stopped</u>
  Anti-Critical Race Theory bills have proliferated the nation, popping up in 38 states throughout the country, each seeking to prohibit teachers from teaching what's characterized as "divisive subjects" that cause students to feel "discomfort." Other weapons in the war against critical race theory include a rash of book banning efforts across the nation targeting most prevalently the *1619 Project*, but also including classics like Toni Morrison's, *Beloved* and *To Kill a Mockingbird* among others. In addition, this all-out assault has been leveraged quite deftly as a political rallying cry to gin up enthusiasm and turn-out among the conservative base, such as was the case in the Virginia Gubernatorial election and even in some cases, leading to the intimidation of left-leaning political candidates—especially those holding or running for school board seats from seeking elected office at all.

- The attacks against critical race theory is based on a false narrative. It's roots are in the legal academic literature, where for over 40 years, leading legal scholars have sought to unpack the various ways in which from the beginning, the social construct of race has been infused into public policy and law, and how that reality impacts lived experiences across the racial dynamic. It is a space that lives in legal academic publications that are NOT taught at the elementary or secondary levels or even typically at the undergraduate level. Historically, one is only introduced to true critical race theory literature as an advanced graduate student, or in law school.

- The fight against Critical Race Theory has been anything but organic. It has been well organized, well-funded and expertly coordinated at state and local levels nationwide. The same sense of urgency is needed to defend it. When Black history is erased, it matters. When Black literature is erased, it matters. When Black children are, in essence, told that their discomfort doesn't matter, but the comfort of their white peers do, it matters.

- What is needed is counteraction that popularizes and prioritizing truth-telling in school curricula, along with a well-funded political focus on school board elections across the nation. And finally, consistent strong turn-out in state and local elections (including the upcoming mid-terms) to ensure that lawmakers are put in office that can roll back the damaging actions that have already taken hold across the country.

<u>HBCUs are a resource for critical professional support in the COVID era</u>

- While comprising only 3% of all colleges and universities, HBCUs are leading in educating African American graduates in scientific, technological, physical, mental, and spiritual health professions.

- HBCUs Receive Historic Funding

  During 2021, more than $5.8 billion dollars went to HBCUs in ARP/HEERF funding, $2.5 billion in Capital Financing Loan debt relief, $1.34 billion and $2 billion in grants.

  Banner federal investments in HBCUs were augmented by unparalleled corporate, foundation, and other private investments, including billionaire philanthropist, MacKenzie Scott's $560 million contribution to 23 HBCUs among other large private donations.

COVID-19 Rages on Two Years Later

Black America Hit Hard by COVID-19

One of the more internal damaging effects of COVID-19 is that Blacks in America are experiencing increased levels of physical, emotional, and financial stress due to the ongoing pandemic. Some of the causes can be attributed to multifactorial variables that Black people cannot control such as having employment that would not allow them to fully adhere to staying at home to provide for their families. Even when able to comply, often times, Black people are unable to social distance because of small-spaced housing restrictions. And with working conditions that put black Americans on the front lines of the pandemic, they have suffered increased exposure to the virus and a greater likelihood of bringing it home to their families. Is there any wonder why African Americans display a 3.7 times higher rate of COVID-19 infections?

- The Need for Mental Health Care Services Increase Under the Cloud of COVID-19

  Several recent studies have concluded that Black women and girls, show as high as double the rates of suicide attempts since the COVID-19 pandemic began in 2020. There is also literature that suggest that these Black youth had no prior mental health diagnoses prior to suicide attempts. Further, Black children are dying by suicide at twice the rate as white children in the same age range. This crisis has no definitive answers or conclusions that are being widely discussed or any public calls to action. We must do more to turn this around. The emotional and mental health of Black women and girls are at a crisis level.

Black Women Owning AND Building Power: From the Ballot Box to the Halls of Political Power

What's At Stake in the 2022 Mid-Term Election Cycle for Black Women and What Do Black Women Want for Their Vote

Krystal Leaphart, Advocacy Co-Lead, Black Girls Vote
Lauren Wyatt, Advocacy Lead, Black Girls Vote
Sakeenah Boyd, Advocacy Committee Member, Black Girls Vote
Erica Cook, Advocacy Committee, Black Girls Vote

It is no secret that the Black woman's vote is essential. According to Black Girls Vote and the National Conference on Citizenship's recent report, *Black Women Did That: A Call to Invest in the Civic Health of Black Women in America*, Black women have one of the highest rates for voter registration and voting. Also, almost 75 percent of Black women reported that they frequently read, watch, or listen to the news regarding current issues. With such high levels of civic participation, Black women understand the importance of engaging in politics. While Black women do this important work, the Biden Administration, Congress, and other important stakeholders must understand what's at stake in this upcoming election for one of the most key demographics in our nation, Black women.

The COVID-19 pandemic has lifted the veil on many of our policy failures. Whether it is the Black maternal health crisis, housing and rent costs, or education disparities, the reality is that Black women have felt the effects of failed opportunities all too well.

Leaders across the country were given the opportunity to fix some of the flaws in our nation. Instead of centering the needs of the most vulnerable, people were forced to make do during an unprecedented health crisis. With that, Black Girls Vote supports policy solutions that acknowledge a race and gender-centered analysis. Some areas of interest for the organization include Universal Child Care, Student Debt, and Voting Rights.

The pandemic has revealed a serious need for Universal Child Care. Since Black women were overrepresented as front-line workers and in domestic workers fields, Black parents and guardians need reliable childcare to be reliable employees. It is essential for the Biden Administration and Congress to secure funding for better wages for childcare workers and provide a safe environment for our children.

The current climate also revealed how crippling the student debt has been for Black women. Black women are pursuing higher education at higher rates but are forced to take out loans in a disproportionate manner. Further, for the Black women who do graduate, the pay gap and other factors make it harder for those loans to be paid off in a timely manner.

Without adequate savings and income, student debt payments during the pandemic were paused for most, but that is not enough. It is time to cancel student debt and reimagine how we can get more Black women into college and graduating without taking on crippling debt.

The pandemic forced most states to make the ballot box more accessible to our communities. However, following the largest turnout we have seen in modern history, we have also seen an overwhelming number of bills passed restricting voter access. In 2021 alone, there were over 440 bills introduced with provisions that restrict voter access in 49 states, with at least 34 bills being passed into law. Both the increase in voter suppression bills and successful passage of these bills are concerning. We must continue to push for legislation that promotes free and fair elections such as The Freedom to Vote Act and The John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act.

States with gubernatorial elections are vulnerable to voter suppression if a candidate who supports voting restrictions is elected. With 36 states electing a governor in 2022, the stakes could not be higher. Activists and organizers should focus on states that are refiling or have already pre-filed restrictive bills for the current session. According to the Brennan Center for Justice's *Voting Laws Roundup: December 2021*, there are at least 152 bills that are being carried over from the 2021 session. The voter suppression train is not slowing down so we must pick up speed.

It is clear that there are many things at stake for Black women in this election. There is a unique opportunity to truly "thank Black women'' for their vote by making sure they have what they need. We need an administration that will push themselves and all-important stakeholders to show up for us the same way we showed up to get them elected.

Our leaders have the power to cancel student debt, secure adequate universal childcare, and protect the right to vote. They also have the power to address sexual assault and violence, Black girl school pushout, and police reform. Black women have earned the right to be bold and demand that leaders from the federal level to the local levels of government show up for us. National leadership must remember that the Black woman's vote is what is at stake during this midterm election too!

The 117th Congress: The Power and Diversity to Act on Behalf of Black Women

Sheila Toppin, Ph.D.
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The Legislative Power of Congress

As mandated by the U.S. Constitution, Congress convened on January 3, 2021, to swear in members into the Senate and House of Representatives to begin the work of the 117th Congress. The initial legislative priorities of this Congress were varied due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Yet, three days after the swearing-in, members of Congress were reminded of their legislative power and duty as they endured the attack on the U.S. Capitol by insurrectionists attempting to stop the ratification of the 2020 presidential election results. Following the insurrection, the agenda of the 117th Congress prioritized holding accountable all involved in planning, inciting, and executing the insurrection including the second impeachment of the 45th President of the United States by the House of Representatives for inciting violence against the government.

The Diversification of Congress

The 117th Congress is the most diverse in U.S. history, and people of color and women are expecting it to tackle issues of concern to them. This Congress possesses the highest number of Black females (26) serving in the House of Representatives--but there are no Black female Senators (Center for American Women and Politics, 2021). As reflected in the table below, 62 of the members of Congress are Black, 53 are Hispanic/Latino, 149 are female and 33 are of foreign birth (Manning 2022).

Additionally, it is historic as the Honorable Kamala Harris, the first female, Black and South Asian Vice President serves as the President of the Senate. With the Senate split evenly between Democrats and Republicans, Harris can become the tiebreaker when the vote is split along party lines.

	House of Representatives (435 members)	Senate (100 members)	Total (535 members)	Percent of Total
Black	59	3	62	11.5
Hispanic/Latino	46	7	53	9.8
Female	125	24	149	27.5
Foreign Birth	28	5	33	6.1

The Inaction of Congress

Despite its diversity, the legislative agenda of the 117th Congress continues to ignore the needs of Black women, their families, and communities. The priorities of Black women need further policy action regarding economic security, access for quality healthcare, reproductive rights, maternal care, criminal justice reform, police accountability, gun control, safe communities and environment, educational assistance, affordable housing, food security, and access to safe transportation.

Since January 3, 2021, 10,552 bills have been introduced in Congress (6,854 in the House and 3,698 in the Senate), however, only 89 have become law. These dismal outcomes are due in part to factions in the Democratic Party. Of the laws passed, only eleven directly address the needs of Black women and their families as reflected in the following table.

Date	Laws	Purpose	Black Women's Priorities
3/11/21	H.R.1319: American Rescue Plan Act of 2021	Additional funds for COVID-19	Public Health, Food Insecurity, Education, Employment, Economic Stimulus
6/17/21	S.475 Juneteenth National Independence Day Act	June 19, commemorating the emancipation of enslaved Texas African Americans made a federal holiday	Black History
7/22/21	H.R.1652: VOCA Fix to Sustain the Crime Victims Fund Act of 2021	New source of revenue for the Crime Victims Fund	Domestic Violence
11/15/21	H.R. 3684: Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act	Additional Department of Transportation funds	Transportation, Environment & Employment
11/30/21	S. 796: Protecting Moms Who Served Act of 2021	Veterans Administration maternity care coordination program.	Maternity/Postpartum Care
12/3/21	H.R. 6119: Further Additional Extending Government Funding Act	Continuing resolution of FY2022 appropriations for federal agencies until 2/18/22.	Income security
12/10/21	S.610: Protecting Medicare and American Farmers from Sequester Cuts Act	Delayed the Medicare sequester and made other changes to Medicare payments. Modified procedures affecting federal budget scorekeeping and federal borrowing	Healthcare
12/21/21	H.R.5545: REMOTE Act	Extended Veterans educational assistance programs during pandemic.	Education

12/23/21	H.R.3537: Accelerating Access to Critical Therapies for ALS Act	Federal grants for research, development of drugs for ALS or Lou Gehrig's disease and related diseases.	Health
12/27/21	S.1605: National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2022	Energy Department program for defense environmental cleanup	Safe Environment/ Natural Resources
2/18/22	H.R.6617: Further Additional Extending Government Funding Act	Continuing resolution of FY2022 appropriations for federal agencies	Income security

In summary, the 117th Congress has the legislative power to act on important policy issues. The diversity of this Congress should serve as a reminder of the diversification of the United States as they draft, debate, and pass legislation. Lastly, to directly address the policy priorities of Black women, their families and communities, Democratic congressional members will need to leverage the majority power they hold by negotiating and compromising within their party and across the aisle so that the lives of Black women are enhanced now and into the future.

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An Analysis of the 2021 State and Local Elections and How Black Women Fared in Building Political Power

Pearl K. Ford Dowe, Ph.D.
Asa Griggs Candler Professor of Political Science, Emory University

While Black women continue to make gains in electoral politics overall, their access to power within states and locally is more nuanced. Whereas, Black women are making strides in seeking state legislative and local elected positions, it is within the statewide elections that we see a significant ceiling for Black women's success. Black women are still challenged in fundraising and gaining access to resources that can increase opportunities for voter engagement and increased name recognition through media outlets. The ceiling is on Black women's representation at the top statewide executive level, as no Black woman has ever served as governor.

It was not until 2018 that Stacey Abrams (D-GA) became the first Black woman major-party nominee for governor in the U.S. While Abrams' run did not end in victory, it was able to provide a model for the value of grassroots voter mobilization and fundraising within and outside the state. The high profile that Abrams has garnered, and her role as a campaign surrogate for other Democrats across the nation should eliminate doubts about the viability of Black women as candidates for statewide and executive offices,

and more Black women should be recruited because of their proven capacity for success.

- Between 2020 and 2021, Black women's state legislative representation increased, though not as much as it did after the 2018 election.
- Black women are 7.8% of the population but are less than 5% of officeholders elected to statewide executive offices, Congress, and state legislatures (Ditmar, 2021).
- Only 17 Black women have held statewide elected executive office, and no Black woman has ever been elected governor (Ditmar, 2021).
- In 2021, only eight Black women were mayors in one of the 100 most populous cities.

Black women remain severely underrepresented as officeholders at the statewide executive level, holding less than 2% of these positions. Only one Black woman won a statewide executive position in 2021--Winsome Sears won the Lieutenant Governor's race in Virginia. Two Black women were appointed to executive positions in 2021. Shirley Weber (D-CA was appointed to California's Secretary of State after the sitting Secretary was appointed to complete Vice President Harris' former senate seat. Sabina Matos was appointed Rhode Island's lieutenant governor after the sitting lieutenant governor became governor after the governor accepted a Cabinet appointment in the Biden Administration.

At least six Black women are known to be running for governor. They include State Senator Mia McLeod (D-SC), former State Senator Connie Johnson (D-OK), Harvard Professor Danielle Allen (D-MA), Democratic activist and businessowner Deidre DeJear (D-IA), educator Deirdre Gilbert (D-TX) and Stacey Abrams (D-GA).

Over the last 20 years, Black women have made significant gains within state legislatures. This is evident with the record high recorded in 2021. Currently 354 Black women serve as state legislators nationwide, including 12 Black women who hold legislative leadership positions such as speaker, speaker pro-tem, majority or minority leader. The 2022 election cycle provides an opportunity for Black women to increase their representation in state legislatures as there are 88 seats up for election this year.

Cities have been central to the advancement of civil rights and equality for people of color and Black women. Mayors serve important roles in American cities, such as developing the economic and political agenda the city will prioritize, heading city councils, appointing board and commission members, developing the city budget, and neighborhood development. Black women now hold the top executive post in seven of

the 100 (Mayor Bottoms in Atlanta did not seek re-election in 2021) most populous cities, matching their proportion of the U.S. population, with two of these women taking office since 2020. Karen Bass (D-CA) is not running for re-election to the U.S. House of Representatives but instead will seek to become mayor of Los Angeles.

While Black women's executive representation remains low at the statewide level, the success for Black women executives in major U.S. cities is important in re-imagining executive political leadership across all levels. Political power is not top down, but instead is cultivated locally and springs up and out through the state and nation. This understanding provides an opportunity to gain insight into the political socialization, motivation, and electoral strategies of African American women that contribute to these women being the most politically engaged demographic in recent history.

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The State of Black Women Entering the 2022 Mid-Term Election Cycle and What Do They Want for Their Vote in 2022

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Black women are the backbone of the Black community, and we have been at the forefront of the women's rights movements. We have done the same for the nation, often unrequitedly--caring when we were not cared for, defending when we were not defended, voting when we were not reflected, believing in the promise of America when the promise was unrealized. We are super patriots, super investors in America, and in the 2022 mid-terms, we are demanding a return on our investment.

From slavery to today, Black women have contributed to the economic strength of this nation at great cost to us and our families. As such, in addition to voting rights and criminal justice and policing reform, economic justice and equity must also be on our agenda in the 2022 mid-term elections. We must demand candidates who are committed to promoting individual and family economic security and providing opportunities for wealth creation for all Americans, beginning with Black women.

The pandemic was particularly hard on Black women, who served disproportionately in frontline industries hardest hit with high layoffs, like the service industries, or increasingly difficult or dangerous industries, like healthcare and caregiving.[1] We cared for other people's aging loved ones by day and our own by night. We taught hybrid

school while managing our own children's hybrid learning. We comforted dying COVID patients knowing that high rates of exposure and our preexisting conditions would result in disproportionate rates of severe illness and death for ourselves. These unsustainable conditions have led to higher rates of Black women dropping out of the workforce.[2] These inequities, however, were exacerbated by, not created, by the pandemic.

Black women are among the most educated people in this nation,[3] have long made up the majority of the Black labor force, with 79 percent of Black mothers serving as breadwinners for their families.[4] Yet, Black women earn significantly less on average than their white male (approximately 63 cents for every dollar), white female, and black male counterparts.[5] This gap is driven in part by discrimination, workplace harassment, job segregation in low paying fields, inadequate minimum wage and tipped minimum wage, and workplace policies that do not support family caregiving,[6] for which women are still primarily responsible.[7] Moreover, the page inequity not only costs them lost wages, but lost retirement security and opportunities for wealth creation.[8]

Black women also bear a disproportionate burden of the nation's student loan debt.[9] One year after graduation, white women owe $33,851 in undergraduate loans, on average, while Black women owe an average of $41,466. Pursuing graduate studies deepens these disparities. While repaying student loans, approximately 57 percent of Black female college graduates report financial difficulties,[10] to say nothing of the mental health effects of such debt. As with the wage gap, this debt also depresses opportunities for wealth generation through savings and attaining business and home loans.

Black women also face additional barriers to success as entrepreneurs, even as they are more likely to be entrepreneurial.[11] Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Black women were the fastest growing group of entrepreneurs. Majority Black women-owned firms grew 67 percent from 2007 to 2012, compared to 27 percent for all women.[12] Still, Black women's businesses tend to be smaller and grow at slower rates than their counterparts in other racial and ethnic groups due to myriad structural biases. The pandemic exacerbated these disparate challenges, and little of the $670 billion PPP funding reached Black business owners.[13] Access to capital is a major predictor of business success and Black entrepreneurs find it difficult to weather economic duress and/or pivot away from unsustainable business models without financial backing.[14]

Black women are more likely to face difficulties finding stable, affordable housing and more likely face eviction. Nearly 30 percent reported having difficulty paying their rent during the pandemic, almost twice as much as White men and women.[15] While homeownership rates had improved for Black women, there are concerns the pandemic will reverse gains made in Black female home ownership.[16]

As the nation slowly recovers from the pandemic, Black women are not sharing equitably in that recovery, and without intervention, stand at risk of falling further behind than they were before the pandemic. In February 2022, Black women's unemployment rate rose even as the rate for other demographic groups leveled-off or fell and Black women's labor force participation rates dropped.[17]

The solutions are clear: Good jobs, a social safety net, and access to capital are needed to ensure Black women and the families and communities that depend on them can do more than survive, as they did before the pandemic. Pre-pandemic inequities are no longer acceptable. We need the realization of a domestic agenda that includes:

1) Affordable housing and investments in homeownership, including down payment assistance
2) Access to capital for entrepreneurship
3) Job training and placement in high earning professions
4) A raise in the minimum wage and the tipped minimum wage
5) Equitable tax policies and an expansion of the Child Tax Credit (CTC) and the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)
6) Investment in affordable childcare and early learning
7) Investments in home and community-based services
8) Paid family and medical leave
9) Quality public education
10) Student loan forgiveness
11) Access to quality health care, including preventative and reproductive health care.[18]

During the State of the Union address, President Biden spoke about a plan for building the economy from the bottom up and the middle out. Black women put President Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris in office to do just that. Their Build Back Better agenda embraces many priorities that will serve Black women and families, but they need, we need, a partner in Congress--a majority who are committed to ensuring economic justice and equity for all people, beginning with the Black women who so clearly have earned it.

Wanted: “Black Girl Magic” on the World Stage

Irelene P. Ricks, Ph.D.
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In 2021, when Kamala Harris was sworn in as the first Black Vice President of the United States, she could not have predicted that the U.S. might be drawn into what might become the first world war since 1945. In an attempt at old-style ‘shuttle diplomacy,’ Harris has met with leaders of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and European Union, making her the highest-ranking U.S. official to negotiate the Ukrainian-Russian conflict on European soil. Backing Harris on the world stage is Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield, a Black career Foreign Service Officer, who has risen through the ranks of the U.S. Department of State to represent the U.S. at the United Nations (U.N.).

Black women have always been involved in domestic politics, and those names are celebrated and well-known: Harriet Tubman, Rosa Parks, Ida B. Wells, and many others. What is less well-known are women in foreign policy roles like Patricia Roberts Harris, who was the first Black American woman to serve as a career U.S. ambassador. Like Vice President Kamala Harris, the late Patricia Roberts Harris was also a Howard University graduate with aspirations for public service. Sent to Luxembourg in 1965 during the height of the U.S. civil rights era, Patricia Roberts Harris served with great distinction in a largely white U.S. Foreign Service corps. It is not hard to imagine the challenges she likely faced at a time in which the Foreign Service had few women officers of any race.

However, Harris more than met the pressures of being the first Black woman to represent the U.S. overseas as a career diplomat-- demonstrating that Black women belonged in all areas of government, including international affairs. Other distinguished Black women include Dr. Susan Rice, who served as National Security Advisor (2013-17) in the Obama administration and Dr. Condoleezza Rice, who served as the first Black female Secretary of State (2005-09) for President George W. Bush.

Today, Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield represents American interests on the U.N. Security Council. Although Patricia Roberts Harris was the first Black career ambassador, "in 1950, Edith Spurlock Sampson became the first African American named to the permanent United States delegation to the U.N. While working at the U.N., Sampson went on several international lecture tours and held membership on the U.S. delegation to NATO."[19] Sampson was not only the first African American named to the permanent delegation to the U.N., she was also the first woman to receive a Master of Law degree from Loyola University in 1927 and one of the first women to argue, in 1934, before the U.S. Supreme Court. In 1962, at the age of 61, Sampson was elected a judge on the Chicago Municipal Court. With that election she became the first black woman in the United States elevated to the bench by popular vote.[20]

Like Sampson, vice president Kamala Harris is a woman who has also broken many barriers. Before her current position, Harris was Attorney General of California. She was the first Black woman to hold that position, and in that role, she instituted civic and judicial reforms to help underserved communities, including a program that provided "first-time drug offenders with the opportunity to earn a high school degree and find employment. The program was designated as a national model of innovation for law enforcement by the United States Department of Justice."[21] Harris served in the U.S. Senate as only the second Black American and first South Asian American woman in that capacity.

Vice president Kamala Harris is confronted with one of the most challenging tasks that have ever faced a vice president – man or woman, Black or white. She must work with the U.S. President, the U.S. Congress, and international organizations in Europe and around the world to ensure that we never reach a place for which there may be no return – World War III.

At this writing, Ukraine is at war with Russia and the world holds its collective breath, wondering how (and when) this terrifying show of Russian nationalism and imperialism will ultimately end. What is encouraging is that two bold Black women are at the forefront of a global effort to maintain peace: Vice President Kamala Harris and Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield.

Black Women's Leadership in the Fight for Voting Rights and Saving Democracy from Peril

Overview of Suppressive Laws Passed in 2021 and Their Expected Impact in 2022

Marcia Johnson-Blanco
Co-Director. Voting Rights Project
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law

In 2021, far too many states responded to the historic voter turnout in 2020 by introducing and passing a new wave of suppressive voting laws aimed at the very opportunities voters used to achieve record turnout. Over 101.4 million voters overcame previous obstacles to cast their ballots before Election Day using early voting and vote by mail. Rather than support this robust engagement in voting, according to the Brennan Center for Justice, over 440 suppressive voting laws were introduced in 49 states. Of those, 19 states passed 34 suppressive laws restricting access to the vote. Not only are an unprecedented number of states introducing and passing suppressive and discriminatory voting laws, the U.S. Senate failed to fulfill its obligation to protect the right to vote by failing to consider and pass needed federal legislation to protect all Americans, especially vulnerable voters.

As Americans begin voting in 2022, whether a voter will be able to access the ballot without having to overcome a gauntlet of barriers will be based on where that voter lives. In some states, voters will have a range of sensible and secure methods of voter access such as automatic voter registration and no excuse vote by mail options that will contribute to increased voter turnout. In other states, voters will face arbitrary and discriminatory voting laws that will prevent them from having their voices heard. Significantly, some of the states that were once subject to the federal review provisions

of the Voting Rights Act--Florida, Georgia, and Texas, passed some of the most draconian laws. These laws have striking similarities.

Florida passed SB 90, which restricts access to mail voting and criminalizes assistance to voters waiting in line. The law requires a voter requesting a mail ballot to provide a Florida driver license number or Florida identification card number, or the last four digits of the voter's social security number. Notably, the law does not allow for any alternative forms of identification, even though Black and Latino voters are significantly less likely to have the limited forms of identification required. It limits drop box voting to working hours and limits drop box locations. Additionally, it imposes significant restrictions on third-party return of mail ballots by imposing criminal penalties targeting voters of color and disabled voters, who disproportionately rely on third-party return. Overall, these provisions make it very difficult for voters of color to access the mail ballot process. The law is particularly mean-spirited in criminalizing efforts to assist voters waiting in line, including providing water, food, chairs, and umbrellas. This assistance is particularly needed in communities of color, where waiting in line to vote is often an hours-long exercise, and for disabled voters, who may be unable to stand in line without assistance. These long lines are often, themselves the result of discriminatory practices in limiting polling places and restricting vote by mail options.

Georgia passed SB 202, a 53 section, 98-page law that criminalizes providing water to voters waiting in hours-long lines to vote. It also undermines the authority of local election officials, creating the potential for partisan takeover of, not only the casting of ballots, but the counting of ballots, harking back to the worst election abuses of a past we had thought was long behind us. The law also targets access to absentee ballot voting, a voting method that Black voters used at higher rates than white voters in 2020. It imposes a new absentee ballot ID requirement that voters provide a driver's license number or Georgia State ID number on their absentee ballot application. If they have neither, voters are required to copy and attach another form of acceptable voter ID to both their absentee ballot application and inside the absentee ballot envelope when returning the ballot. The law also prohibits public employees and agencies from sending unsolicited absentee ballot applications to voters and threatens private individuals and organizations with a substantial risk of incurring hefty fines for every application they send to an individual who has not yet registered or who has already requested a ballot or voted absentee. Further, the law limits accessibility to absentee ballot drop boxes by limiting the placement to early voting locations, and availability to only early voting hours. This, in effect, makes it impossible for voters who cannot vote during early voting

hours to access drop boxes. It is unquestionable that this law has a disproportionately negative impact on Black voters.

The Texas legislature passed SB 1. As with Florida and Georgia, the law makes it harder to vote by mail, imposes burdens on voters needing assistance at the polls, and hampers election judges from addressing harassment and intimidation at the polls. Texas is one of 16 states that requires voters to have an "excuse" in order to access an absentee ballot. It added to this requirement by banning county election officials from encouraging vote-by-mail requests or distributing unsolicited vote-by-mail applications to voters directly, or to third party civic engagement organizations; requiring election officials to reject vote-by-mail applications if they cannot match the voter's identification with the registration application on the statewide voter registration database; and prohibiting local election officials from offering more voting opportunities of drive-thru voting, extended voting hours, and ballot drop boxes. Notably, the law threatens election judges with criminal penalties for attempting to keep the peace in polling places, thereby expanding the ability of poll watchers to harass and intimidate voters in polling places.

As is evident from the examples just given, the authors of this new wave of laws that suppress the vote and subvert election administration have designed elections to hobble voters and elections in every way possible. It is also important to note that no real justification is provided for this crippling of democracy except tired, unsubstantiated rhetoric.

In addition to these laws that suppress the vote and subvert election administration, the states above have introduced and passed redistricting maps that limit minority opportunity to elect candidates of choice. This overall assault on the right to vote has an outsize impact on Black voters. As voting begins this year, it is increasingly important that voters, the media, and public officials are made aware of the changes in access to voting and that we continue to record the challenges that Black and other voters of color are facing. Recent backsliding cannot be allowed to stand and public officials should not think that these issues can be ignored.

The fight for the right to vote is bigger than the 2022 election cycle. These challenges come at a time when our democracy is under threat and at a crossroads. The outcome of challenges to these laws will determine whether we become a democracy where all have a voice or one that takes us back to a time when democracy was too often frustrated, and government was limited to the voice of a few. In 1965, with the passage of the Voting Rights Act, our democracy was finally opened to all. Now with a VRA neutered by courts that have often lost all sense of precedent and the rule of law, and by states brazenly passing restrictive statutes, the 2022 elections are an important

bellwether of where our country is headed. Public officials and courts must be put to the test of whether we will live up to our values and fundamental civil rights.

Racial and Partisan Gerrymandering and Redistricting: Diluting Black Political Power

Letetia Daniels Jackson
Convener, South Alabama Black Women's Roundtable
President/CEO, Tandeka LLC

"You don't make progress by standing on the sidelines, whimpering and complaining. You make progress by implementing ideas." Shirley Chisholm

The "Browning of America" is real. It is happening now. It cannot be stopped. This is the primary reason we have seen an escalated uprising of White Supremacy and heightened racial and partisan gerrymandering in redistricting, with specific goals to dilute the increasing Black political power. The South is ground zero in this effort.

According to the Center for American Progress, States of Change: The Demographic Evolution of the American Electorate, 1974-2060, February 2015, the whole United States population will become majority-minority by the year 2044, with the voting-age eligible population majority-minority by 2052! That is just 22 and 30 years from today, respectively. Therefore, in our lifetimes, we will see a majority non-white United States. To understand the reasoning for the attack on voting rights, gerrymandering, and redistricting to dilute Black political power, one has to look no further than these

growing demographics. The chart below shows how quickly the demographics in key Southern and Midwestern states that are now considered conservative bastions are changing.

Minority Population Trends					
	Year[22]	% Whole[23]	Year[24]	% Whole	% Eligible[25]
Alabama	2020	34.7	2060	45.3	42.1
Arkansas	2020	28	2060	43.3	38.9
Indiana	2020	21.6	2060	38.7	34.1
Kentucky	2020	15.9	2060	25.4	21.5
Louisiana	2020	41.6	2040	50.6	47.2
Michigan	2020	25.3	2060	41.3	37.2
Mississippi	2020	43.6	2060	54.4	51.8
Missouri	2020	20.9	2060	35.8	31.8
Nevada	2020	51.8	2040	63.8	57.6
Oklahoma	2020	35	2060	57.5	52.0
Tennessee	2020	26.5	2060	39.1	35.2
West Virginia	2020	6.5	2060	20.9	17.6

Power is never conceded; it must be taken. The most powerful tool in taking power is the ballot. One woman/man, one vote–that is the power of democracy. White supremacists understand this clearly; they understand the Power of the Sister Vote. They understand Black Women are the highest voting population in the country, bar none. To maintain power, White supremacists and their supporters understand that they must dilute the Black vote and the vote of our Brown sisters and brothers. That is the crux of gerrymandering–drawing political legislative districts that split communities and dilute the Black vote, while stacking White communities together in their quest to maintain power in the face of changing demographics in this country.

Alabama has been a leader in gerrymandering and diluting the Black vote during redistricting. This year, I was a proud plaintiff in the Mulligan, et.al. v. John Merrill, Secretary of State and Jim McClendon and Chris Pringle, Co-Chairs of the Alabama Permanent Legislative Committee on Reapportionment lawsuit against the gerrymandered congressional districts in Alabama. I joined Evan Mulligan, Shalela Dowdy, Khadidah Stone, Adia Winfrey, Greater Birmingham Ministries, and the Alabama State Conference of the NAACP as plaintiffs in this successful lawsuit challenging the Alabama Congressional Redistricting Map. Our argument was simple: the Black voting population in Alabama should have at least two Congressional districts where

we are the majority. The way the current redistricting map is drawn, the Black vote is diluted, and this denies us an opportunity to elect representatives who will support and advance policies that improve our lives and communities.

We won our motion for preliminary injunction, which was argued in front of a 3-judge panel from January 4-12, 2022, to prevent the State from using the current unconstitutional congressional district map in the upcoming election. The United States District Court for the Northern District of Alabama agreed that the map was unconstitutional and ordered the Legislature to redraw the map by February 11, 2022. The State appealed to the Supreme Court and unfortunately, the Supreme Court sided with the State and ruled that it was too close to the election for the maps to be redrawn and lifted the injunction. While we lost that battle, we have not lost the war. We will continue to fight on.

Interestingly, John Merrill, Secretary of State, said in a televised interview after the Supreme Court ruled in their favor that there are not enough Black people living in one area to create another Black district. Wait! What? Isn't that the crux of what gerrymandering is? Didn't they draw the congressional districts to reach "far and wide" to pack white conservative voters in districts to maintain a majority because there aren't enough of them living in one area to create the majority white districts, while breaking up Black communities to dilute our vote? We are confident that our top-notch legal team will make them eat these words when the full case is argued, as the case itself will continue to move forward. The ruling was solely on the preliminary injunction, not on our argument that the Black population is significant enough to support having two majority Black congressional districts instead of the one we currently have. So, the fight will continue. Through patience and perseverance, I am confident we will win the war!

Voter Suppression Threatens Black Women's Political Power

Deborah Scott
CEO, Georgia STAND-UP

In 2020 when then candidate Joe Biden was failing in his bid to win the Democratic nomination for President, Black women in South Carolina rallied to his side, lifting him to victory in that state's crucial primary election. In exchange Biden made a pledge: If elected, he would make appointing the first Black woman to the Supreme Court a top priority. That was the first solid indication of the powerful influence Black women could exercise over national politics. Black women consolidated their influence by insisting upon and winning the selection of Kamala Harris as Vice President, providing for the first time an open door for them to this country's inner circle of power. Biden has now fulfilled his campaign promise, nominating Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson to serve on the Supreme Court, proof of Black women's political leverage and power. Today Black women have coalesced nationally, building a powerful network of collaborating organizations, registering millions of new voters, and controlling grassroots infrastructure that can deliver record numbers of voters—the infrastructure that lifted the Biden/Harris ticket to victory and secured Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson's Supreme Court nomination.

The ongoing surge in voter suppression laws is intended to reverse that progress and destroy that woman-led infrastructure, particularly in the South where migration has increased Black voting strength. The flipping of Georgia—a key event in the 2021 election—is testimony to the national leverage Black voters hold in the South, most of it due to the work of Black women-led activist organizations. Voter suppression efforts are intended to discourage and prevent minority communities and Black women leaders from expanding their newly consolidated regional and national power. The wave of voter suppression legislation that erupted in 2021 and has continued to accelerate in

2022 is specifically aimed at reversing the impact of Black women at every level of the political process. Nationwide, about 75 bills designed to suppress minority votes were introduced in state legislatures during 2021. That number exploded to more than 250 such bills in 2022.[26] The nature of these bills is alarming. Most would make it harder to vote and they typically target voters of color. Most of this aggressive anti-voter legislation can be traced to the impact Black voters had on the 2021 presidential election, and particularly the role Black women played in shaping the outcome of the Presidential race.

Voter suppression laws are based on the false claim of widespread voter fraud in the 2021 Presidential election, a claim that has been repeatedly and decisively disproven. This lie is aimed at delegitimating Black political power, and while patently false, continues to have a lingering effect. Specifically crafted to discourage Black political activism, it calls into question any election outcome that is decided by the votes of historically disenfranchised citizens. The laws use tactics designed to muddle the voting process, making it hard for citizens to understand the proper procedure for casting their votes, thereby increasing the number of votes that may be disqualified. They intimidate election officials by imposing criminal and civil penalties for routine or trivial mistakes. They put restrictions on the kind of help voters can receive in preparing mail-in ballots, demand forms of identification that can be hard for marginalized citizens to acquire, and limit drop boxes that make voting convenient. They alter precincts and reduce early voting periods and the number of polling sites. In Georgia, the legislature has even made it illegal to offer water or a place to sit for minority voters forced to stand in line for hours due to limited polling sites in their communities.

Black women are now at the leading edge of progressive politics as the country looks ahead to the 2022 midterm elections. Their work has tipped the balance of national policy away from Trumpian authoritarianism and helped preserve democratic institutions, but the margin is slim. To preserve the gains of 2021, Black women political leaders will have to double down on voter engagement, registration, and mobilization efforts. They must strengthen their coalitions, adopt powerful messaging, and increase their financial capacity through aggressive fundraising. In the upcoming Midterm elections, the national balance of power as defined by control of the House and Senate, hangs in the balance. Over thirty governors will also be elected, including the possible historic elevation of a Black woman to the governorship of Georgia. Thousands of statewide and local contests that directly influence economic opportunities and quality of life will be decided. The key to preserving the political power of Black women is continued, unrelenting grassroots organizing—putting boots on the ground to counter voter suppression efforts. That is the path to victory and the way to make permanent, the growing influence of Black women as a political force in this country.

WHEN BLACK WOMEN VOTE: WE ALL WIN!

Clayola Brown
National President
A. Philip Randolph Institute

More than a century ago, on August 18, 1920, the ratified 19th Amendment granted American women the right to vote. Black women, however, would not fully realize their right to vote until the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

Despite the barriers that kept Black women from voting, they have been the spearhead of social justice movements throughout American history. They were a driving force of the abolitionist movement in the mid-1800s. They led the fight to pass the Voting Rights Act in 1965, helping to abolish tactics of voter suppression and disenfranchisement that targeted Black Americans.

History teaches that the voting rights advocates of today stand on the shoulders of women like Ida B. Wells, who was one of the early leaders of the civil rights movement. Born into slavery, Ida B. Wells fought tirelessly for women's rights—in particular, the right to vote. She was a prominent member of the Women's Suffrage Movement, and she took part in the first suffragist parade in Washington, D.C. in 1913. However, at the last minute, she was asked to move to the back of the procession with the segregated contingent. Despite the racism within the Women's Suffrage movement, Ida B. Wells

continued to advocate for Black women's right to vote. In that same year, she co-founded the Alpha Suffrage Club, the first Black women's suffrage group in the state of Illinois.

We cannot talk about voting rights without mentioning Fannie Lou Hamer. Born in 1917, Hamer became a prominent voice in the civil rights and voting rights movements. As a Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) organizer, Hamer led voter registration movements across the country and co-founded the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party in 1964. In that year, Hamer helped organize Freedom Summer, a mobilizing effort that brought college students together to help with Black voter registration in the South.

These are just two of the countless Black women who have influenced voting rights throughout our history.

Their influence continues to be realized at today's polls.

According to a November 2019 report from the Center for American Progress, Black women make up one of the most active voting blocs in the U.S. electorate. They are a key and committed force, driving the increasing electoral power of women of color. For example, much of the surge in Black voter participation in 2008 was driven by increased participation among Black women and younger voters. The voter turnout rate among eligible Black female voters increased 5.1 percentage points, from 63.7% in 2004 to 68.8% in 2008. Overall, among all racial, ethnic and gender groups, Black women had the highest voter turnout rate in that election. This surge would continue for the next five presidential voting cycles.

The report also noted that women of color fueled the massive increase in turnout nationwide by mobilizing friends and family and engaging voters beyond the ballot box.

In 2020--one hundred years after passage of the 19th Amendment--about 90% of Black women voted for President-elect Joe Biden over Donald Trump, making them the Democrats' most loyal voting bloc. Experts say their nationwide voter mobilization efforts led to the historic turnout that secured Biden's victory and that of the first Black female Vice President in the nation's history.

Black women voters: Key takeaways

- Black women constitute the largest and most politically active demographic of women of color voters. At least 15 million Black women are eligible to vote, and they participated at some of the highest rates of all women voters.

- Black women voters are more likely than any other racial or ethnic group of women to support a pathway to legal status for undocumented immigrants. Approximately 85 percent of these voters want undocumented immigrants to have a pathway to legal status.
- Black women voters are among the strongest supporters of gun violence prevention measures.

Today, marginalized communities continue to be unfairly disadvantaged at the polls, as certain jurisdictions work to suppress voting under the guise of preventing "voter fraud." According to the Brennan Center for Justice, in 2021 legislators in 49 states drafted more than 440 restrictive voting bills--Thirty-four (34) became law. While there have been several key victories to overturn these challenges, the struggle for full voting rights remains.

There is still work to be done.

Now is the time to make our voices heard, to call on the spirit of Ida B. Wells and Fannie Lou Hamer and awaken the activist inside each of us, to continue their important—and unfinished work. For example, tell Congress it is time to pass the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, which would restore voting protections that were stripped away from the Voting Rights Act in 2013, and ensure that every voice is heard and every vote counts!

ADDENDUM AND REFERENCES

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On November 4, 2008, voters across the country awakened early and braved long lines to cast ballots in an election that many believed would be the most pivotal of their lives.

But much of the distracting news and talking heads focus was on the potential First Lady's appearance as she accompanied her Presidential candidate husband, and her two daughters to the polls.

DO NOT BECOME DISTRACTED…

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Racial and Partisan Gerrymandering: Redistricting to Dilute Black Political Power

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The 2020 U.S. Census reported growth from 34% to 43% of non-white citizens since the 2010 data, creating significant apportionment shifts and state population gains. Those gains logically predicted increases in minority-majority or minority opportunity congressional districts in places like Texas, North Carolina, and Alabama. However, no such districts materialized in the redistricting process. Instead, more gerrymanders were created.

Racial gerrymandering has been illegal since the 1966 *Gomillion v. Lightfoot* Supreme Court decision, however, as recent as 2022, districts appear to be drawn to either pack communities together or divide them based on their race. These dynamics of "packing and cracking" communities of color have the impact of diluting the influence of voters and often the legislators who represent them. One would think that after years of challenges and litigation, we would not have to continue to fight this particular battle on behalf of Black people, but the battle rages on, even today. Emboldened by the 2013 *Shelby v. Holder* decision and lack of action by Congress to enact necessary legislation like the John Lewis Voting Rights Act, we have legislatures' worse gerrymandered maps. In some states, they are being struck down by the courts, but in others, we must grab our power back in other ways.

After the most recent reapportionment, Texas gained two seats due to the growth in the Hispanic population. Prior to its recently adopted redistricting map, the state had

fourteen competitive congressional districts. It now has fifteen Republican leaning seats due to partisan gerrymandering. Additionally, there are now more white majority seats than there were before the redistricting process began. In February 2022, the Department of Justice filed a lawsuit challenging the maps as unconstitutional.

Using map-making software, the Texas legislature drew lines that all but guarantee the outcome of the congressional races, while diminishing the voting power of the Hispanic voters in the state. This is despite the fact that Hispanics are responsible for the gain in congressional representation. Polling data indicate that in Texas, Hispanic voters tend to vote conservatively; however, map drawers were clearly more focused on partisan power than providing an opportunity for the ethnic community to have political power.

North Carolina has a long history of racial gerrymandering. After the 2011 apportionment and redistricting process, the North Carolina map was litigated for years before it was finally ruled to be an unconstitutional gerrymander. By that time, the damage had been done because legislators had been elected, and restrictive election laws had been enacted diminishing the voting rights of North Carolina voters. In 2021, North Carolina again enacted redistricting maps that were challenged in the courts as an unconstitutional partisan gerrymander. This time the courts acted swiftly, and the State Supreme Court ruled in early February 2022 that the congressional and legislative maps were partisan gerrymanders. The ruling requires the Republican-controlled legislature not only to submit new maps to the court, but to offer a range of statistical analyses to show "a significant likelihood that the districting plan will give the voters of all political parties substantially equal opportunity to translate votes into seats" in elections.

The Alabama case is unique because it has been litigated at the state and federal circuit court levels and appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court. The Supreme Court stayed the decision of the lower court that found the maps unconstitutional, which in effect allows them to conduct the election using maps that the lower court said violates the Voting Rights Act. The argument made and accepted by the Supreme Court was that Alabama did not have enough time to draw new maps, even though it drew the unconstitutional maps in one week.

The 2021 redistricting cycle is the first since the Supreme Court, in its 2013 Shelby v. Holder decision, gutted portions of the Voting Rights Act. The 2022 elections are being conducted after the erection of many barriers and challenges to voters. Despite those efforts to make voting more difficult, there is also a greater level of awareness and engagement than normal during a mid-term election cycle.

The redistricting process is a clear indication that map drawing is neither racially blind nor non-partisan. S/He who holds the pen holds the power and elections have consequences; and too often, efforts are deliberate to dilute the power of African American voters. We must stay alert and engaged at every level to combat many efforts to diminish and dilute the African American vote and never give up in the fight to overcome them.

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Black Women Owning Their Power in the Judiciary

WHY DIVERSITY AND LIVED EXPERIENCE MATTER TO ACHIEVE JUSTICE FOR ALL

Rev. Dr. Judith C. Moore
CEO and Founder Sisters Saving Ourselves Now
Convener, Black Women's Roundtable Pittsburgh-Mon Valley BWR

The 2020 United States Presidential election is over, but the anger, divisiveness and conflicts continue. We are spinning out of control and desperately need divine healing, but people only change when made uncomfortable.

We believe that now is the time to advocate for morally correct behavior and rectitude, no matter one's age or religion, sexual orientation, or race. We are one family that requires unity, not only to fight evil but to celebrate and embrace coming together, for the good. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. states, "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

There has been a consensus that the policies of the "tough on crime" era were flawed and erroneous. They did not make us safer, but instead ingrained lasting racial and economic inequities. Studies have shown that high levels of incarceration have devastating consequences for underserved communities, including an increase in crime, (see statistics at www.sentencingproject.org), poverty, and homelessness. Ultimately, our society should focus on individuals and communities flourishing and living up to their full potentials by providing "liberty and justice for all."

Diversity and lived experience should matter to all of us because they help us see how others grew up, what their mindsets are, and how they can compare to other lives. Inclusion should matter because one group is not superior to another.

What needs to happen to achieve justice for all?

1. Growing Acceptance, Diminishing Discrimination
Encouraging diversity is not just "tolerance", but genuine inclusion and acceptance. Through increasing contact with, exposure to, and communication between people who are not like us, we can learn how to relate to difference in a way where difference does not have to be an issue, a hurdle, or a threat. There is a chance, we may discover that the people we assumed to be so different have a great deal in common.

2. Becoming a Global Citizen
Embracing diversity in our everyday life will provide better understanding of others' cultures, traditions, and practices. It is essential that we learn the skills to share information and interrelate with communities, concepts and belief systems that are unknown, and gain worldly, balanced, and informed viewpoints. It will enhance our own social development and increase our understanding of the world. It is crucial that we interact as part of a global society, and work hand in hand with people of diverse backgrounds.

3. Perspective
Learning about other experiences can lead to new perspectives. As we examine other perspectives, it opens the opportunity to embrace others' attitudes and beliefs at a profound level.

4. Richer Life Experience
Diversity is what our survival depends on. If we all were just alike, it would discourage creativity or individual responsibility. Diversity invites a path to applications that stimulate and inspire us to various lifestyles. We must understand that diversity is fundamental to our surviving, and vital to our flourishing.

5. Productivity
A consortium of people with various backgrounds with different life experiences can give rise to ideas or perspectives that others may not have thought of or been acquainted with. All of us have our own ways of dissecting a challenge that is shaped by individual experiences, and the worldview we carry gives rise to them. When unravelling an issue, many interpretations and approaches can give rise to creativity and innovation.

In conclusion, diversity reflects the world in which we live. Our differences make us strong-- locally and globally. We find ourselves today with intolerance, discrimination, and violence, but we must spread throughout the world how vital diversity is, and shutdown divisive tactics and embrace unconditional respect for one another.

Bearing Witness: An Eyewitness Account of the Historic United States Senate Confirmation Hearing of The Honorable Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson, Nominee for the Supreme Court of the United States

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This is my eyewitness account of the United States Senate confirmation hearing for the first Black woman nominated to be an Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court. I saw and heard what was broadcasted to the entire Nation and world. I was unexpectedly transfixed, wonderfully amazed, and immeasurably proud. In the end, my joy was complete to know that my children and grandchildren could see and hear the Hearing as well. We must never forget the significance of this historic moment.

On March 22, 2022, I had the honor of observing live the Confirmation Hearing of the Honorable Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson, nominee for the United States Supreme Court. It is the highest Court in the Nation[1]. By virtue of the U.S. Constitution, the Supreme Court is the final arbiter of the law.[2] It is the Court that decides with finality cases of life and death. It is the Court that issued the shameful *Plessy v. Ferguson* and later *de facto*

[1] U.S. Constitution, Article. III
[2] *Marbury v. Madison*, 5 U.S. 137 (1803)

overturned it.[3] It is the Court that decided the ground-breaking *Brown v. Board of Education* decision that declared unlawful "separate, but equal" public education.

Notwithstanding this past, it is the same Court that has never included a Black women justice. After Judge Brown Jackson's confirmation by the full U.S. Senate, now it will.

This was a remarkable moment. Black Americans and our fellow citizens– if not the whole world – have waited hundreds of years to see it. I had attended many confirmation hearings as a Judicial Selection Committee Chair and Past President of the National Bar Association (the oldest and largest association of Black lawyers in the Nation, organized in 1925). This was decidedly different. Heightened expectancy commanded the hearing room and filled the atmosphere. I had hoped for – but never thought I would – witness this moment.

Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson and I share race, gender, early childhood education, profession, motherhood, and devotion to family. We have in common lengthy public service, nonprofit corporate board participation, and adherence to democratic principles of representative government. I had not expected to see someone like me testifying before the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee as a U.S. Supreme Court nominee.

But there was the Judge--exceptionally qualified, articulate, gracious, and confident. She testified forthrightly despite a few Senators' hysterics, bullying, exaggerations, and theatrics. Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson clearly demonstrated her incontrovertible qualifications for the U.S. Supreme Court. The Congressional Record will forever bear witness that Judge Brown Jackson possesses the highest levels of educational and professional achievement, exceptional judicial experience, flawless character, and uncompromised integrity. Her almost ten years on the Bench is more than the judicial experience of four of the current sitting Justices at the time of their nominations. According to testimony, she has carefully authored almost 600 decisions, and participated in approximately 1,000 cases. She has defended criminal cases.

Notwithstanding repeated challenges from inquisitors, Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson clearly articulated her judicial methodology, *i.e.*, careful review of the applicable statutes and regulations, legislative and regulatory history, written submissions of the parties, oral arguments, and official records. The nominee repeatedly stated her view of the limited role of judges, *i.e.,* to apply the law passed by Congress, and not to create policy. Contrary to the claims of some, Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson is not soft on crime and prefers lenient sentencing. The Judge politely reminded Congress that its job was to

[3] *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 (1869)

make and improve the sentencing guidelines if it wished to do so. She was eloquent in the defense of her record.

Finally, I was greatly impressed by Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson's legendary calm and judicious poise in the face of disrespectful questioning. Therefore, the hearing clearly proved that Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson should be confirmed without delay. I look forward to that glorious day of celebration.

Building Hope & Justice in the Criminal Justice System for Black Communities

Justice Reform and Policing

Sakira Cook
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The Leadership on Civil and Human Rights,
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The coronavirus pandemic amplified the deep racial inequities in our country, from access to health care, economic injustice, and the state of our civil and human rights. Black, Latino, and Native American communities were hit especially hard by the health and economic repercussions. We are living in a moment when our country's deeply seeded divisions based on class and race have led us further into danger. As such, there has been no more important work than that done by activists and community organizations to envision a new paradigm for public safety, rooted in a new vision for justice that respects the human rights of all people and makes our communities safer. This is why we put together our Vision for Justice program: to offer a holistic framework of solutions that expand our view of public safety, prioritizing prevention through non-carceral programs and social services — not jails, prisons, and policing — to keep people safe.

The past several years have seen great strides toward ensuring public safety for all, like the enactment of the First Step Act, Fair Chance to Compete for Jobs Act, and the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act. However, we have also experienced a disappointing backlash. The attacks on leaders who are working to make investments in

community support systems that reject violence and mass incarceration have been relentless. They also make us less safe. Overwhelming evidence tells us that investments in prevention-oriented programs and services — things that address the root causes of violence and harm — are ultimately the best ways to keep families and communities safe. Meanwhile, the failure to hold accountable police and other criminal-legal system actors who commit crimes against the communities they are meant to protect only further destabilizes and physically endangers all of us, especially our most vulnerable. Against this backdrop, we must have the tough conversations about what a safe community truly looks like.

Policies centered around punishment and mass incarceration have led to more violence in our communities, while policies that uplift opportunities and reinvest in our communities have led to increased public safety for all. The failed "tough on crime" policies have not made us safer, nor served justice for anyone. Safe communities are communities where everyone, regardless of race or background, has access to health care and clean water, well-resourced schools, employment and living wages, and safe and affordable housing, among other essential resources. Therefore, it should not be surprising that when the pandemic took away the economic security of millions of people, it also impacted our public safety. Advancing safety requires rebuilding these economic and social supports, addressing the massive upheaval and dislocations that have jeopardized so many people nationwide — particularly our youth and our most vulnerable communities. Decades of neglect and lack of investment in communities of color, while we invest heavily in jails and prisons and the criminalization of poverty, have led us to this critical point.

To move forward, we must embrace new models that rebalance our spending priorities and create safety structures outside of the criminal-legal system. Our solutions must span every stage of the criminal-legal system to offer a true transformation, including dramatic decarceration and investments to tackle racial and economic inequities. By shrinking the system's footprint in our lives, we will be able to invest in reforms rooted in human rights that empower communities to provide oversight, accountability, and influence over the public safety policies that affect them. Ensuring equity and accountability in the criminal-legal system, building a restorative system of justice, and doing the work to rebuild our communities is our only path to achieve equal justice and safety.

The work to ensure public safety requires a paradigm shift at all levels of our government. The current system was not built overnight, and it will not be transformed overnight. Undoing the harm of our tough on crime policies and our flawed criminal-legal system will require all of our efforts. We cannot criminalize or police our way to

safety. What we can do, however, is join together to push our elected officials to invest in people instead of prisons, and invest in families instead of violence, so our country can finally live up to its ideals.

The George Floyd Justice in Policing Act: What Happened and Where We Go from Here

Ebonie Riley
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George Floyd, 46 years old, died in police custody on May 25, 2020, on the corner of 38th Street and Chicago Avenue in south Minneapolis, Minnesota. Four Minneapolis police officers--Derek Chauvin, Tou Thao, J. Alexander Kueng, and Thomas K. Lane, responded to a call shortly after 8 p.m. about a counterfeit $20 bill used at a corner grocery and encountered a Black man who ends up handcuffed and face down on the ground. A passerby, 17-year-old Darnella Frazier, recorded Mr. Floyd's arrest, filmed his killing, shared it online, and with the viral video sparked an uprising, spread from this single corner to cities across the country and the world.

Video of the incident shows that the other officers did not intervene while Chauvin kept his knee pressed on Floyd's neck despite the stricken man's pleas of "I can't breathe" for about nine minutes, while bystanders shout at him to stop. He was pronounced dead at a hospital. In the days following, police issued a statement saying Floyd died after a "medical incident": He physically resisted and appeared in medical distress. Police released another statement saying the FBI will help investigate. Chauvin and three other officers were fired. Protests began and spread to other cities, drawing millions across the country and abroad; protesters called for police reform while mourning the death of another Black person at the hands of police. The Hennepin County medical examiner

ruled that Floyd's death was a homicide--that the 46-year-old's heart and lungs had ceased functioning "while [he was] being restrained" by law enforcement officers.

In June 2020, George Floyd was memorialized in Minneapolis with additional services in Raeford, North Carolina, and Houston, Texas. In his eulogy, Rev. Al Sharpton, Founder & President of the National Action Network, announced a March on Washington, formally known as the Commitment March on Washington, convened by him, impacted families of excessive force, and Martin Luther King, III. Immediately after the Houston memorial, Philonise Floyd testified before the House Judiciary Committee hearing.

Responding to weeks of national protests and advocacy calls from Civil Rights organizations and others, the U.S. House and Senate Democrats unveiled legislation led by the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) with support of more than 200 co-sponsors, entitled the Justice in Policing Act, later renamed the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, which would have prohibited police from using chokeholds, created a national registry to track police misconduct, lowered legal standards to pursue criminal and civil penalties for police misconduct, and banned certain no-knock warrants. It passed the House on a nearly-partisan vote of 220–212 on March 3, 2021. No Republicans supported the legislation, saying it goes too far and would prevent police from doing their jobs effectively.

Led by the Chamber's lone Black Republican, Sen. Tim Scott of South Carolina, Senate Republicans drafted police reform legislation, to not include ending qualified immunity, chokehold bans, and no-knock warrants in drug-related cases. Democrats blocked the effort from reaching the floor for debate but fell short of the support required from Democrats or Independents.

Ending qualified immunity has always been the sticking point for Republicans to support police reform, and it is one of the most important things to change. Ending qualified immunity means supporting personal accountability. Law enforcement officers who break the law should be held personally accountable, and those impacted by bad actors can receive justice.

In April 2021, Derek Chauvin was convicted of second-degree unintentional murder, third-degree murder, and second-degree manslaughter 11 months after Mr. Floyd's death. Biden initially called on lawmakers to compromise by the first anniversary of Floyd's murder, but the May 25, 2021, deadline came and went without any breakthrough. In June 2021, Derek Chauvin was sentenced to 22 and a half years in prison. Under Minnesota law, Chauvin will have to serve two-thirds of his sentence or

15 years and be eligible for supervised release for the remaining seven and a half years. President Biden told reporters the decision "seems to be appropriate."

In September 2021, months of bipartisan negotiations over policing reform legislation ended with no agreement. Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ) told reporters that he and Rep. Karen Bass' conversations with Republican negotiator Sen. Tim Scott of South Carolina "weren't any more meaningful progress on establishing substantive reform to America's policing." Civil rights leaders and policing reform advocates expressed their frustration that talks had broken down without agreement, despite months of work.

Black and Brown people are casualties in the U.S.'s police brutality and misconduct patterns, and we should not continue to fall prey to gaps in policy gaps. There are many varying opinions among scholars, activists, lawyers, and policymakers on the path forward. Federal police reform cannot be symbolic only.

We also know we need a front and back overhaul of the criminal justice system. Short, medium, and long-term reforms and standards are possible and must be set at the national level to help municipalities grapple with this critical issue. Many decisions about policing tactics, training, and strategies are determined at the state and local levels. However, the Bill attempts to make it easier to hold individual law enforcement officers accountable through existing law and practice changes. Most agree the Bill was a great start to reform but did not go as far as some hoped; but now we are currently left where we began, with nothing. There must be a fundamental reconceptualization of both the mission of police and the culture in which that mission is carried out. To make our communities safe, we must begin by rebuilding trust between law enforcement and those entrusted to serve and protect. We cannot rebuild that trust if we do not hold police officers accountable for abuses of power and tackle systemic misconduct –and systemic racism in police departments. Like many others killed at the hands of police, George Floyd should not have died; his family, like many families impacted, should not have this trauma.

Racial, Gender, Economic & Environmental Justice, Equity and Equality

American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA): The Potential for Equity

Carol Joyner
Director, Family Values@Work Action

Black leaders have an opportunity to use American Rescue Plan funds to further our fight for equity, thanks to inclusion by the bill sponsors of racial equity as a top priority. To ensure that plans meet the equity guidelines and reach intended families, it is imperative that communities of color understand the funding levels in their specific jurisdictions and work with state, local, and community actors to direct these funds in an equitable manner.

The American Rescue Plan[4] (ARPA) was signed into law in March 2021 with an appropriation of $1.8 trillion to address the continued health and economic impact of COVID-19 on "all citizens, businesses and state, local, territorial and Tribal governments." The ARPA funding was structured to promote equity and get relief to families and communities most impacted by the pandemic. Funds allowed for direct financial relief ("money in pockets''), vaccine infrastructure ("shots in arms"), child tax credits, higher education funding (with HBCUs receiving $2.7B)[5], broadband targeted to

[4] U.S. Treasury Department. Fact Sheet on American Rescue Plan, 2021

https://home.treasury.gov/news/featured-stories/fact-sheet-the-american-rescue-plan-will-deliver-immediate-economic-relief-to-families

[5] White House Briefing Room. Fact Sheet on investments in HBCUs in the ARPA funding.

https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/03/07/fact-sheet-state-by-state-analysis-of-record-2-7-billion-american-rescue-plan-investment-in-historically-black-colleges-and-universities/

rural and low-income communities, K-12 school support, and more. Compared to the last large recovery package in response to the 2008 economic recession, ARPA and the previous COVID-related policies provided significantly greater relief[6] to those most impacted by the crises. As a result of the bill sponsors embedding racial equity as a top priority, the covid-related recession had a shorter duration; the funds bolstered economic recovery.

Of the ARPA funding, $350 billion was earmarked for more flexible spending by state, local, territorial and Tribal governments. Known as Fiscal Recovery Funds (FRF)[7] , there were two scheduled disbursements, May 2021 and May 2022. These governments have until December 31, 2024 to obligate the funding and December 31, 2026 to spend it. Each jurisdiction determines the process for administering the funds as set forth in a plan that is submitted to the Treasury Department. Active engagement by communities of color can help ensure the plans have the greatest impact on equity goals.

According to a report by the the U.S.Treasury Department,[8] states and localities are encouraged to target funds to people most affected by the pandemic and to address racial and economic inequities that predate, but worsened, during the pandemic". The Treasury Department's Guidance:

- Encourages states to focus on households "most disproportionately impacted by the pandemic";
- Promotes using funds for "a strong, inclusive, and equitable recovery, especially uses with long-term benefits for health and economic outcomes;"
- Allows a broad array of spending targeted on people with low incomes or in low-income communities; and

[6] Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. Briefing Paper. ARPA Recovery Funds Building a Stronger Recovery. March, 2022

https://www.cbpp.org/research/state-budget-and-tax/american-rescue-plans-fiscal-recovery-funds-are-helping-produce-a

[7] Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. Spreadsheet on state use of ARPA funding. December, 2021 (will be updated in the coming weeks)

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1-4L7bbMMM1DbDkBmifKIWzbZtkGsQU61/edit#gid=1590452576

[8] Treasury Department Briefing on Centering Racial Equity in Policy Making. September, 2021

https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/136/American-Rescue-Plan-Centering-Equity-in-Policymaking.pdf

- Allows spending that reduces health inequities across racial and economic groups.

ARPA - Untapped Potential in the States

In 2022, the Department of Labor released a final rule[9] on greater flexibility in the use of state and local ARPA funds. These funds provide opportunities for working families and communities to address a myriad of issues. It emphasizes addressing stark racial disparities that have persisted for too long, impacting the daily living and futures of Black, Latino, and Native Americans who were more likely to be infected, hospitalized or die from COVID -19.

Based on this rule, ARPA funds earmarked by state and local governments can be used to support premium pay programs;, water, sewage and broadband, rent and mortgage payments, mutual aid and paid time off. State and local governments can use these funds for paid family and medical leave, vaccine leave, paid sick days and other time off needed to address pandemic related issues including long-haul covid illnesses – chronic conditions that impact daily living for many. A current example is in Massachusetts where they have funded an emergency paid sick leave program with ARPA funding.

While many states have proposed projects that address COVID-19 health and economic disparities and others are in a planning stage, others have used the money in ways that fall short of the ARPA funding goals. In Alabama, for example, the state legislature voted to use a portion of their funds to build new prisons. The highlights below point to a few of the plans consistent with the spirit of this monumental funding opportunity.

[9] U.S. Treasury Department. Final Rule on ARPA funding, January, 2022

https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/136/SLFRF-Final-Rule.pdf

Highlights: How States Are Using Fiscal Recovery Funds:

Type of Funding	State Funding Examples as of Dec. 2021
Economic Recovery	WA allocated $340M to immigrants affected by the pandemic; OR expanded emergency food supplies; and CT used a portion of resources for legal assistance in housing, MA funded state-wide Emergency Paid Sick Days.
Education	MD advanced a multi-year Blueprint for Education; NV devoted $200M to improve literacy impacted by the pandemic; NJ committed 27% of funds to special education initiatives, and new HVAC/water systems in schools.
Healthcare	IL appropriated 15% of their funds to long term care services, mental health and substance abuse services. NJ spent 18% to improve emergency preparedness at 3 regional healthcare facilities; and VA spent $77M to raise wages for direct care staff in state behavioral centers and intellectual disability training facilities.

Steps for Securing Funding for Your Community:

1. Determine how much money your state was allocated and what was spent to date. This spreadsheet has funding levels through December 2021. Currently, state legislatures are meeting to propose additional spending. For more information, contact your local fiscal policy organization, organized under the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.
2. If there is funding left in your state, meet with local partners to assess the needs and propose spending. Check in with the state administrator managing the funds to get any proposals that have been submitted to the Treasury Department.
3. Work with community groups to turn your proposals into bills that can be passed next legislative session, or program ideas that can be directly implemented by state agencies.

4. Be persistent! This funding is meant to support the needs of those most impacted by COVID-19. We should identify programs, policies and resources that help communities thrive.

The Time is Now to Ensure No Communities are Left Behind as We Buildout Broadband Infrastructure

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March 2022 marks two years since COVID-19 changed the world as we know it. As the novel coronavirus spread, the world abruptly sheltered in place shutting down schools, offices, retail stores, and more. With the closures, our daily routines shifted online and a high speed internet connection was critical for work, school, healthcare, and remaining connected with family and friends. The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the urgency to bridge the digital divide, as those without reliable internet, adequate devices, and digital literacy skills were clearly disadvantaged when most essential activities moved online.

The burdens associated with shifting daily activities from in person to online have been particularly challenging for Black women. Black families are less likely than White families to have a computer and internet at home. According to, *Impact of COVID-19 on Black Women*, a new study from ESSENCE magazine, "[t]he majority of Black women who are parents (85%) say there are not enough computers or laptops in their household to support the educational needs of their children[.]" Instead, more Black families depend on smartphones as their sole source of access to the internet. And the pandemic has placed enormous financial burdens on many Black families, especially those that are low-income. As a result, some of the most vulnerable in our society have

found it even more challenging to afford broadband service and home computers as they faced lost wages when everything closed down.

Fortunately, Congress, recognizing the need for intervention, enacted emergency measures early in the pandemic to help states, school districts, libraries, and families in need obtain affordable broadband. In November 2021, Congress passed the historic Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), a once-in-a-generation investment into America's infrastructure. Among other things, it will bolster the resources and tools necessary to ensure everyone has access to reliable, affordable high-speed internet. The IIJA provides $65 billion for broadband initiatives that will address three key factors that contribute to the digital divide: (1) affordability; (2) access; and (3) adoption.

- **Affordability:** One program that was particularly helpful at the height of the pandemic was the Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) Program, which provided $50 per month for qualifying families to purchase broadband service and $100 to purchase a laptop, desktop computer, or tablet. On March 1, 2022, the EBB was replaced with the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), a new, long-term $14 billion program that provides $30 per month for eligible households to purchase broadband service. Eligible households can enroll in the ACP through their provider or by vising ACPBenefit.org. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is mobilizing organizations to help raise awareness about the ACP and has created materials for public use that can be customized and shared with state and local communities. Consumer awareness content is available in multiple languages and can be found at https://www.fcc.gov/acp-consumer-outreach-toolkit.

- **Access:** The IIJA provides $42.5 billion for the Broadband Equity Access and Deployment (BEAD) Program that provides funding to states to build broadband in unserved and underserved areas. The BEAD Program is intended to provide states and territories with the necessary resources and flexibility to meet their unique needs while also ensuring an equitable deployment of new federally-funded broadband infrastructure.

- **Adoption:** Even when broadband is available and the cost is zero (thanks to the new government-funded broadband benefits), a significant number of people still may not adopt broadband. There are many reasons for this. Some may lack the requisite digital literacy skills; others may not trust the internet fearing a loss of

privacy; and still others may not appreciate how broadband can meaningfully improve their daily lives. Fortunately, the IIJA provides $2.75 billion for its Digital Equity Act Competitive Grant Program to fund work that can address the myriad of complex issues which can discourage people from adopting broadband.

If there was ever any doubt about the need to urgently close the digital divide, the pandemic made it crystal clear that the time is now to bridge the gap so everyone has the opportunity to thrive in an increasingly digital world. Long before the pandemic, in 2012, Verizon launched the Verizon Innovative Learning program to help students achieve, learn, and create more with free internet access, free devices, and innovative next-gen technology-infused curriculum for teachers. Last year, we announced our plan to invest over $3 billion by 2025 to help close the digital divide by, among other things, equipping 10 million youth with digital skills training and supporting one million small businesses with tech resources and tools by 2030. Digital tools are not only essential to day-to-day life for individuals, but are also critical for small businesses as consumers conduct more business online. Small businesses are the backbone of our communities and Black women are the fastest growing group of entrepreneurs in the U.S. To help small businesses recover from the pandemic, we launched Verizon Small Business Digital Ready, which provides free online courses that meet a variety of entrepreneurs' needs, including personalized coaching, 1:1 sessions with experts, and opportunities to network with other business owners. In addition to being eligible for grants up to $10,000, participating small business owners have expanded their reach after learning key digital marketing skills, finance management, and operational efficiency.

The COVID-19 pandemic has forever changed the way we live, work, and play. We are pleased that Congress has stepped up to make this unprecedented investment in broadband. As we continue to navigate a post-pandemic world, supplying critical resources to Black women, in their many roles as parents, entrepreneurs, busy professionals, community leaders and more, will require a strong commitment from both the public and private sector. Together, we can advocate for equitable allocation of new government funding combined with private sector resources to achieve our goal of 100% connectivity. The time is now to ensure no communities are left behind as we build and fortify the bridge that will finally close the digital divide.

The Impact of Environmental Justice and Climate Change in Black America and The African Diaspora

Jacqui Patterson
The Chisholm Legacy Project

Roots--Greed, Colonization, and an Extractive Economy

Contrary to the romanticized notions of explorers seeking religious freedom and liberty, when the colonizers came to the US, it was in pursuit of riches and power to be achieved by any means necessary. And those means were the murder and displacement of the indigenous people who greeted them with open arms. And then these colonizers boarded ships and sailed again to the Motherland of Africa and stole people from their land, from their families, from what would have been their generational wealth, by force putting them as cargo in the bottom of ships on the TransAtlantic journey to come to these United States (and nations in the Caribbean) to become someone else's generational wealth as "owned property".

The earth hasn't fared any better against the forces of greed and the pursuit of power. When the "explorers" journeyed across the ocean seeking spices, the original intent for the journey was to take from the land. Right away, in displacing the original inhabitants of this land, whose culture and heritage was centered in living in respect and harmony with the land we saw the disruption in our ecosystem as they broke the threads of harmony. Indigenous values and practices were in resonance with the regenerative bounty offered by the land. But this relationship was replaced by settler colonialism with the modus operandi of reckless extraction and dominion over people and place.

All of this was done while advancing a false scarcity narrative that in order for the "settlers" to be well, they had to murder, displace, and enslave others. As the settlers established dominance, they institutionalized policies, practices and an economy that has evolved into the complex system that prevails today, one that is rooted in exploitation, materialism, extraction, enclosure of wealth and power, and ruling by force.

These circumstances have led us to where we are, on a collision course with catastrophic climate change. In the examples that follow, one can glean a snapshot of the impacts of pursuit of the US and other industrialized nations in amassing wealth and power, creating dependencies, and systematizing imperialism through trade, finance, labor, and aid policies as well as structural adjustment programs in Africa and beyond.

Impacts—A Sampling of Examples of Global Profiteering Differentially Imperiling Black People in the US & Africa

Resource wars on the Motherland are often driven by constrained access to water which impacts food security, poverty and is linked to population displacement.

Climate forced migration has driven millions of people from their lands due to disaster or drought which puts women in particular at risk for trafficking and sexual assault. It also drives people to nations where they are not afforded the rights of citizenship and therefore they often face abuse. In the example of the United States, people seeking refuge from Haiti were met with men on horseback using their reins as whips and other families seeking safe harbor had their children placed in cages.

Compromised access, affordability, and quality of basic goods and services come as a result of pollution from the same facilities that emit the greenhouse gas emissions that drive climate change. Other impact include increased natural disasters, rising sea levels, and shifts in agricultural yields. An African American family making $50,000 per year is more likely to live next to a toxic facility than a White American family making $15,000 a year and 71% of African Americans live in counties in violation of federal air pollution standards. This lack of access to the basic human right to clean air results in African American children being 2 to 3 times more likely to die of asthma that White American

children. Post disasters, African Americans are more likely to lose their lives at worst and suffer long term displacement at best due to substandard infrastructure. African American are already more likely to be food insecure, a situation exacerbated by the shifts in agricultural yields resulting from climate change.

Deepened gender inequities are more prevalent among Black women who faced increased risk of sexual assault and domestic violence post Katrina while non-binary persons faced insecurity on the streets because the shelter system had no provisions for their safety. Because of the disproportionate exposure to polluting facilities, Black women suffer disproportionately from endocrine disrupters that are among the toxins being emitted from the smoke stacks.

Solutions—The Imperative for Frontline Community Power and Decision Making

People are seeing that the solution is in shifting away from a society rooted in exploitation and domination to one anchored by caring and cooperation, and a true notion of 'all for one and one for all.' An increasing swath of society is embracing the need for systems change. More people see themselves as responsible for being the change we want to see in the world. We see the Atlantic Coast and Keystone pipelines blocked and. We draw inspiration from the Soulfire Farm, the Earthseed Collective, the Baltimore Community Land Trust, and other who are growing healthy and nutritious foods! We find hope as we see white nationalists becoming Black Lives Matter activists. From California to Evanston, IL to Washington, DC municipalities, organizations, and individuals are committing to reparations. We've seen advancements in dismantling the corporatocracy from new FERC guidance on considering climate change in permitting decisions and the legislative progress on getting money out of politics is promising!

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "*We have before us the glorious opportunity **to inject** a new dimension of **love into the veins** of our **civilization**."*

Love in practice must encompass justice. Justice in practice is an inclusive society where we embrace and cooperatively live into our interconnectedness, where all voices are heard and heeded, where all rights are lifted and affirmed, including earth rights, and where we honor and care for the sacred, including our relationships with each other and Mother Earth.

Black Women are Entrepreneurs

Jena Roscoe
Senior Vice President Government Relations & Public Policy
Operation HOPE

Historic Black Women

Judy W. Reed, First known U.S. Patent (and many more now) by an African American Woman in 1884.

First African American (and only one, to date) U.S. Treasury Treasurer Azie Taylor Morton in 1976.

First African American (and only one, to date) U.S. Labor Secretary Alexis M. Herman in 1997. https://www.dol.gov/general/aboutdol/history/sec-chrono

Dr. Lisa D. Cook is the first nomination (hopefully, not the last) as a Federal Reserve Board Governor in 2022.

Some key extraordinary women and trailblazers who paved the way for greater economic equity opportunities for all Americans, including African Americans and Women.

Historic Entrepreneurs

According to the U.S. Census, there are over 2 million African American Women Entrepreneurs as of today. During a National COVID19 Pandemic and Omicron Virus, extraordinary women pave the way in creating and/or maintaining job and economic growth.

At Operation HOPE, founded by Chairman & CEO John Hope Bryant thirty years ago, we welcome the success in this growing U.S. Census Small Business Statistic. Our HOPE Programs generate economic educational foundation for seeding small business growth by aspiring entrepreneurs, innovators, and dreamers.

AND we need more small business incubator systems to add to the growing network of small business organizations and micro enterprises institutions.

Federal Entrepreneurship Resources

The federal government continues to hear the American viewpoint that greater "access to capital" opportunities remain a priority and especially in minority communities as we continue to live through a current COVID19 Pandemic and Omicron environment. With the support of greater U.S. Congress appropriations towards financing programs and initiatives with core federal agencies such as U.S. Treasury CDFI Fund, U.S. SBA, U.S. Commerce EDA, MBDA, ITA, USPTO, and U.S. NCUA, and hosting unique federal engagements to educate entrepreneurs, the minority small business statistics will show positive progression. To name a few:

- The U.S. Treasury's Freedman's Bank Forums
- The U.S. SBA Small Business Week;
- The U.S. Commerce MBDA MED Week, USPTO National Council For Expanding American Innovation (NCEAI), ITA Global Market Forums, and EDA Challenges; and
- The U.S. NCUA Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Summit.

These annual federal initiatives remain an honest sign of support to grow entrepreneurship and innovation.

Financial regulatory agencies service initiatives to encourage greater “access to capital” credit education opportunities for Americans. They include:

- The U.S. FDIC Money Smart Program;
- The U.S. OCC Project REACH Program;
- The Federal Reserve Bank’s Investment Connection Program;
- These federal initiatives must continue to spur public - private sector investments in economic innovation and growth.

AND promoting positive women, and African Americans, on U.S. Coins and U.S. Currency may serve as a unique symbol of promoting the American entrepreneurship spirit for all. There are many examples of minted coins including the historic 2017 225th Anniversary American Liberty Gold Coin featuring a modern rendition of Lady Liberty, an African American Woman, as well as 2022’s minting of Maya Angelou on the Quarter... there’s HOPE we will see the 2016 announced $20 Bill with a face of Harriet Tubman soon.

Black Women Beyond the Workplace

Shani Hosten
Vice President
Diversity, Equity & Inclusion African American/Black Strategy & LGBTQ Strategy
AARP

It's well known that Black women face distinct challenges in the workplace and beyond. But what if instead of focusing on those challenges, we focused on how to move beyond them as we enter the next stage in life? What if we reimagined our possibilities as we transition to life beyond our careers?

What comes next in the lives of Black women is a key focus at AARP. We believe there is no reason why your *next* chapter in life, can't be your *best* chapter in life. Here are a few ways to make that happen.

Put the GOLDEN in your Years

The data is clear, in far too many instances, Black women find themselves financially strained in their retirement years. But at AARP, we believe it's never too early or too late to start preparing for your retirement in a way that will leave you financially stable instead of financially stretched. To help put a little more gold into your golden years, in collaboration with the Ad Council, AARP developed Our Shero, an Ace Your Retirement Digital Coach that in just 3 minutes, can map out a personalized action plan to get you on course to reach your 'next chapter' goals or to retire with financial confidence.

Live Your Dream

Black women are the most likely demographic group in America to start a business. But starting or growing a business after 50 may be a challenge. However, that's a challenge that is far from insurmountable. In fact, it might just be the gateway to the life you've always imagined.

To help make the entrepreneurial journey as smooth and successful as possible, Public Private Strategies in partnership with AARP created the Small Business Resource Center for the 50+. Through this Center, aspiring entrepreneurs as well as established business owners can receive access to a wide range of online resources and events specifically designed to help the over-50 entrepreneur thrive.

Be Prepared for the Curveballs

Every once in a while, life throws you a curveball. And more often than not, that curveball comes with a hefty price tag. A major unexpected expense can sometimes mean the difference between living comfortably within your budget and finding yourself struggling just to get by. But the best thing to do when the unexpected happens is to think strategically about how best to meet that challenge without throwing the rest of your life into shambles. To help deal with the unexpected, AARP created a free Money Mapping Tool that offers a wide range of options to consider and then develops a course of action that will help you get beyond life's curveballs and instead, more swiftly get your life right back on track.

Focus on What's Most Important

While there were far too many tragedies associated with the Covid-19 pandemic, one positive thing to come out of this experience is that it caused us to slow down enough to really begin to appreciate the most important things in life. According to an AARP survey of Black women Millennials, Gen Xers, and Baby Boomers, Black women across the age spectrum have taken this time to focus inward with an eye towards self-care. Well over half of the Black women in our study (58%) were more focused on keeping their inner peace than enhancing their outer beauty. While 3 out of 5 said they focused more on their health than their outward appearance. Across the generations, Black women agree—now is the time to focus on what's most important. Taking care of our health and inner peace is ultimately the greatest wealth of all.

Building Resilient Black Communities

Felecia Davis
Managing Director, HBCU Green Fund

It is time for Black America to recalibrate. Strategies and arguments that served us well in the past are good tools in the toolbox yet insufficient for the task at hand. Closing gaps and securing our community remains our highest priority and while we have not removed all barriers, it is time that we shift our focus to economic enterprise and regenerative development. From this vantage point the enormous energy transformation underway driven by the critical need to address climate change must be embraced as an opportunity to close health, education and wealth gaps.

Understanding and communicating a sense of urgency around climate change and the fact that we are out of time must be conveyed to the Black community. The most recent report by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change confirms that climate is changing at a pace that humans may no longer have the capacity to adapt to. Impacts are worse than previously predicted with drought, floods, fires and heat waves threatening life at an accelerated pace. Tropical diseases like malaria and dengue fever are spreading to new areas and the global water crisis threatens one-fourth of the Earth's population with running out of water.[27] Drought increases water insecurity with demand exceeding availability in cities like Los Angeles.

Communicating climate impacts must become a priority for social justice organizations. When farmers lose entire crop cycles food prices rise. Invariably climate change drives migration, war and a growing refugee crisis that also impacts more affluent nations. The US is no exception. The loss of biodiversity may seem far removed from the concerns of those struggling with day-to-day challenges, however it is impacted by and equals climate change in human impact. Ecosystem disruption and mass species die-offs endanger drinking water, food production and ultimately human life as we know it. We

must simultaneously educate communities about the damaging impacts of our consumptive behavior and lead efforts to transform our economy to one that is just, life-affirming, and sustainable.

The Biden Executive Order on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad (14008) establishes addressing climate change as a top priority. President Biden has initiated a government-wide approach to the problem with action underway across federal agencies. The Administration has set a goal for at least 40% of federal investment to benefit disadvantaged communities, with particular "focus on investments in the areas of clean energy and energy efficiency; clean transit; affordable and sustainable housing; training and workforce development; remediation and reduction of legacy pollution; and the development of critical clean water infrastructure." We must organize within this framework to create the change we desire.

Identifying "disadvantaged" Black communities is essential if we are to capitalize on emerging opportunities and maximize resource flow to communities that we care about. The White House has released a beta version of a tool to be used to identify targeted communities. In an effort to avoid legal challenges race has not been included as a factor. The Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool, CEJST, prioritizes low-income status along with some 21 climate, environmental, health and other economic indicators to determine disadvantage. Perhaps the race neutral design will expedite implementation. It is imperative that we become familiar with the tool and work to ensure that over-extracted Black communities are prioritized for investment.

The US Department of Energy set two job generating, emissions reducing goals: to deploy 30 gigawatts of offshore wind and cut the cost of solar energy by 60% by 2030. DOE also pledges resources to build climate resilient infrastructure, scaling clean energy technologies, and in keeping with Justice40 directing 40% of overall benefits to underserved and disadvantaged communities.[28]

STRENGTHENING BACKBONE & ANCHOR INSTITUTIONS

In order to tap federal investment, disadvantaged communities need support. Identifying and strengthening backbone organizations and increasing the capacity of anchor institutions to manage large federal grants and investment is an important first step. Historically Black Colleges and Universities can serve as anchors for sustainable development. Several national organizations like the The Urban League, UNCF and the NAACP possess strong track records in providing technical assistance, crafting public/private partnerships, and workforce and community development. Together these institutions can provide training in growth areas including renewable energy,

electric vehicle sales, service and charging infrastructure, energy efficiency retrofits, and sustainable building. Management capacity must be expanded to accommodate the management of larger infrastructure and development projects.

Civic organizations, especially those with a presence at the local level like the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation and National Council of Negro Women, possessing expertise in community outreach and engagement also have an important role to play in increasing community resiliency. Supported by additional resources these organizations are well positioned to perform backbone services. In keeping with collective impact theory, backbone organizations[29]:Guide vision and strategy; Support aligned activities; Establish shared measurement practices; Build public will; Advance policy; and Mobilize funding.

Turning the Corner to Improve Black Women's Employment in 2022 Will Require Concrete Investments Focused on Growing Wages and Addressing Care Needs

Jocelyn C. Frye
President, National Partnership for Women & Families

More than two years into the COVID-19 pandemic, Black women continue to experience the disruptive effects of a crisis that has pushed millions of women out of the workforce, spurred massive job losses in industries where women disproportionately work, and exacerbated longstanding gaps in caregiving supports. Although 2021 saw important jobs gains in the economy overall, the turnaround has been slower, more uneven, and less promising for Black women workers. Their prospects in 2022 will depend in large part on whether there are intentional efforts to address longstanding workplace inequities that have undervalued Black women's work, diminished their care needs, and ignored the quality of the jobs they hold —all problems that preceded, but have been exacerbated by, the COVID-19 pandemic.

Black women worked throughout the pandemic, but also experienced enormous job losses. Black women have been on the frontlines of the pandemic from its earliest days in February 2020 and have borne the brunt of its effects. Black women historically have had among the highest labor force participation rates for women and that has remained true throughout the pandemic, with many working as essential workers and often for low pay.[30] In January 2022, the labor force participation rate for Black women workers over the age of 20 was 61.9 percent, while their unemployment rate was 5.8 percent, both highs among all women.[31] (See Figures 1 and 2). This shows that Black women were more likely to be working than other women, but they still have experienced huge job losses, largely because they have been over-represented in sectors with the steepest job declines. From February 2020 to January 2022, the number of employed Black women

fell by 2.6 percent, the largest decrease among all white, Hispanic, and Black workers, with many women leaving to address caregiving challenges.[32]

Figure 1:

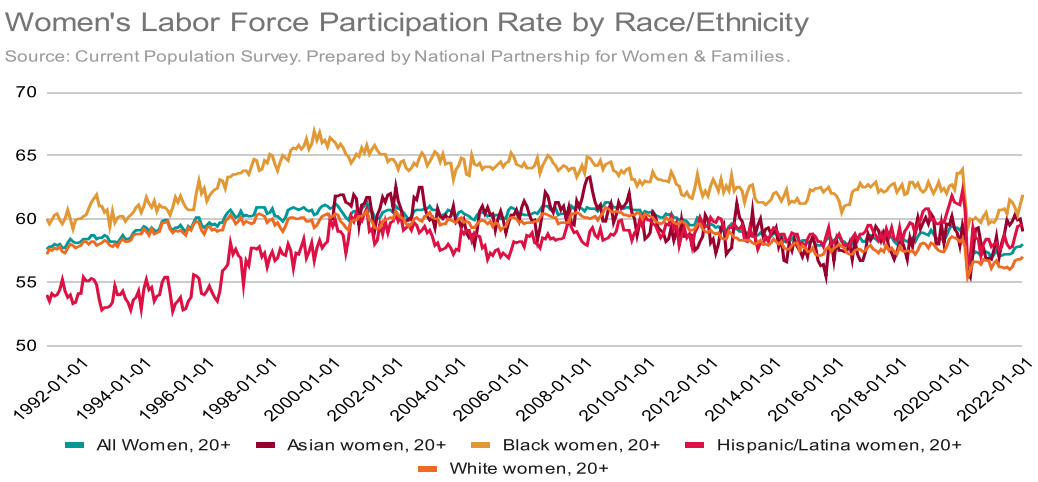
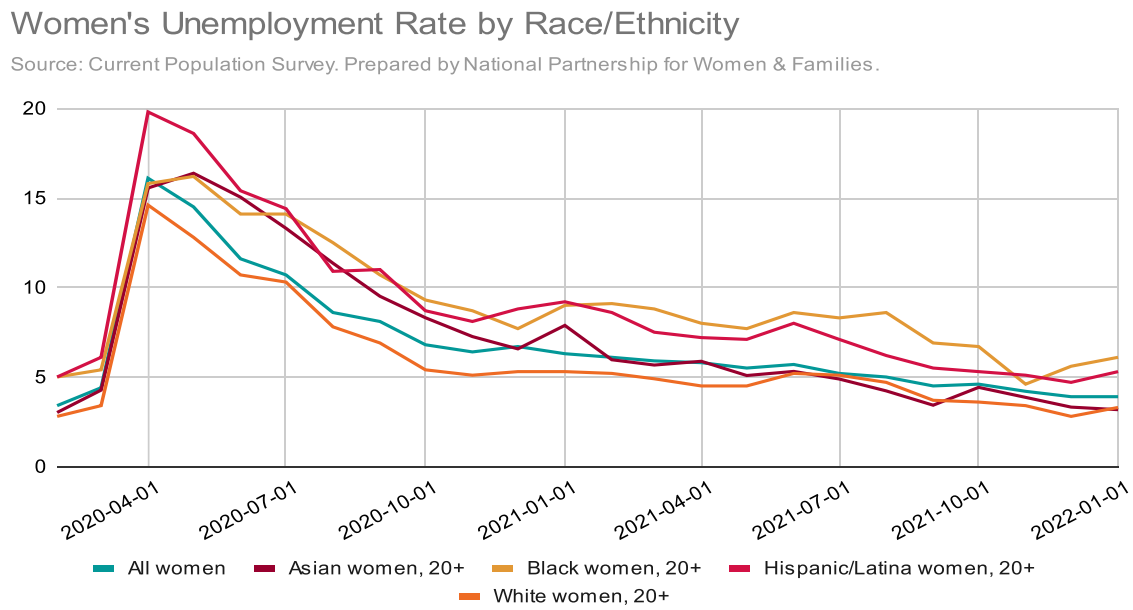


Figure 2:



Workplace improvements to raise wages and address care needs are key to Black women's success in the job market. Efforts to improve Black women's employment must do more than focus solely on getting Black women back into any job; instead, the focus must be on ensuring that the jobs Black women hold enable them to remain attached to the workforce, become economically secure, and fulfill their responsibilities at work and at home. This means addressing longstanding wage disparities — in 2020, Black women

working full-time year-round earned only 64 cents for every dollar earned by white male workers working full-time year-round.[33] It also means improving the jobs where Black women work — Black women are over-concentrated in sectors, such as the care and services sectors, where the pay is frequently low and there are few supports to address care needs.[34] Many Black women also experience the combined effects of race and gender discrimination and are more likely to report experiencing discrimination at work.[35] All of these factors make it harder for Black women to keep their jobs and achieve financial stability.

Improving Black women's employment is vital to the economic stability of their families. More than 80 percent of Black mothers, for example, are either co-, primary, or sole breadwinners, meaning that their economic contributions are essential.[36] Proposals to: strengthen protections against pay discrimination and boost enforcement of employment discrimination laws, tackle pay disparities experienced by women of color, raise the minimum wage and overall wages, improve job quality by providing caregiving supports such as paid family and medical leave, and establish a federal task force on strengthening women's employment are among the solutions that could make a difference. Black women play an important role in our economy and centering their workplace experiences when discussing what is needed to achieve a full economic recovery is critical to ensure that Black women — as well as other women workers — are not left behind.

The ERA and Black Women's Pursuit of Equality

Jennifer Tucker
ERA Coalition and Fund for Women's Equality

After the 2016 elections, with conservatives taking over the White House, the Congress and many state Legislatures, ERA advocates renewed their interest and the public developed a growing appetite for amending the U.S. Constitution to include the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), which prohibits discrimination based on sex. By then it was a whopping 45 years since Congress passed the ERA and sent it to the states to be ratified. The ERA was first in introduced in Congress in 1923, and has been introduced every session thereafter.

In 1972, the ERA was voted out of the Congress with overwhelming support in the House (354-24) and Senate (84-8)[10] with a 7-year time limit, later extended to 10 years, in its preamble. The ERA quickly racked up support and was ratified in 35 states, but failed to meet the required three-fourths of state ratifications prior to the expiration of the time limit. State ratifications stalled until 2017 when Senator Pat Spearman of Nevada, the chief sponsor, worked with her colleagues; it became the 36th state to ratify the ERA. In 2018, Illinois became the 37th state to ratify, with Senator Julianna Stratton (now Lt. Governor) playing a crucial role in turning the tide in favor of the ERA's passage. The Virginia Legislature, led by Senator Jennifer McClellan and former Delegate Jennifer Carroll Foy, became the 38th state to ratify the amendment on January 27, 2020. At this moment, the ERA met the two requirements set forth in Article V of the Constitution to be certified and published in the Constitution: Passage

[10] J. .Neuwirth. (2015). *Equal means equal: Why the time for an equal rights amendment is now*. New Press: New York, New York.

in Congress with at least two-thirds of the vote and be ratified by more than three-fourth of the states.

The Black women state legislators in Nevada, Illinois, and Virginia, and ERA supporters in such organizations as the Black Women's Roundtable, Delta Sigma Theta, National Urban League, National Action Network, National Organization of Black Elected Legislative (NOBEL) Women, National Congress of Black Women, In Our Own Voice, National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda, and the National Caucus of Black State Legislators are moving the ERA forward. They are using their leadership and vision of the U.S. Constitution as a document with core values of equality and fairness as guiding principles to advance justice for all. These leaders have been crucial in moving the ERA to the door steps of the Archivist of the United States for its publication as the 28th Amendment where it is stalled once more. Today, the ERA has never been closer to being included in the Constitution. Yet, the Archivist refuses to publish the ERA because of a January 6, 2020 policy opinion issued by the Office of Legal Counsel (OLC) at the Department of Justice during the Trump Administration[11] . A court case to address this policy that bars the Archivist is pending in the District of Columbia Court of Appeals[12]

Fully 80 percent of people in the United States believe the U.S. Constitution guarantees people sex equality.[13] Sadly, the United States is **not** among the 85 percent of the world's nations with Constitutions that prohibit discrimination based on sex.[14] The ERA adds an important protection to the toolkit that helps us attack pervasive sex discrimination and gendered abuses that affect every aspect of women's lives, from home to the workplace, to the public square and every place in between. For Black women, this extra layer of protection is particularly critical because their experience with sex discrimination is magnified because of the intersection of race and sex/gender in a host of areas the ERA might rectify, including, equal pay, pregnancy discrimination,

[11] U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Legal Counsel (2020). Ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment, Opinion by Steven A. Engle. Washington, DC. Retrieved March 2022 from https://www.justice.gov/olc/file/1232501/download.

[12] Commonwealth of Virginia, et al., v. David Ferriero. (2022). Retrieved March 2022 from https://2ovrcr1ntdy0qupom33icsxw-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Brief-of-Appellants-ERA.pdf

[13] J. Heymann. (2020). *U.S. protection for constitutional rights falling behind glob al peers.* UCLA WORLD Policy Analysis Center: Los Angeles, CA. Retrieved March 2022 from https://www.justice.gov/olc/file/1232501/downloadJodyHeymannWORLD

[14] J. Heymann. (2020). *U.S. protection for constitutional rights falling behind glob al peers.* UCLA WORLD Policy Analysis Center: Los Angeles, CA. Retrieved March 2022 from https://www.justice.gov/olc/file/1232501/downloadJodyHeymannWORLD

gender-based violence, maternal health, human trafficking, sexual harassment, access to reproductive health care, child marriage, and female genital mutilation.[15] [16] [17] Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm, speaking in support of the Amendment in 1970, said, it [ERA] provides a "legal basis for attack in the most subtle, most pervasive and most institutionalized form of prejudice that exists."

Over time, the ERA will level the playing field for women and girls, though outcomes may not be felt immediately on a personal level. With equal rights protections in the Constitution, the Congress has more authority to pass legislation to ensure sex equality. The Congress and state Legislatures are required to remove federal and state statutes and administrative codes that discriminate against individuals – women, men and gender-expansive individuals -- because of their sex. The ERA gives the Congress and states two years to review, remove discriminatory laws and administrative codes and come into compliance with the ERA after it is ratified. ERA supporters in states across the across the country are beginning to conduct these reviews as state Legislatures are slow to begin purging discriminatory laws. For example, earlier this year the ERA - NC Alliance, with pro bono assistance from the law firm Winston Strawn, LLP in Charlotte, North Carolina, conducted an audit of its states laws found 45,000 pages of possible discriminatory laws and only 2,300 pages of laws that met the standard set forth by the ERA.

Although proponents consider the ERA ratified after fulfilling the requirements laid out by Article V of the Constitution, they are working to remove any lingering doubts that it should be published. In addition to the court case now before the DC Court of Appeals, ERA advocates are calling for the Biden Administration to remove the Trump era OLC opinion that bars the Archivist from publishing the ERA as the 28th Amendment and asking Congress to pass legislation that supports the ERA. In the Senate, there is the bipartisan S.J. Resolution 1 that removes the time limit for ratification set by Congress in1972 and extended in 1977 to 1982. Its companion bill has already passed in the House of Representative with bipartisan support, recognizing that there is no time limit on equality.

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[15] A. McKinney Timm, C.Palladino and M. Perry. (May 2022) *Policy brief on the equal rights amendment to the U.S. Constitution.* Justice Revival. Retrieve March 2022 from . https://justicerevival.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Justice-Revival-ERA-Policy-Brief-Final-1.pdf

[16] R. Bleiweis. The Equal Rights Amendment: (January 2020) *What you need to know*. Center for America Progress. Retrieved March 2022 from https://www.americanprogress.org/article/equal-rights-amendment-need-know/

[17] C. Bettinger-Lopez and D. Cleavland. (September 2000). *Constitutionalizing equality: The equal rights amendment as a catalyst for change.* Council on Foreign Policy. New York, New York. https://www.cfr.org/blog/constitutionalizing-equality-equal-rights-amendment-catalyst-change

A new resolution introduced in the House of Representatives in January validates the ERA as having met all the constitutional requirements for ratification, paving the way for publication as the 28th amendment to the Constitution. This legislation is expected to soon have a similar bill in the Senate. With all that is happening, the ERA's future is bright. Fifty years after the ERA left Congress for ratification in the states, a vocal intersectional, intergenerational, and diverse movement of ERA advocates is growing across the country.

For more information about the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), visit www.eracoalition.org

Public Policy to Support Black Women Leading in Public Interest Technology

Fallon S. Wilson, PhD
Vice President of Policy
Multicultural Media, Telecom and Internet Council

Black women in America have often been overlooked, not cared for, and forgotten, especially when it comes to their place in technology and especially within the emerging field of Public Interest Technology, where Black women “advancing the public good with technology" face grave adversity – e.g., fired by Google like Dr. Timnit Gebru or academically blacklisted like Dr. Latanya Sweeny. Both utilized research and data to shape our global tech ecosystem more equitably but were punished, publicly, for their work of solving an ethical crisis in tech.

Dr. Gebru and Dr. Sweeney are national figures who have somewhat rebounded from their public shaming. But what about *lesser-known* Black women Public Interest Technologists who labor against "systems of oppression," without financial/emotional/social/spiritual protection? Examples include Tiffany Bell, who uses her website to pay utility bills for the poor; Marian Christmon, who supports public housing residents gaining access to the internet; and Dr. Denise Ferbee, who uses criminal justice reform to frame cybersecurity for first-generation Black college students. Though lesser known (and consistently scouring for financing), these Black women technologists challenge the very definition of Public Interest Technology, which often positions technology at the center of doing public good.

Questions arise concerning Black women Public Interest Technologists: What recourse do they have? Who funds their dreams? What networks of support do they have access to when fired/demoted/not funded? Who protects their spirit when fighting against unjust systems? Who will write, remember, and canonize their contributions to the public good? These questions are deeply rooted in historically racialized and sexualized

stereotypes of Black women being inhumanly strong, with an expectation to silently and diligently do good work without support/recognition, leading to the consistent silencing of their contributions. As Britney Cooper eloquently suggests in her historical retrospective on the lost work of race women, it's time to restore the legacies of those who came before, creating a new foundation for the future. Black women "eloquently rage" to build a world where generations of Black women can be seen, heard, and supported.

Black women have a long and venerable history of being crisis solvers who have utilized the technological practices of their time to confront unjust systems. Early on, Harriett Tubman solved the dilemma of moving enslaved Africans North through her understanding of astronomy. Ida B. Wells bravely told the story of the lynching of Blacks through her qualitative and quantitative journalistic data mining that relied on the printing press. Despite contributions to improving the lives of others, these women were relegated to a space of invisibility. When they succeed in solving the problems, like NASA Mathematician Dr. Katherine Johnson, their success is "hidden," buried in the vaults of history; when they fail, however, it serves as a mark against all Black women.

Alice Walker notes *In Search of My Mother's Garden* that many Black women have gone mad because they lacked the tools of artists to draw themselves into existence. Thus, the arts provide a hint to the possible solutions for telling the story of Black women while also shielding them from the trauma of their work. Often, however, Black women Crisis Solvers, like Zora Neal Hurston and Fannie Lou Hamer, die alone, in poverty, deeply misunderstood, and seemingly forgotten by the very communities they fought to make inclusive and seen. *As a society, we have not figured out how to protect their memories or honor Black women's genius and spirit as they create solutions in an ever-emerging automated world, as evidenced by every measure of STEM achievement to date.*

For instance, Black girls are least likely to enroll in computer science AP classes, more likely to be sexually harassed, and least likely, when compared to White women, to get a degree in STEM or Computer Science. This is also seen in employment data where Black women are least likely to be made managers at tech companies and are more likely to file harassment lawsuits. These data points illuminate the need for a Black girl and a Black woman's future work policy agenda.

Two current policy prescriptions can be used to support Black women in their STEM, computer science, and Public Interest Technology work. In December 2021, Congresswomen Robin L. Kelly (D-IL), Yvette D. Clarke (D-NY), Bonnie Watson Coleman (D-NJ), Co-Chairs of the Caucus on Black Women and Girls, and Congressman Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA) introduced the bipartisan *Protect Black Women and Girls Act*, which establishes an Interagency Task Force to examine the conditions/experiences of Black

women and girls in education, economic development, healthcare, labor/employment, housing, justice, and civil rights, to promote community-based methods for mitigating and addressing harm and ensuring accountability, and to study societal effects on Black women and girls. This would become the first federal step *to specifically* identify solutions to the many "intersecting" challenges that silence/restrict Black women from embodying their dreams, including tech futures. Never in the history of the federal government has there been an act to specifically support the voices and lived experiences of Black women and girls.

In November 2021, Congress passed the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act that designates $2.75B for digital equity planning and grants. Outside of the 2009 Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP), which focused on broadband/Internet infrastructure, this is the first time in the history of legislation that Congress is encouraging States to use an equity lens to end the digital divide in their states. The $2.75B for digital equity presents a strategic opportunity to address the racial tech disparities that Black women face in the STEM, Computer Science, and Public Interest Technology fields. Further, it works to create solutions for many of the discriminatory practices that keep Black women technologists from excelling.

An America for All:
The Case for Black Civil Rights and
LGBTQ+ Equality Movement Solidarity

Victoria Kirby York, MPA
Deputy Executive Director, National Black Justice Coalition

Black same-gender loving and transgender women have long been at the frontlines, strategizing tables, and central to the fight for racial justice, women's rights, LGBTQ+ equality, and social justice movements. The civil rights terrain of 2022 demands that the civil rights, women's rights, and LGBTQ+ liberation movements join those whose identities live at those intersections to prevent opponents of equity from returning us to a "white, straight, wealthy and male" led only era.

As record numbers of diverse elected officials won elections in 2018 and 2020, shattering glass ceilings across the country, state legislatures have introduced and sought to pass laws prohibiting teaching the whole truth of our nation's history and people who have helped build it into the most robust economy in the world. Florida's "Stop WOKE Act" and "Don't Say Gay" surveillance bills seek to penalize educators and employers for discussing topics related to race, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

Florida's twin surveillance bills seek to make biology binary instead of the broad spectrum that science, medicine, hormones, and DNA proves it is. Lawmakers are drafting bills that pretend Black, LGBTQ+, intersex, and other students of color do not

exist in the classroom or their student's families and communities. Even worse, lawmakers pretend that public school children will not need knowledge of various cultures and others' similarities and differences to excel and compete in the workforce today.

Lawmakers proposing these bills, book bans, and others would prefer not to have children learn about the different roles people of all races played in our nation's history - the good and the bad - as we seek not to repeat the mistakes of our past. Lawmakers should be *passing* legislation to incorporate multicultural, gender, and LGBTQ+ history into classrooms that more frequently lack these intersections with various subjects.

Another area of mutual partnership is in the area of civil rights protections. Just as the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Shelby v. Holder* gutted one of the most important provisions of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, opponents of equity seek to gut the Civil Rights Act of 1964 through "religious exemptions." Since 2015, hundreds of legislation has sought to redefine religious freedom as an "opt-out" of serving all who enter a public place, federally funded agency, or business. While many of these bills focus on refusing to serve LGBTQ+ people, they also have broad interpretation or set precedence to refuse to serve anyone for any reason - not just religious grounds. Civil rights and LGBTQ+ equality groups must work together to prevent these bills from becoming the law of the land, or it could take a generation or more to reverse them.

Few policies were more painful in this legislative session than Governor Abbott's family separation directive out of Texas. Since before the birth of our nation, Black women have endured the pain of family separation. Our separation from our children, in particular, happened at borders, at ports, and in our homes on plantations. Separation from our children has continued at disproportionate rates based on the racism and subjectivity of police officers, social workers, and child welfare agents – and too often due to systemic poverty. Now, the Texas Governor and Attorney General have created a new reason to separate us from our children - for loving and affirming who they are as transgender human beings. We must show up to school board and state legislative hearings to raise our voices in support of our kids and highlight that our community does not support these actions or any others that unjustly remove a loved and provided-for child from their family.

State officials in Florida, Indiana, Georgia, and dozens of other states have introduced and passed laws seeking to prohibit parents from providing health care services their children have asked for, and their doctors have supported. The Trevor Project research

shows overwhelming evidence that Black LGBTQ+/SGL children attempt and complete suicide at a disproportionate rate compared to their heterosexual, cisgender counterparts. The state of Texas is taking away the best tool to prevent youth suicide; parent support and affirmation. What's worse, lawmakers claim they are putting these policies in place to support girls' and girls' sports. However, none of their claims hold up to the data. Transgender and intersex girls and women have played several competitive sports with rarely any issues for a decade. The truth is: most locker rooms have privacy stalls for those who prefer them; it is hard to find many instances of someone losing out on an athletic scholarship because a transgender girl who has medically transitioned competed against them; and the person most likely to be bullied or harassed on a team is the transgender athlete forced to play on the team of their sex guessed at birth. Unfortunately, most of us aren't aware that the sex placed on our birth certificate is a guess based on how our reproductive organs look after delivery. Our sex assigned at birth does not consider your hormones, chromosomes, or how you identify with the gender stereotypes of the era you were born. State governments should leave the rules of competitive sports to the pros and stick to ensuring we have a government that works, includes, and reflects the needs of all of us.

Black women have been the backbone of our country, our movements for liberation, and our communities. For all Black women to be free, Black LGBTQ+/SGL and intersex women must be free too. We will not win without an integrated struggle, advocacy strategy, and electing champions of equity for all in all levels of government. 2022 is the year we must all come together to create the multi-cultural democracy and nation we always could have been, but we must put fear aside and move with unshakable faith in each other.

Rebuilding Hope for Racial, Gender, & Health Justice, Equity and Access

Want To Reduce Black Health Disparities? Focus On Family Caregivers.

Willetha King Barnette
CEO, Institute for Family Caregiving, Inc.

African Americans have never had equitable access to quality healthcare. Their long history of medical exclusion, neglect, and abuse combined with new barriers revealed by the coronavirus epidemic demands bold new approaches. Pervasive suspicion of the medical establishment and skepticism toward public health in general present a huge obstacle to reversing healthcare outcomes among Black Americans but changes underway in the healthcare system itself may provide an opening to innovation and progress. American healthcare is in the process of a massive reorganization. It is decentralizing—shifting from a hospital-and-facility, fee-for-service -based model to a home-and-community-based design that is supposed to provide comprehensive care. The change may potentially give Black folk more control over their healthcare interactions and eventually, outcomes. Though little discussed, this shift can be seen in the speed with which patients are now discharged from hospitals, the proliferation of screening technologies such as video “visits” that exist mainly to reduce hospital and clinic traffic, and the emergence of huge corporate healthcare management organizations. These changes, mostly motivated by the need to reduce costs as the population grows older, had been planned for some time. Implementation was just accelerated by the pandemic.

Structural changes in the delivery of healthcare services correlates with a massive demographic shift—the aging of the 70+ million baby boom generation. Over the next twenty- five or so years our society will experience a wave of aging the likes of which it has never seen before. Right now, about ten thousand people are turning 65 every day. That will continue throughout this decade. Some 70% of people who reach 65 require about 2 years of assistance with “activities of daily living” before they pass away. Those

activities include bathing, dressing, toileting, cooking, and medication management (the typical older person has multiple chronic illnesses requiring multiple prescription medications). Who takes care of older people at home? Family caregivers, most of whom are women. This is especially true of Black families. Due to historic discrimination, Black families generally lack the resources to employ commercial care services, to afford assisted living situations, or opt for nursing home confinement, all of which cost thousands or tens of thousands of dollars per month. Fewer than 1% of Black Americans have private long-term care insurance. They rely primarily on public sources such as Medicaid, the competition for which will be intense in coming years, or family members, friends, and community supports.

Quiet as it is kept, there are over 50 million family caregivers in the U.S. more than 40 million of whom care for an adult over the age of 50. As the population ages those numbers will grow. Only about 20% of care comes from providers; more than 70% of all care is provided by unpaid family members. But providing that care can have a steep downside. Because care responsibilities fall primarily on women, they are most at risk for disruption to their careers and earning ability. Black women are disproportionately heads of household and breadwinners. Economic losses due to care responsibilities can threaten economic stability and long-term wealth accumulation. As the pandemic abates over half a million Black women have failed to return to the workforce. A primary reason is lack of both child and adult care services. The disproportionate impact on minority populations by the pandemic—lingering effects of "long covid" and worsening of existing chronic conditions due to restricted medical access—suggest an intensification of demand for family caregiving services going forward.

The primary obstacle to improving Black outcomes in healthcare is distrust of a historically racist system in which patients were one-on-one with healthcare providers who didn't necessarily have their best interests at heart. The emerging healthcare paradigm is a definitive pivot away from the clinical environment and toward home-based care. Particularly for older people, a triangulated relationship that obligates providers deal with both older patients and their caregivers could become the norm. Family caregivers, long ignored "hidden decision makers," could finally be empowered to advocate for their loved ones, helping them navigate the confusing, bureaucratic healthcare system, as well as identify and secure resources to provide greater comfort in their loved ones' old age dependency. With well informed, confident, and capable family caregivers, elderly Black folk whose numbers will swell dramatically in coming years can be better protected from neglect and abuse, producing improved outcomes for their cohort and the Black population generally.

Such a rosy outcome is not a given, however. As the healthcare system adopts a more distributed, community-based architecture, bias against Black constituents can easily be perpetuated. Segregation by residential geography is one factor. Another is the continuing lack of Black physicians and a lack of Black ownership among healthcare businesses. In healthcare, there can be no equity without more Black ownership. Needed reforms will not come without strident and persistent advocacy—campaigns most appropriately undertaken by Black women, who bear the brunt of caregiving responsibility. Caregiving must be dragged out from the shadows of family life and made a topic of open, honest public discussion. It is a universal issue, impacting every family, and should be regarded as such. Black folk need to be educated about the shifting parameters of strategies for improving health outcomes, including preparing every family for the likelihood of caregiving responsibilities. They need to advocate for paid family leave. Healthcare is an enormous industry—worth $4.1 trillion in 2020, about 5 times the current national defense budget. Black women must fight not just for culturally appropriate interactions and equality of treatment, but for economic equity in the healthcare enterprise on which those things depend. That's a way forward for reducing Black health disparities, and Black women will have to take the lead.

Mental Health & Surviving Covid-19

Alicia Butler
Health and Wellness Policy Associate
National Action Network

Mental Health and America's healthcare system are two things that our community, the Black community, has a history of being skeptical on. But, rightfully so! There is a history in this country of misdiagnosing, not diagnosing, or withholding treatment from black people as a means to deceive them or generally show lack of investment in their health.

A global pandemic had the ability to shift how we view mental health; the way we prioritize ourselves, yet, heighten our skepticism in our healthcare system. Either way, living in a global pandemic has brought mental health issues to the forefront and it's something we should all acknowledge as an issue needing an immediate response.

Let's start off by saying — Mental illness isn't a switch you can just turn off and on. Ignorantly self-diagnosing yourself whenever there's a twinge of inconsistency in your mood. Depression is more than sadness and anxiety is more than butterflies in your stomach.

How am I able to speak on this so confidently?

After many psych evaluations from three different mental health professionals, I've been diagnosed with both moderate anxiety and depression (A&D). Anxiety was first. Then came depression. It took me a while to process and accept my new reality. As someone who likes to be in control of — really everything— you could only imagine how defeating it felt when I had no control over my *own* emotions. One way in - *No way out.* I refer to it as mental incarceration. As a black woman, dealing with this without having anyone to rely on sometimes felt debilitating.

2020 was the year that the mental well-being of many took a turn for the absolute worse. A year where so many lost so much. Where pretty much everyone was on lockdown with an inability to rely on outside factors to distract them from the chaos the year brought.

Mental Illnesses have a way of making you feel as if you are not in control of your own mind; altering your reality like a psychedelic drug and manipulating you like a narcissistic ex. You feel trapped inside of yourself - with *no way out*. We struggle in silence, then struggle in confidence with those close, then for those who are able to access it, struggle with a licensed therapist, then it seems like less of a struggle. It begins to feel like a hike in the Pacific Northwest that was harder than expected but once you reached the end of it, you found solace in how you conquered it and reflected with relief at the beauty of the journey.

One thing I've learned about mental health is that you have to own it. It's a battle that only you can fight and win. We have to acknowledge what mental health is and isn't. Identify who and what is around. What it looks and smells like. What it sounds and tastes like. Making note of what sets your soul on fire - and always having it within arms reach. We must continue to do the work because realizing you're stronger than what your mind tells you when you're at your lowest. Most importantly, making a conscious choice everyday to fight for my well-being. To stay alive. Some days, that's all the fight

we'll have, other days - more fight will come. Surviving Covid-19 and battling with mental health has been the greatest battle of our lives — but we are a resilient people. Through that resilience, we'll come out stronger than ever.

Structural Inequity Surrounding Access to Quality Healthcare for Rural Black Women and Families

Oleta Fitzgerald
Director, Children's Defense Fund Southern Regional Office

Anyone questioning whether decades of racially discriminatory practices, stigmatization, and neglect in healthcare settings, as well as rural poverty itself, continue to systemically exclude Black women and families from access to health care and disproportionately impact Black women, need only to look to recently released research convened by the Southern Rural Black Women's Initiative (SRBWI) and Human Rights Watch. While the report, "*We Need Access": Ending Preventable Deaths from Cervical Cancer in Rural Georgia* is focused on barriers to cervical cancer specifically, its insights and implications are far reaching. Based on 148 interviews, mostly with Black women between the ages of 18 and 82 in three rural south Georgia counties, this community-based participatory research documents firsthand how Black women living in rural Georgia continue to be engaged in ongoing generational struggles to overcome structural barriers to quality health care, often in the face of hostile, demeaning, and neglectful environments.

The report centers the fact that Black women are at risk of dying from cervical cancer, a preventable disease, at disproportionate and alarming rates while lifesaving information and care is often inaccessible. A dearth of gynecological care, rural hospitals (none in two of the three counties studied), and reproductive healthcare services, a lack of transportation, and affordable medical insurance are significant

barriers experienced by Black women residing in persistently poor, rural Georgia counties. Many of the women interviewed reported associated challenges getting to a doctor, paying for medical services and critical follow-up visits, as well as not being eligible for Medicaid. In some instances, women interviewed reported forgoing bill payments and groceries in order to access healthcare services.

Additionally, about one-third of the women interviewed did not know about the HPV vaccine (an effective cancer prevention tool), including several parents with adolescent children. HPV vaccination rates in Georgia fall below the national average and trail significantly behind other required and recommended adolescent vaccination rates in the state. Georgia ranks 36th in the country for adolescent HPV vaccination rates and as of 2019, only 49.7 percent of young people in the state ages 13 to 17 had completed the vaccine series.

While 46 Georgia-based academics, medical providers, public health officials, and members of non-governmental health, reproductive rights, and justice groups informed the report, as well as data analysis from secondary sources, the insights gained from the report lie in its articulation of stigmatization, fear, and hostility that emerged from the participatory research.

Over the past year, interviews by eight community-based researchers with a majority of Black women in Baker, Coffee, and Wilcox counties uncovered stories of racial discrimination spanning generations. Several of the women interviewed reported feeling that their health concerns were dismissed and the level of care they received was inadequate as a result of racism. Some women reported extremely demeaning treatment and discriminatory experiences with medical providers, including stories that had been passed down by mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and friends, in some instances linked to reproductive cancer-related deaths and diseases.

Overall, findings suggest that structural racism and discrimination within the healthcare field impacts the quality of care Black women receive, and, in turn, the level of trust many have in providers and their willingness to seek lifesaving cervical cancer care. The findings illustrate the need to provide access to critical information and to address economic and social barriers that impede Black women and their families from accessing reproductive health care.

Currently, SRBWI and Human Rights Watch are sharing the report findings and information on cervical cancer prevention and treatment with community members and organizations, including young women in Alabama where Human Rights Watch conducted similar research in 2018. The organizations are also sharing the report findings and conducting outreach with women in the three south Georgia counties studied in the report, as well as surrounding counties. Additionally, SRWBI and Human Rights Watch plan to conduct research in the Mississippi Delta in 2023.

The COVID-19 pandemic has only deepened the structural inequalities that surround access to quality health care for Black women and families and has exposed the connections between racism, poverty, health, and access to the fundamental human rights and services that support and nurture healthy individuals and communities. Lack of food security, access to broadband, transportation, etc. all inhibit the capacity of rural communities to take protective measures to improve their health, wellness, and quality of life. In the absence of community driven research and solutions, we will continue to see Black communities experiencing COVID-related food shortages and inadequate access to medical services where they are most critically needed and less accessible.

SRBWI works across the Black Belt of Alabama and Georgia, and the Delta in Mississippi.

Sarah Bobrow Williams, SRBWI Community Based Participatory Research Consultant

Oleta Garrett Fitzgerald, SRBWI Regional Administrator

Shots Fired: A Call for Help

Barbara A. Perkins
Executive Leadership Coach
President of the International Black Women's Public Policy Institute
President of Image Builders Etcetera, LLC

It is not my intention to be the one who exposes the family secrets. The consequences of being labeled a snitch in our community petrifies me. However, the consequences of not seeking to understand why death by suicide--an alarming crisis among black youth and black young women and girls--petrifies me even more.

For 22 years, I have been a multi-credentialed Minister of Spiritual Consciousness and Life Coach, in private practice serving Black women and girls throughout the United States, the Caribbean and in recent years, Africa. Through my work as a coach to hundreds of women, I have learned to decode, identify trouble spots, and to influence transformation in lives where suicide was considered a viable option. Coaching is not a substitute for therapy, and for me, having mental health professionals on speed dial is essential to my practice.

There are several recent studies that have concluded that Black women and girls, studied in sub-groups show as high as double the rates of suicide attempts since the COVID-19 pandemic began in 2020. There is also literature that suggest that these Black youth had no prior mental health diagnoses prior to suicide attempts. Black children are dying by suicide at twice the rate as white children in the same age range. With no definitive answers or conclusions that are being widely discussed or any public calls to action. We must convene to discuss what we can do to turn this around. The emotional and mental health of Black women and girls are at a crisis level risk.

There are strong indicators and behaviors within our own communities, that have had a significant negative impact on Black women. These indicators are not easy to discuss; however, as Black women, we have accepted that the world need our voices and sensibilities. We are using all that we have physically and emotionally to right the exhaustive numbers of wrongs against our people and against us. However, this crisis calls for interrogation among us. This crisis calls for our attention in a different way. From a coach's perspective, I am inclined to ask tough questions, which are intended to address the immediate challenges that have perpetuated the crisis of suicide among Black women. I call this "shots fired."

We all can contribute to the rapid turnaround needed right now in the Black women's community. There are shots being fired among us. There is a significant role for each of us to play and an unattended responsibility we can no longer ignore. What I am offering for consideration are individual contributions and commitments to influence better outcomes for all of us. We each have the potential to impact and influence the decline in diagnoses of depression and anxiety among Black women.

How can we help to decrease the growing numbers of Black women diagnosed with depression and anxiety?

1. I call on my sisters to practice true kindness to each other. The consequences of isolation, exclusion, othering and bullying are devastating. Evidence of this can be found in the recent reports from the pageant industry, where in 2019 for the first time ever Black women held the top four world titles. Almost daily, I am privy to hair-raising stories about the emotional and physical body blows women are struggling to survive at hands of other Black women. What are we doing to each other and why? Is a new position or elevated public status worthy of another sister's life? Intended or unintended actions that harm others are not the best demonstrations of who we are. Self-examination of your kindness meter is necessary.

2. Expand your sand box and pay close attention to your appetite for always sitting in the front seat. What frightens you about allowing others to play? You may not think that it shows, but mean girls' traits, if not seen, are felt and sometimes are irreversible.

The lockdown period has been the catalyst for devastation at the deepest levels of our being. Never, in my six decades of life have I ever witnessed such loss and grief. Navigating these treacherous emotional waters even for trained professionals have not been easy. I meet regularly with a network of coaches since COVID-19 began. We all

admit our own need for support and help with ensuring that our clients are getting the best of who we are as professionals.

On a personal level, I had to recommit living my life in Joy. This required establishing a few hard lines of dos and don’ts in my life. It required a more intentional life practice of service and giving. I find service and giving to be great antidotes and distractions from worry and doubt.

If you need help or know someone in need of help, please call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1 (800) 273-TALK (8255)

Black Women, Mental Health, and the Underlying Trauma Covid-19 Triggers

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Trauma is a topic that rarely comes up in mainstream discussions of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on case counts, hospitalization rates, and mortality rates. Even though experts note the rise in stress, anxiety and depression in response to the virus, few provide a comprehensive portrait of mental health from the substratum of an already tenuous baseline. For Black women, the relationship between self, community and society creates considerable challenges for positive mental health. In particular, Black women's experiences of depression is exacerbated by gendered racism (Jones et al, 2021) and the interlocking oppressions of the various subject locations they occupy (Nelson et al, 2022; Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991). Given that Black women's mental health challenges are often under-detected (since they are often masked as strength) and under-treated (since help-seeking risks uncomfortable vulnerability), Black women's negative mental health may persist as chronic and severe (Nelson et al, 2020). As such, by the time Covid-19 emerged, Black women were already experiencing mental health fragility and truly could not afford to be pushed further over the edge. Covid-19 has affected Black, Indigenous, and Latino people the most with its impact felt nearly across all areas of life. As a major disruptor in health, employment, relationship, family, education, culture and religious/spiritual dimensions of the lived experience, the pandemic is a major source of trauma that requires focus and response. As a result, this essay presents reflections on the traumatizing influence of the Covid-19 pandemic on the mental health of Black women.

The American Psychological Association defines trauma as “an emotional response to a terrible event” (APA.org, 2022). Psychological trauma can occur in situations that overwhelm a person’s perceived ability to cope and can subject the person to feelings of helplessness, fear, confusion, anger, sadness, and anxiousness, to name a few. Psychiatrist Paul Conti (2021) frames trauma as “an invisible epidemic,” suggesting that imperceptible pain and negative emotionality is an all-too-common human experience. Conti raises the notion of the multiple-hit hypothesis—the idea that one’s coping resources become weakened by having endured traumatic experience after traumatic experience. The idea of one taking one-too-many hits brings to mind the experiences of Black women during the Covid-19 pandemic. Often the sole breadwinners of their families, Black women may have lost their employment due to the pandemic. Those who continued to work may have been in service sector jobs, identified as essential workers, which may have exposed them to the virus. Those who worked from home may have had to balance work responsibilities with educating children in virtual schooling. Many contracted the virus. Many grieved the untimely deaths of loved ones. If being trapped within the cycle of raced, gendered, classed lose-lose situations exacerbated by the pandemic was not enough, the continuous onslaught of collective racialized trauma and civil unrest engendered by the highly publicized murders of Black people was yet another trigger. It is impossible to talk about the Covid-19 pandemic without also mentioning racialized violence and how the two intertwined to reveal the ways in which inequity maintains the social and political injustice of vulnerable persons. As a vulnerable group, Black women have been affected on multiple fronts. As such, Black women’s already precarious mental health has been taxed beyond its limits. Thus, the ongoing insecurity and uncertainty of the Covid-19 pandemic amidst the backdrop of social, cultural and political chaos, is a source of continuous traumatic stress (Kira, 2020; Goral et al., 2021; Amram-Vaknin, 2021).

As a scholar of religion who teaches Africana Women’s Studies, I am most interested in how the continuous trauma of the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted the capacity of people to construct coherent narratives that enable them to make sense of their worlds. As the foundation to myth-making, ritual, and tradition, constructing story often serves as the vehicle by which human beings deal with chaos. To take the terror out of an otherwise frightening existence, humans make myth, which partly serves to explain the terror away. To persevere in the face of danger and threat, people enact their constructed stories, ritualize them and turn them into traditions. These fashionings, then, become the means by which people come to know self and society. The mythos that undergirds human narratives provides an assurance of solidity in a not-so-solid world. In many ways, Black women have been able to persist, albeit not always functionally, with their chronic depression and anxiety because of the pervasiveness and accessibility of the mythology of Black womanhood associated with their perceived strength and

superhuman capacity to bear burdens (Nelson et al., 2022; Wallace, 1978). However, the Covid-19 pandemic also exposed the fragility of such myths, rendering them improbable for use in bolstering and buffering Black women's mental health. Few Black women would be "strong" or "superwoman" enough to fight the virus, to battle the bill collectors, to forage for toilet paper, to homeschool the children, to march for racial justice in the streets while simultaneously grieving loved ones, gasping for air through inflamed lungs, in addition to coping with the normative heavy feelings of clinical depression one has grappled with all of one's life. The experience of the pandemic, with its extended periods of physical distance and interrupted routines, has also halted the possibility of continuity in adaptive personal and collective myth-making. For Black women, this rupture may have untold consequences as Covid-19 left them bereft of viable coping mechanisms, causing scholars and researchers to sound the alarm about the need to attend to Black women's mental health following Covid-19 (Walton et. al, 2021). To survive the trauma that Covid-19 exposed, Black women must have healing resources that redress their chronic dysregulation, that offer them viable coping skills and that root out the inner wells of pain.

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An Overview of the Black Women's Roundtable "Listen Up Report": Key Findings from Listening Sessions on Clinical Trials and the COVID-19 and Flu Vaccines

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CEO, Tate Strategies

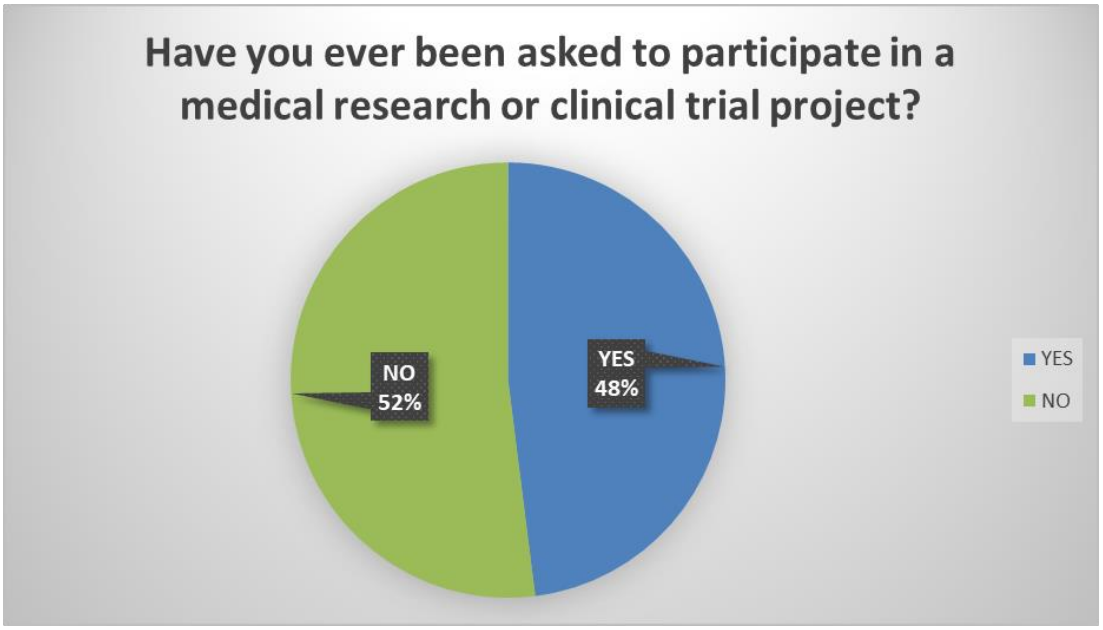
As a part of the *Black Women's Roundtable Public Health Awareness and Community Engagement Series* (BWR Health & Community Engagement Series) in 2021, members of the Black Women's Roundtable (BWR) in Florida, Georgia, Maryland, and the District of Columbia participated in a series of listening sessions to share their opinions about clinical trials and the COVID-19 and flu vaccines. These listening sessions are a component of the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation's *Rebuild Hope, Equity & Equality NOW Project*.

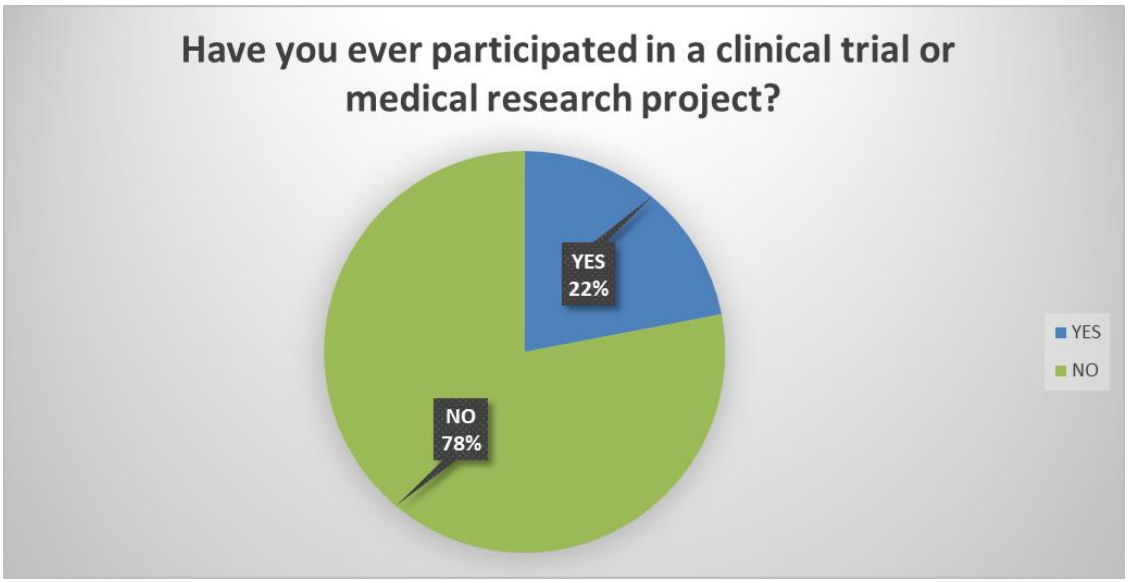
Eli Lilly funded these listening sessions for the purpose of helping the medical research community understand the concerns, perceptions, and experiences of Black women regarding clinical trials, and to hear Black women's perspectives on effective ways to equitably distribute COVID-19 vaccines and vaccine information in the Black community.

Here are key findings from these listening sessions:

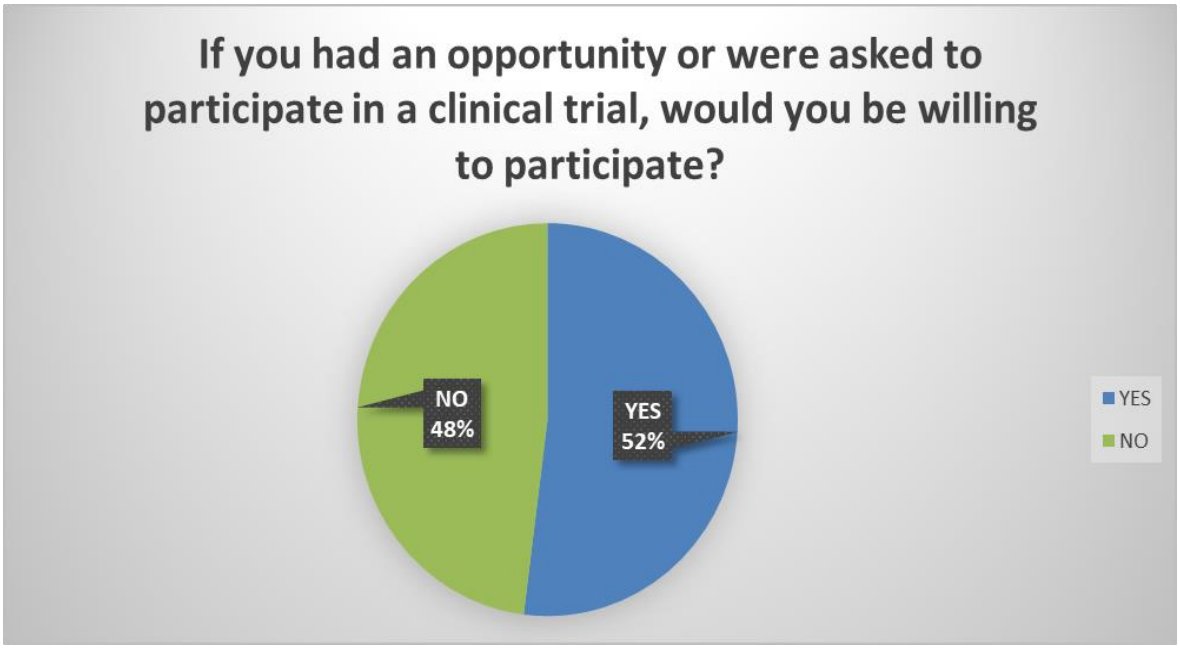
CLINICAL TRIALS

- Nearly half of the listening session participants have been asked to participate in a clinical trial. Less than half of those asked have participated in a clinical trial.





- More than half of the listening session participants said that they would not participate in a clinical trial if they were asked

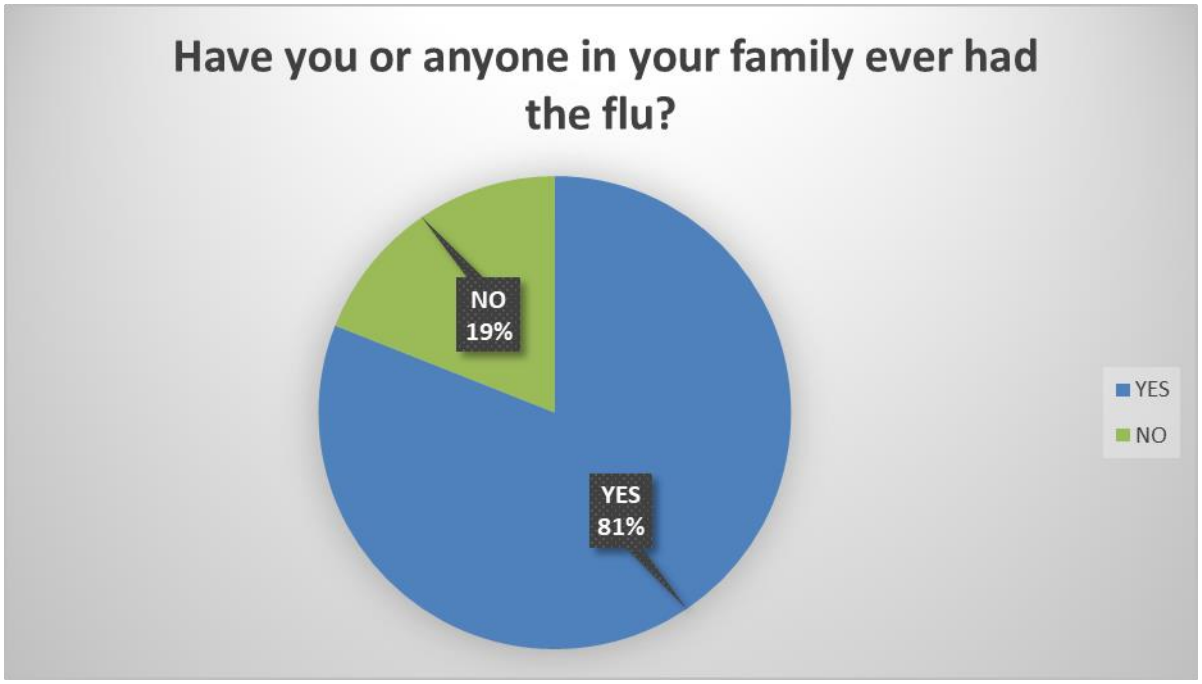


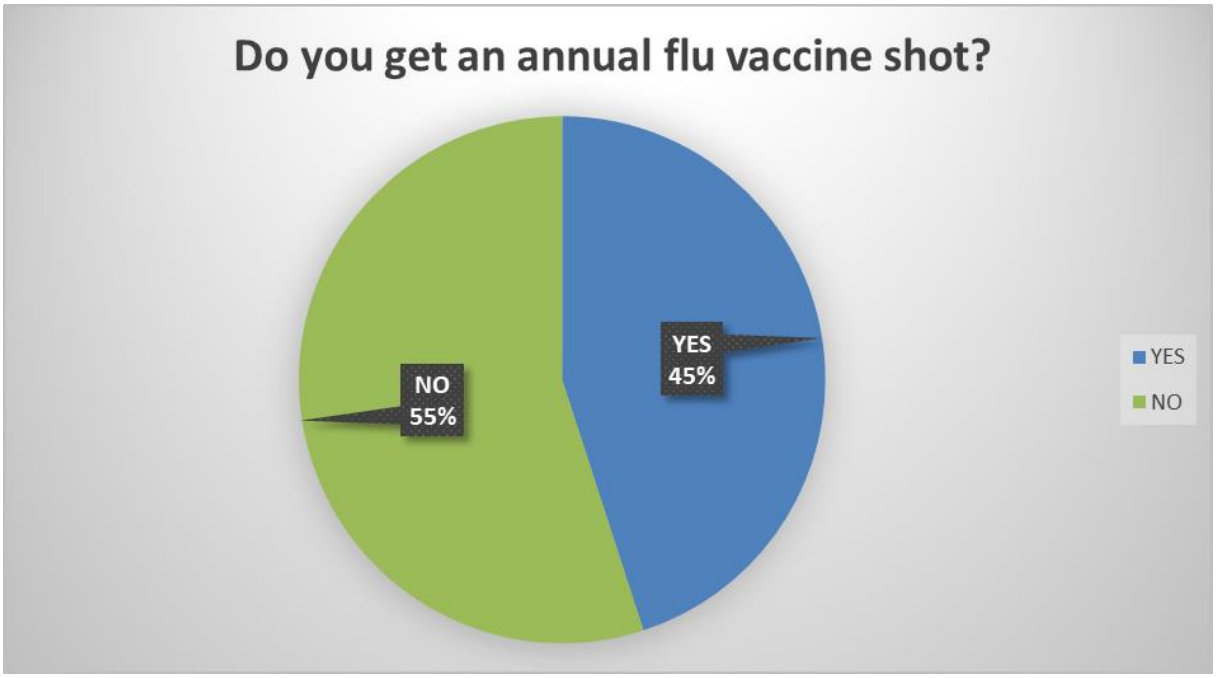
- Recurring reasons listening session participants gave for their unwillingness to participate in clinical trials were the historical mistreatment of Black people in clinical trials and fear of not being fully informed about the purpose of a clinical trial

- Listening session participants repeatedly said they trust Black doctors and historically Black medical schools to provide them with information about clinical trials

COVID-19 AND FLU VACCINES

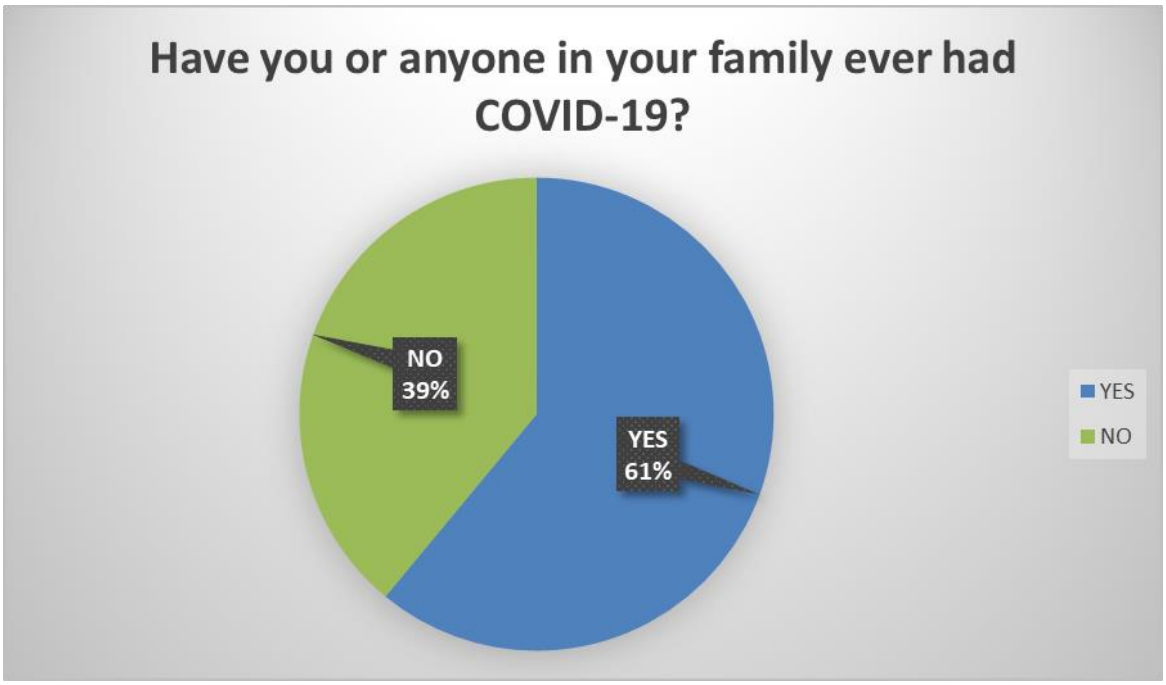
- 81% of listening session participants said they or someone in their family has had the flu, and 45% said they get an annual flu vaccine



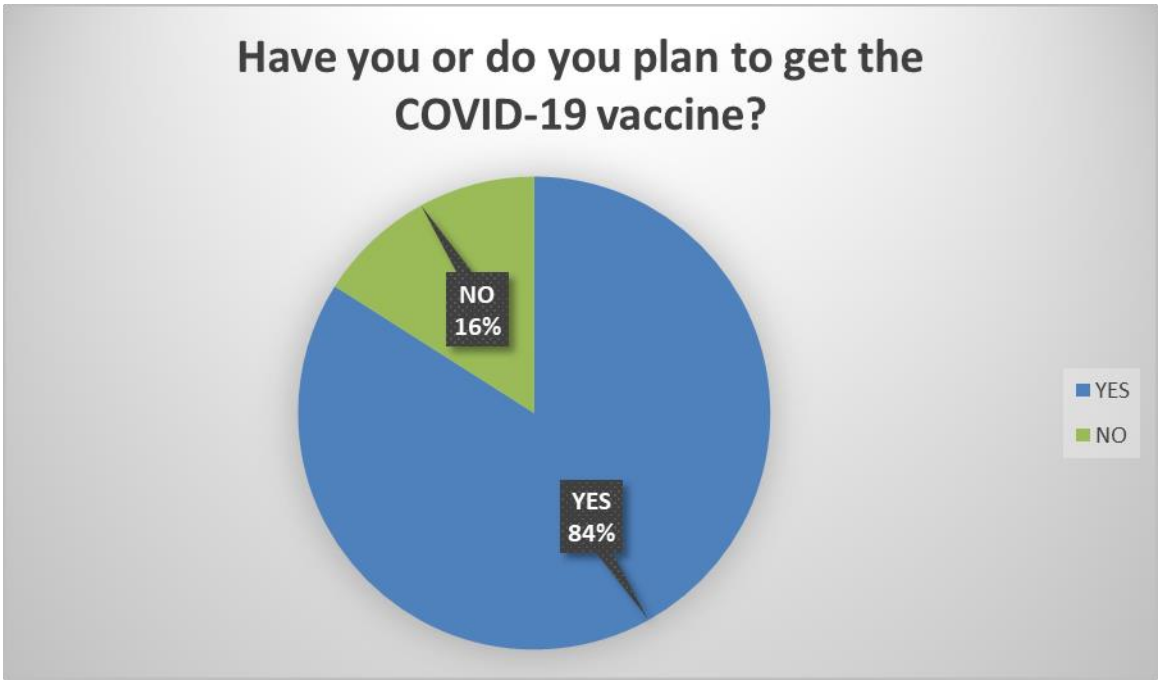


- The major reason listening session participants gave for not getting a flu vaccine was because they have witnessed others who became ill with the flu after getting the flu vaccine or they became ill themselves after getting a flu vaccine

- 61% of listening session participants said that they or a member of their family has contracted COVID-19



- 84% of listening session participants said they have or plan to get a COVID-19 vaccine



- Recuring reasons listening session participants gave for not getting the COVID-19 vaccine were: 1) there was not enough time invested in researching the vaccine before releasing it to the public, 2) preferring to use wholistic approaches rather than vaccines to boost their immune system, and 3) not enough information was publicly released on the vaccine's clinical trial results on African American women

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DISTRIBUTING COVID-19 VACCINES AND INFORMATION IN THE BLACK COMMUNITY

Listening session participants provided recommendations on ways to distribute the COVID-19 vaccines and information about the vaccines in the Black community. Key recommendations were:

- Black churches and faith-based organizations should develop collaborative approaches to providing COVID-19 vaccines in the Black community

- Develop targeted social media campaigns to increase COVID-19 vaccination rates in the Black community

- Host intergenerational public events with information to debunk COVID-19 vaccine conspiracy theories

- Black doctors should partner with community leaders to advocate for vaccine distribution in the Black community

Racial & Gender Justice, Equity and Equality in Education

The War Against Critical Race Theory, Why it Matters and How to Fight Back

Avis Jones-DeWeever, Ph.D.
Founder & CEO
Exceptional Black Woman Network

The War Against Critical Race Theory

On September 4th, 2020, the Trump Administration issued a Memorandum which directed all federal agencies to ban racial sensitivity training that included a focus on "white privilege" and "critical race theory", characterizing such training as "divisive" and "anti-American propaganda." From that moment on, critical race theory, a canon developed by legal academicians, was put squarely in the crosshairs of right-wing conservatives seemingly fixated on erasing historical fact as well as contemporary truth-telling regarding race in America.

Since then, the war against critical race theory has not only raged on, it has broadened and intensified. It has been at the root of coordinated acts of intimidation and threats of violence aimed at school board members across the nation. It has led to anti-Critical Race Theory bills popping up in 38 states nationwide, each seeking to prohibit teachers from teaching what's characterized as "divisive subjects" that cause (insert the word

"white") students to feel "discomfort." And broadening the umbrella of critical race theory beyond race, this war is also at the root of book banning efforts in multiple states targeting most prevalently the 1619 Project, but also classics like Toni Morrison's, Beloved and To Kill a Mockingbird among others, as well as newer books that focus on the LGBTQ community such as All Boys Aren't Blue and Gender Queer. In addition, this war has been leveraged quite deftly as a political rallying cry to gin up enthusiasm and turn-out among the conservative base, such as in the Virginia Gubernatorial election and even in some cases, intimidating left leaning political candidates—especially those holding or running for school board seats—from seeking elected office at all.

But what is critical race theory, really? And why is it important to fight back against this largely race-based authoritarian movement taking place around it at this very moment?

What Critical Race Theory is, and What it is Not

Critical Race Theory has it's roots in the legal academic literature, where for over 40 years, leading legal scholars have sought to unpack the various ways in which from the beginning, the social construct of race has been infused into public policy and law, and how that reality impacts lived experiences across the racial dynamic.

It is a space that lives in legal academic writings within books and academic journals that are NOT taught at the elementary or secondary levels or even typically at the undergraduate level. Historically, one is introduced to critical race theory literature in the same way I was, as an advanced graduate student, or in law school.

This means, all of the school board intimidation and take-over tactics as well as laws that have been written across the nation, each seeking to end the teaching of "critical race theory" in public schools are based on a lie. Why? Because critical race theory has not ever been and is not now taught at the elementary and secondary level. The truth is, what's under attack is not critical race theory at all—it's the accurate teaching of history and the ability of teachers to even discuss current events that touch on race, and in some cases also sexual orientation without potentially risking unemployment.

The result of these attacks is ironically what critical race theory would have predicted—the prioritization of whiteness in the form of protecting white students' "feelings" over the history and lived reality of students of color. It also all but erases the relevant relaying of the historical and contemporary context that results in racial disparities across a variety of social measures, thereby implicitly relaying the impression that any disparities that currently exist must be due to white superiority in merit, intelligence or

work ethic, and not as a result of unearned advantages that have been historically passed down or as a result of contemporary institutionalized racism that continues to unfairly disadvantage some while simultaneously unfairly bestowing advantages to others. These implications are far from unimportant. Yet a concerted effort to fight back has yet to materialize.

How to Fight Back

The fight against Critical Race Theory has been anything but organic. It has been well organized, well-funded and expertly coordinated at state and local levels nationwide. What is has not been, however, is challenged with any sense of urgency from the other side.

When Black history is erased, it matters.

When Black literature is erased, it matters.

When Black children are, in essence, told that their discomfort doesn't matter, but the comfort of their white peers do, it matters.

What's needed is counteraction that popularizes and prioritizing truth-telling in school curricula. What's needed is a well-funded political focus on school board elections across the nation. And what's needed is consistent strong turn-out in state and local elections (including the upcoming mid-terms) to ensure that law-makers are put in office that can roll back the damaging actions that have already taken hold across the country.

If this doesn't happen, what we are witnessing in real time is a burgeoning white autocratic state that seeks to enshrine it's existence for generations to come not only by attacking the Black vote, but also by seeking to rollback whatever begrudged progress America has made in dismantling systemic racial oppression. Instead, a right wing victory in the war on critical race theory would ultimately strengthen and making permanent those systems which have resulted in a de facto racial hierarchy in this nation. What better way to enshrine unearned social, political and financial advantages than by outlawing even the discussion of such advantages in the first place? This is the real threat critical race theory presents to the right. The truth is in fact, a powerful weapon. And that's precisely why it must be protected at all cost.

Making the Case: Forgiving Student Loan Debt is Good for the Economy

Yumeka Rushing
Chief Strategy Officer
NAACP

Education, especially higher education, leads to better jobs and higher wages. This is what we tell ourselves. This is what we tell our children. Stay in school, study and learn, and you will prepare yourself for a high-paying career. Except the story is more nuanced in a Black household. Parents know that those high-paying jobs most often go to the white student while their sons and daughters are more likely to leave school with fewer job prospects at lower pay.

In truth, a college degree is one of the most effective pathways to bringing about generational change for students and their families. Every student of every race and ethnicity benefits from education.

Paying for college is a challenge for many Black families. As a result, students and parents rely on federal loans. Tuition costs are steadily rising, leading to more money being borrowed. Increased borrowing and compounding interest on student loans can double the amounts due, leading students to struggle or default on their rising loan balances. Defaults hurt the individual and the economy as a whole.

But we must acknowledge that a college degree can also bring crushing student loan debt that can erase the economic benefits of education. It is not only the student and their families who suffer. The nearly 48 million borrowers who hold more than $1.7 trillion dollars in student loan debt are also a great burden on our economy.

Surely, an astonishing amount of that debt falls hard on Black and Brown borrowers. And cancellation of student debt will greatly help Black and Brown people. Debt forgiveness also will enable students from all races and ethnicities to build wealth which will stimulate the overall economy. Cancelling student debt would go a long way toward reducing the ever-widening racial wealth gap in America – and set the groundwork for a just and equitable economy.

"Broad cancellation of student debt is good for the economy and should be considered as a tool for economic stimulus and recovery" according to a research report by the Levy Economics Institute, in "The Macroeconomic Effects of Student Debt Cancellation." "Research shows that student debt cancellation can stimulate the macro-economy and boost GDP by billions of dollars, reduce the unemployment rate, and add up to 1.5 million new jobs. Alongside catalyzing economic growth, student loan cancellation will also positively change the trajectory of borrowers' lives."

Student loan debt had been touted as "good debt", but that is a false narrative for Blacks. The student loan crisis is an economic justice issue, a racial justice issue and a gender justice issue. This debt has exacerbated racial inequities and impeded individuals and families' ability to build wealth. Removing such inequalities will stimulate the economy.

Cancelling student debt would economically benefit all students and would especially benefit Black women. Data shows that women account for two-thirds of all outstanding student loans. Black women owe an average of $41,466 in loans after completing their undergraduate degree. This represents the most substantial debt burden, made all the worse because Black women earn 61 cents on the dollar - compared to white men.

According to a 2019 report by the Economic Policy Institute:

"Black workers are twice as likely to be unemployed as white workers overall (6.4% vs. 3.1%). Even black workers with a college degree are more likely to be unemployed than similarly educated white workers (3.5% vs. 2.2%). When they are employed, black workers with a college or advanced degree are more likely than their white counterparts to be underemployed when it comes to their skill level—almost 40% are in a job that typically does not require a college degree, compared with 31% of white college grads.

This relatively high black unemployment and skills-based underemployment suggests that racial discrimination remains a failure of an otherwise tight labor market".

Changing the trajectory of borrowers' lives, by eliminating student debt, would account for the ability to have increased income that will afford many of the goals put on hold by student debt, like homeownership.

Homeownership is one of the most important means to generate wealth and is one of the main drivers of wealth in this country, particularly across generations. Increasing Black homeownership is a critical goal in addressing the overarching racial wealth gap. Yet owning a home is one dream that continues to elude many Blacks. The homeownership rate for Blacks hovers around 44% and the white homeownership rate, which is considerably higher, is approximately 74%. By eliminating student debt, more Blacks would be able to successfully qualify for mortgages and afford the mortgage payments.

Economists have shown that increasing Black homeownership benefits not just Black homeowners or Black Americans, but broadly the entire community and global economy.

Without the burden of student loan debt, individuals and families have more disposable income allowing them to save for retirement, build a financial safety net to ward against unforeseen life incidents, start a family, save for their children's education or pay for their own graduate education. There would be money to pay off other debts, thus reducing the daily stress of having to balance finances. In short, eliminating student debt improves overall household finances.

Removing student debt can help repair credit and reduce the debt-to-income ratio for many. Consumer spending would surely grow as people could purchase large items that were previously out of economic reach. Many individuals would have the ability to start small businesses and explore entrepreneurship that stimulate the economy.

The American dream continues to be out of reach for many Black Americans. Student debt is not the biggest factor. Racial discrimination holds that dubious title. But the crushing burden of student debt certainly can turn the American Dream into an American nightmare of debt. Eliminating this debt promotes both economic and racial justice. Cancelling student debt empowers nearly 48 million students to play a greater role in our economy.

The Impact of Student Loan Debt on Black Women

Chinita Allen
President, Georgia Federation of Democratic Women

Even before the COVID–19 Pandemic, the United States faced a historic student loan crisis. Forty- three million Americans, or 1 out of 8 Americans carry student loan debt and collectively owe $1.7 trillion, up from $250 billion in 2004 making student loans the second largest slice of household debt after mortgages and bigger than credit cards debt. Seventy- five percent of student loan borrowers take loans to go to a two or four year college accounting for about half of all student loan outstanding debt. Borrowers span generations.

The majority, two- thirds, of borrowers are women with Black and Hispanic women disparately impacted. Between 2000 and 2018, the median student debt for White borrowers doubled, but quadrupled for Black borrowers. Black women have the highest average student loan debt at $37,558, followed by Black men at $35,665. White women owe $31,346 on average, and White men $29,862. Hispanic/Latina women owe $27,029 on average, slightly less than Hispanic/Latino men at $27,452.

According to a new report by The American Association of University Women, Black women carry about 20% more student debt than white women do. Researchers estimate that one year after graduation, white women owe $33,851 in undergraduate loans, on average, while Black women owe an average of $41,466.

Among those with graduate school debt, white women are estimated to owe $56,098, on average, while Black women owe closer to $75,085.

Why the Student Debt Crisis?

According to the Brookings Institute, over 99 percent of all jobs created during the post-recession recovery went to workers with at least some college experience; and nearly two-thirds of all jobs in the United States now require some form of postsecondary education. For most Americans, a high school diploma is no longer enough to access the middle class.

Additionally, tuition has risen, particularly among four year public institutions, the federal government has changed the rules to make loans cheaper and more broadly available, parents borrow more and borrowing for graduate school has increased sharply. However, forty percent of borrowers don't complete their degree, and 75% of borrowers make less than $127k a year and only 25% make $127k or more; and 1 in 5 borrowers default. When left unaddressed, the student debt crisis has a devastating effect on the Black community.

Impact:

High Debt to Income Ratio

The way to get out of poverty and achieve middle class status is to get a college degree. This mantra is consistently taught in African- American families.

But a college degree does not eliminate the income gaps between white and Black workers because education does not achieve income parity for Black workers due to employment and historical discrimination practices in addition to a concentration in low- paying jobs. Across all education levels, women and people of most racial and ethnic minority groups earn less than White non-Hispanic men—in fact, the wage gap is higher at higher levels of education. In 2018, median earnings for White men with a bachelor's degree were $62,000, compared to $50,000 for White women, $43,900 for Hispanic women, and $42,100 for Black women. Black women at the median need a bachelor's degree to make what White men make with just a high school degree.

Due to systemic racial discrimination, Black families have far less wealth to draw from for college tuition. This means Black students must borrow more to finance their education, have increased difficulties paying back those debts, and hold loan debts that take up a larger proportion of their financial resources, this exacerbating the college debt crisis for women and children in a high debt to income ratio.

Decreased Economic Mobility

In addition to having a higher debt to income ratio, Black women also encounter more bias and social barriers to accessing credit to buy homes. This coupled with different patterns of intergenerational transfers; such as Black households transferring their increased post-college income to help their family as opposed to white households who may receive wealth transfers from their family to help pay for things like the purchase of a home, contributes to nearly three-quarters of Black borrowers' student loans having a higher balance today than they did originally effectively making it more difficult to qualify for higher loan amounts. Consequently, barriers to homeownership closes doors on valuable tax deductions and access to equity for education, investments, withstanding emergencies, access to affordable financial products including car loans, and starting businesses. As housing costs continue to rise, affordable home loans are a key stepping stone to economic stability and wealth creation.

3. Mental Health

According to a recent Education Trust report student loans have negatively impacted Black borrowers' mental health, quality of life and serve as a primary source of financial stress. The burden of debt also contributes to acute mental health issues, including prolonged stress, anxiety, and feelings of shame that can quickly turn into feeling bad about yourself and not being able to present your entire self. Still others with debt end up putting off other financial milestones, such as having a baby, buying a home, getting married, saving for retirement or even taking a vacation

What Can We Do

1. The President of the United States and Congress should broadly cancel Federal student loan debt, that is not tied to income debt repayment programs (IDR), for Federal student loan borrowers administratively using existing legal authorities under such section 432(a), and any other authorities available under the law.
2. The President of the United States should continue to pause student loan payments and interest accumulation for Federal student loan borrowers for the entire duration of the COVID–19 pandemic.
3. Student loan borrowers should have protections from abusive and fraudulent practices by schools, lenders and loan services.
4. Protect and expand Pell Grants for low-income students to reduce the amount of student loan debt they have to take on to complete a degree.

5. Help to eliminate the gender pay gap, like the Paycheck Fairness Act.
6. Increase funding for public colleges and universities and support efforts to move toward tuition- and debt-free options for students.

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Making The Case:
Forgiving Student Loan Debt Is Good for The Economy

Honorable Sheila Tyson
Convener, Alabama Black Women's Roundtable, ACBCP
Commissioner, Jefferson County Alabama Commission

The Federal government should forgive student loan debt. Even if it wouldn't benefit individual families and communities, which it will. Even if it wouldn't be a significant step forward in eliminating the racial income gap, which it will. Those are great reasons, but the most important reason is that forgiving student loan debt is good for the economy. According to the Levy Economic Institute of Bard College, a one-time cancellation of the $1.4 trillion outstanding student debt would increase GDP anywhere from $86 billion to $108 billion. Loan forgiveness would put almost $3000 back in Americans' pockets each year, which increases disposable income and consumer spending. There is also significant evidence that forgiveness would increase homeownership. A survey showed of Americans ages 22 to 35 found 61% of millennials said they've delayed buying a house because of student loan debt

There are a lot of conservative voices that are opposed to student loan debt forgiveness. Some of the most common arguments are the cost and whether or not debt forgiveness will actually benefit poor and middle-class people.

Let's talk about the cost. Forgiving all federal loans would cost the federal government $1.6 trillion. Forgiving student loan debt up to $50k would cost 1 trillion dollars. One of the most popular arguments is that this would be a more significant 'transfer' or 'entitlement payment' than the government has made in the last 20 years. Forgiveness would cost more than programs that were arguably more effective, they say. The comparisons you see most often are

the earned income tax credit and food stamps. First, loan forgiveness isn't meant to replace social safety net programs. And it is interesting that is the comparison that is made. You will not hear loan forgiveness compared to the amount the government has spent subsidizing oil companies (over the last 20 years, that number is $400 billion). Just for context, the oil industry remains the most profitable industry in the United States, according to Forbes.

The other argument often made is that the beneficiaries of student loan forgiveness would be higher income, better educated, and whiter than beneficiaries of other 'transfer' or 'entitlement' programs. The argument here is that if the idea behind the program is to help lower-income people, helping financially privileged people defeats the purpose. However, according to research by the Urban Institute, one reason that lower-income people wouldn't 'benefit' from loan forgiveness is that they are less likely to be actually making payments on their loans because they can't afford to. And the problem is only getting worse. In 2009 student loan debt made up 56% of a poor family's income, by 2018, that number was up to 94%. So, eliminating the debt burden would improve their credit scores, debt to income ratio and open the door for them to return to school if they choose. The other problem with that argument is that it simply isn't true. While it is true that lower-income people, with less education, have less student loan debt, that debt is actually a higher percentage of their income and net worth. Forgiving even $10,0000 worth of debt for lower-income people has a greater impact on them because that is a more significant portion of their annual income. The patronizing companion argument is that it makes more sense to expand existing social safety net programs (e.g., food stamps, TANF) because they do more to help poor people. If it needs pointing out, the classist undertones of this argument delegitimize it. Social safety net programs are designed to help families survive; student loan debt forgiveness is designed to help them thrive.

That brings us to a glaring omission in the loan forgiveness debate.; an honest conversation about the interest and penalties. Student loans are structured like mortgages, meaning that you pay mostly interest at the beginning of the loan. This may seem like a tedious technical detail, but a more straightforward way to think about it is, between interest and penalties, student loans are more predatory than payday loans. Every year 32% of the payments that are made on student loan debts are interest. That comes to a whopping total of $22 billion dollars. Imagine if your mortgage payment had a 32% interest rate. That figure is only for debt serviced by the government. That is essentially 'profit' made by the government at the expense of students. Traditionally, interest on loans is how lenders like banks make money. It certainly raises the question of whether or not the government should have been profiting from educating its population in the first place. Additionally, should the government still be turning a profit on student loans when this debt is one of the main factors hindering younger generations from being active contributors to the economy by having children, buying homes, and starting businesses?

Although those opposed to student loan forgiveness will often mention race, the truth is that student loan debt forgiveness will be the most giant step the United States has taken towards

eliminating the racial wealth gap. African Americans carry a heavier debt burden than their peers regardless of education level. They are more likely to have taken student loans and generally have higher loan balances (see Brookings Institute). Student loan debt for the most educated African Americans prevents them from taking advantage of opportunities available to their white counterparts because of their debt-to-income ratios. They are less likely to start businesses in their communities because their debt profile decreases their access to capital. Their debt also forces them to delay buying homes and having children. African Americans are also less able to assist their children in building generational wealth because they are still paying back loans well into their peak earning years. An issue that their white counterparts are much less likely to face.

The benefits are not just on an individual level. The benefits to communities cannot be overstated. The federal government should forgive student loan debt. Not just for the benefit of the individuals being crushed by it, but for the economy as a whole.

The State of Historically Black Colleges and Universities

Lezli Baskerville, PhD
President and CEO
National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education

In January, 2021, the Biden Administration officially began, an Administration that included as Vice President, Kamala Harris, the first female, African American and Asian, HBCU alumna Vice President; the first female Speaker of the United States House of Representative, forth-termer Nancy Pelosi; the second-term first Black Majority Whip of the United States Congress, James Clyburn, an HBCU alumni; and the most diverse Congress ever, including the largest Congressional Black Caucus, with 59 members led by Congresswoman Joyce Beatty, an HBCU alumna, and the largest number of Blacks in the United States Senate in the 21st Century, with Senators Corey Booker (NJ) Tim Scott (SC) and Raphael Warnock (GA) an HBCU alumni. The new Administration and the make-up of the 117th Congress were in no small measure the results of the work of the NCBCP and BWR.

The Nation faced monumental challenges. It was in the grip of the worst and longest deadly pandemic. Race discrimination, voter suppression, joblessness, economic dislocation, and anti-democracy undertakings were at alarmingly high levels. The recording of the barbarous murder of George Floyd, the emergence of the Black Lives Matter Movement, and the televised January 6, 2021 anti-democracy insurrection at the United States Capitol, energized the HBCU student justice movements. Collectively, these events and others, positioned HBCUs to rise as a critical government, foundation and corporate, partner for fostering an American course correction.

A. HBCUs CALLED TO ASSIST IN LEADING AMERICAN COURSE CORRECTION in 2021

The HBCU Community responded in the affirmative to requests for its leadership or support in prioritizing coronavirus research, testing, and recovery efforts in communities of greatest distress in the Nation. It requested in return that it be provided an equitable share of American Rescue Plan and other resources necessary to enable it first, to shore up its students, families, campuses and service communities to meet the "new normal" for meeting its research, education, service, and justice missions.

While comprising only 3% of all colleges and universities, HBCUs are leading in educating African American graduates in scientific, technological, physical, mental, and spiritual health professions. They are graduating 42% of Blacks with advanced degrees in STEM; 53% of Blacks in Agriculture, 50% of Blacks in Communications Technology, 50% in education professions, and 46% of Black women in STEM. The 6 HBCU law schools are graduating 60% of Black attorneys (60% of whom are female), and 80% of Black judges. They are graduating disproportionate percentages of African Americans and Blacks in other fields required for a strong and competitive economy, a peaceful and just society.

The short-term economic impact of HBCUs on their service communities is roughly $15 billion.

B. BANNER INVESTMENTS IN HBCUs

The Biden Administration and the 117th Congress focused attention on immediate human needs. They chose HBCUs as critical partners in their efforts.

With bipartisan and bicameral support in Congress and with leadership from the CBC, the Congressional Bipartisan HBCU Caucus, the Administration, the HBCU Community and its allies, an unprecedented investment of billions of dollars was made in these institutions during 2021: more than $5.8 billion dollars to HBCUs in ARP/HEERF funding, $2.5 billion, Capital Financing Loan debt relief, $1.34 billion, and $2 billion in grants. These investments enabled recipients to shift from classroom-and-laboratory-centered learning to virtual learning, while continuing to prepare for graduation disproportionate percentages of Blacks and other diverse students in high need disciplines who will join the workforce, entrepreneurship, service, and diplomatic corps. Additionally, it enabled HBCUs to establish new courses, centers of excellence, and collaborative campus and community hubs that better positioned each institution to meet the heightened needs of their campuses, students, faculty, staff, administrators, and service communities.

The banner federal investments in HBCUs and an energized HBCU student economic-and-social justice advocacy movement, inspired in part by the Black Lives Matter Movement, the January 6th Insurrection, and voter suppression set the stage for unprecedented additional federal investments in HBCUs as well as unparalleled corporate, foundation, and other private investments. Billionaire philanthropist, MacKenzie Scott's $560 million contribution to 23 HBCUs is a prime example.

II. UNFINISHED AGENDA FOR ATTAINING HBCU EQUITY in 2022

Central to the mission of the National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education (NAFEO), the 53-year-old national non-profit membership and advocacy association of all HBCUs and PBIs, is tearing down barriers to equal educational opportunity and opening wide the doors of opportunity, through avenues such as HBCUs and PBIs, the quintessential equal educational opportunity institutions. As a champion for HBCUs and PBIs, NAFEO develops and advances multi-year advocacy and appropriations agendas. The preeminent and constant items on all NAFEO agendas are (1) "Strengthening and Maintaining the Voting Rights Act, Unfettered," and (2) "Valuing Our Votes, and Voting Our Values" because NAFEO Nation realizes, that voting is the most important action in which anyone can engage in a participatory democracy. NAFEO members, the deans of the six HBCU law schools that graduate 60% of Black lawyers (60% of whom are female), and 80% of Black judges, the HBCU law school students, political science students, and students, faculty, staff, administrators at the 106 HBCUs and 80 PBIs, will not rest until the coverage formula for the preclearance provisions of the Voting Rights Act is restored, and until the recently enacted and pending voter suppression laws, mostly in states in which are home to HBCUs, are rescinded.

We leave it to other contributors to this important policy document to drill down on this, the preeminent unfinished agenda for NAFEO and for all democracy-loving Americans.

A. IMPERATIVE FOR RETAINING <u>NEED</u> REQUIREMENTS FOR DESIGNATION & FUNDING UNDER MSI PROVISIONS (AANAPISISs HSIs, AND PBIs)

The central role of HBCUs in meeting the challenges that threaten American democracy and putting America on course to become one nation, indivisible, is increasingly clear. Destabilizing challenges that confront our nation and illuminate HBCUs as essential for getting and keeping America on course include the continuing pandemic; the economic uncertainty, the domestic terrorist attack on the US Capitol and its implications for the continuance of the "Great American Experiment" in Democracy.

The nation's HBCUs that were founded during Reconstruction, amid racial, economic, political and geographic divisions, that have resurfaced, are uniquely situated to move the Nation to realize its Egalitarian Ideal, stimulate the economy, lead in closing the education, employment, economic, wealth, health, sustainability and justice gaps, and position "We, The People" to prevail in the battle for the soul of America. This will not happen without several congressional actions in the immediate future.

1. Technical & Clarifying Amendment to Definition of MSIs

Congressional action is needed immediately to clarify the presence of an important "need criterion" in the legislation creating Hispanic-serving Institutions (HSIs), Asian American, Native American, Pacific Islander-serving Institutions (AANAPISIs), and Predominantly Black Institutions (PBIs). These institutions are known collectively as Minority-serving Institutions (MSIs) because of the legislated requirement that these colleges and universities must enroll a specific percentage of an identified under-represented minority, e.g., Hispanics, Asian Pacific Islanders. The percentages are either 25% (HSIs, AANAPISIs) or 40% (PBIs). The definition of MSIs does not end there, however. There are also critical requirements that the institutions seeking to become and remain an MSI (HSIs, PBIs, AANAPISIs), and secure funding under the MSIs provisions must also demonstrate (**1) student need** (a certain percentage of low-income students in the covered racial or ethnic minority class) and (**2) institutional need** in relation to the other institutions in their service areas. These standards are being ignored in determining qualifications as MSIs. This must be stopped and current mis-designated institutions must be re-evaluated. NAFEO members and allies will work indefatigably to ensure that the MSI qualification requirements are clear and adhered to in accordance with the law. *See,* www.nafeonation.org. NAFEO institutions are suffering tremendous adverse impacts from non-compliance with the qualifying criteria for the designation of MSIs. NAFEO members and allies will work with determination, precision, and alacrity to correct this challenge.

B. Retroactive Congressional Legislation to Require Withholding Title VI Funds from States that Fail(ed) to Provide Congressionally Mandated Match Funds to 1890 Land-grant Institutions and For Other Purposes

When President Abraham Lincoln signed the Morrill Act into law on July 2, 1862, he established a unique relationship between historically White land-grant institutions and the federal government to position them to become America's research institutions. Congress authorized both the transference of land and public dollars to these institutions., and the issuance of dollars to support their work. The 1862 land-grant

institutions would not admit Blacks. In 1890, America established its central role in creating and sustaining a separate and unequal public higher education when it committed to providing public funding for 18 historically Black land grant institutions. The e legislation required a 100% funding match by the states. The state funding match for the congressional funding for 1890s land-grant institutions, has routinely been ignored.

NAFEO members and allies, will urge and encourage the 117th Congress, to end the funding disparities between the 1862 and the 1890 land-grants., and to withhold all Title VI funding, consistent with the law, from states that fail to provide their mandated 100% match to the federal funds provided to 1890 land-grants.

Final Thoughts

During these times of monumental challenges, as HBCUs are continuing to be called on to assist in leading American course corrections, and there is heightened awareness of the centrality of HBCUs to a stronger, more inclusive, more peaceful and just America, we must seize this moment, under the leadership of NAFEO, in partnership with the National Coalition of Black Civic Participation, one of its signature programs, the Black Women's Roundtable, and our host of partners, allies, and friends, in finishing the unfinished 2022 agenda for moving HBCUs and PBIs closer to attaining equity, ending separate and unequal higher education in America, ensuring diversity in higher education, and moving America to becoming her better self.

Bomb Threats Directed at HBCUs
From the Perspective of an HBCU Chief of Police

Debra A. Williams
Chief of Police and Associate Vice President
Department of Public Safety
Clark Atlanta University

As Chief of Police for Clark Atlanta University – the largest member of the Atlanta University Center Consortium ("AUCC"), the world's oldest and largest association of Historically Black Colleges and Universities, I have encountered both challenges and triumphs in dealing with the most recent threats to our Historically Black Colleges & Universities. The fact is, as police chief for an HBCU, you cannot help to be impacted, personally and professionally by these threats. Not only am I impacted by the challenges and triumphs associated with these dangers but defending and policing our campus is at the forefront of what I am required to execute and accomplish on a daily basis.

When reflecting on the most recent threats, I am reminded of a call we received in 2019 and how it made me feel at the time. Fast forward to our most recent threat, the feeling has not changed. It made me think of the person on the other end of the call and how he wanted to place fear in our campus community. He wanted to take the comfort of being able to enjoy the serenity of learning and working in the campus environment away from our students, faculty and staff. I knew I had to do everything in my purview to make sure that the fear of receiving such threats did not cause a panic within our campus community by collaborating with the other law enforcement agencies (in addition to our internal

university partners). It was important for our community to know that these threats were taken seriously and we were responding as such.

In conversing with one of my students, she shared that she came to Clark Atlanta University to grow and better herself in preparation for the future. Therefore, during her search and her decision to attend CAU, she wanted it to feel like home; one that will help mold and shape her into the person she wants to become. Now, imagine if someone threatens that. Her campus – the place she calls her "safe place" - was no longer her safe haven. How would you feel if someone entered your home and endangered your "safe place"? One would then start to feel as though nothing is sacred or safe. This is what the bomb threats have done to some of our students. What provided her with some form of comfort at times like these was for the people she looked up to - our campus law enforcement officers - for guidance, response, and resolution (as we are trained to act in such cases). In her words, "Although you all may not always have the answer, as it varies based on circumstances, at least I know that you all will try your hardest to ensure that the campus is safe. That's all one can ask, is that someone cares enough to protect us."

During the debriefing with the communication's supervisor, as the first contact was made with the communication's officers, she stressed that regardless of how many threats were received, each call was taken as if it was the first call and that it is a credible threat. In responding to the threat, it is critical to ensure that the person receiving the call is able to obtain all pertinent information from the caller to relay as much information as possible in order to consider implementing our Bomb Threat Protocol. When it comes to emergencies, especially threats of this nature, I'm always worried about how we respond to the campus community. Because no matter how many times you receive a threat, each call must be treated with the same seriousness as the first. There is no such thing as a one-size-fits-all approach to emergency responses. Each call is different, and we have to be ready to respond at all times. The old cliché *"Preparedness is the Key",* is the focal point of ensuring our campus is prepared to respond and mitigate the threats received.

Finally, recent threats of violence against HBCUs have prompted me and my colleagues, as chiefs of police, to review our plans and take additional steps to secure our campuses. Collaborations with other HBCUs and government agencies keep us all better informed about what's going on on-campus in terms of risks and how we can all be better prepared. We are kept up to speed on a regular basis, and the FBI emphasizes that the investigation is a top priority. **My prayer is for all students, faculty, staff and visitors to feel safe and secure within the boundaries of our campuses and these types of calls cease!**

The COVID19 Pandemic Rages On Two Years Later

An Analysis of COVID-19 Impacting Health Outcomes by Race, Age, and Gender

Kwamme A. Anderson, Ph.D., M.P.A.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, commonly known as the CDC, health equity is defined as the assurance that every person has the access to healthcare to be as healthy as they possible can (2022)[37]. The two-year pandemic that has ravished the world, but more intently, our nation has dealt with the coup de grâce of the novel severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). For the purposes of this essay, we will reference it as, 'COVID-19'.

COVID-19 has been a hard fought battle within racial and ethnic minority communities; most especially among black Americans. It was through first-hand experience of having a front-row seat to our nation's historical health at an all-time low attributed to the widespread contagion of the COVID-19 viral infection. It is said that if America catches a cold, then black America catches the flu. But in this case, it was the proverbial double pneumonia. As well, COVID-19 blatantly exposed the long-whispered health injustices existing in ancient and modern American society.

To demonstrate this belief, the Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF) reported in 2022 that while African Americans account for 13% of the United States population, they are 14% of COVID-19 deaths, nationwide[38] (2022). Further, this same subset of the U.S. census is reported to have displayed a whopping 3.7 times higher rate of COVID-19 infections, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration[39] (n.d.). Clearly, our risks of contracting and dying a death from COVID-19 appears to remain morbidly high. So, what does all of this mean for the black

community, in terms of its impact on our health outcomes? To paraphrase the Baptist preacher, I am glad that you asked that question!

One of the more internal damaging effects of COVID-19 is that blacks in America are experiencing increased levels of physical, emotional, and financial stress due to the ongoing pandemic. Some of the causes can be attributed to multifactorial variables that black people cannot control such as having employment that would not allow them to fully adhere to staying at home to provide for their families. Even when able to comply, often times, they are unable to social distance because of small-spaced housing restrictions, per SAMHSA (n.d.). And with working conditions that put black Americans on the front lines of the pandemic, this naturally increases their exposure to the virus and even greater, bringing it home to their families[40].

Other behavioral health issues, according to the American Psychological Association (APA), asserts that black American health outcomes are impacted as a result of COVID-19 resulting in diagnosable mental health disorders. For example, APA reports that there has been increased levels of anxiety among blacks for having to work despite national stay-at-home guidelines. Then, there is the emotional stress brought upon by financial distress of job loss coupled with costs of healthcare if infected with either uninsurance or underinsurance. Lastly, the depressive subsequently following the grief of their loved ones in addition to having to cover unexpected burial costs with little financial assistance[41].

As we move further along the new trailways of living life with COVID-19, long haulers will give rise to helping us better understand the myriad of health problems that persist post-COVID-19 infections. This will be especially true among the black American community. With proper empirical research that is community-based driven, executed by employing a culturally and linguistically methodological approach, we have the opportunity of learning more about how long-haul symptoms such as brain fog, shortness of breath, and prolonged fatigue impact people of color[42].

One thing we can rest assured is that COVID-19 is here to stay – in whatever variant form or long-haul symptom that may be. We may not know the full effects on persons with comorbities (e.g., diabetes, hypertension, obesity, kidney disease, asthma, etc.), of this mysterious virus for decades to come. In retrospect, it would behoove our nation to focus on staying healthy as we plan futuristically by strengthening the pipeline of black nurses and physicians to diversify our health professional workforce. Lastly, the dearth of African American participation in clinical trials and vaccine education is needed to address better health outcomes and a decent chance of survival greater than a snowball's chance in Hades.

Conversations With Self When You Think You Are Dying

Barbara A. Perkins
President & CEO, International Black Women's Public Policy Institute

Room #426 was small, extremely cold, and isolated. It was a recently converted Covid19 wing of Northside Hospital in Atlanta, Georgia. Both me and my youngest child, Cody was admitted on the same day. I was taken to Northside Hospital by ambulance and Cody dropped off a few hours later in front of the emergency room by his dad, who was not permitted to enter.

Tuesday, February 9th, 2021, the day we were admitted was moving so fast, remembering what happened is almost a blur. For three days, I had been sick with severe bone aches and nausea after taking the first Pfizer vaccine for Covid19. Stanley, my husband, had taken the same vaccine, but his reaction to it was much less than mine. He had mild symptoms, a low-grade fever and his arm was sore. What was alarming during the week for the three of us living together was that Cody was displaying symptoms of a bad cold, with a fever and nausea.

For almost a year, we had created our own type of bubble and Corona Virus home protocols. We were extremely cautious and as careful as we could be. Now, we were almost sure that our bubble had been breached. Cody got tested and as we waited for

the results for two days, his condition worsened. I had to care for him in the best way I could while trying to protect myself. When Cody's positive test results came back, our daughter Kelsey, who thank God, had just moved into her own apartment with our 2-year-old grandson, arranged for Stan and me to have a rapid Covid19 test. Within 15 minutes of taking the rapid test, we knew that all three of us were Covid19 positive.

For 24 hours, we all took different parts of the house. We needed a plan for what to do. Public opinion had been for months, not to go to the emergency rooms because Black people were being turned away, sent home, or simply not being cared for as they should. Black people were dying faster than any other groups from coronavirus and not given accurate information for how to care for themselves. As sick as I was, I had to take care of my family. I was on the telephone calling medical, political, and trusted friends for advice. The collective information led me to decide that I had to go to the hospital where my primary care physician and my oncologist practiced.

With a small bag packed with personal items to take with me, important paperwork pulled out of files and left on top of my desk so that my daughter would see them and finally, the last thing I pulled out before asking Stan to call 911 was my end-of-life emergency briefcase, which contains all documentation that my family would need if I did not return home. **I cried**. Taking me to the hospital of my choice was not easy. It was beyond the approved distance for the ambulance. The telephone calls made earlier worked.

Day #4 of the eight days being in the hospital was the darkest. My ability to breathe was steadily declining. I was being treated for double pneumonia and respiratory failure. There were hundreds of people praying for me in small groups, national prayer calls, church congregations and individual family and friends. My family had told me this and it gave me hope and motivation. But

I struggled to breathe and was scared. I started to slip away in my mind; that was when it happened.

A series of life events on a loop went through my mind. Was this the end? Things were flashing across my mind. I wanted to talk to a few special people; I worried about my husband and my grandson. I felt like what was being left to do was too much for Kelsey, but I knew she would have so many people to help her. I saw my daughter's strength in these moments. Then finally, I made my request to God. Please let my son live. He deserved more time, and I simply could not bear the thought of both of us leaving**. I prayed.**

The conversation went on through the night as I watched the COVID-19 Plasma being dripped into my veins. It took all the inner strength I had to keep my mind from letting go. Iyanla Vanzant had sent me a mediation and song by text message. In the early morning, I clicked on the message and listened in the dark. When the doctor entered my room, she asked, was I listening to church? I nodded my head and whispered yes. Her response was, “that’s great. Take care of your mind and we will take care of your body.”

Cody was released from the hospital the evening of that same day. He texted me in the late afternoon, “mom I am being released.” I cried and thanked God. A few days later, I was released, and we continue to heal and regain our strength.

This experience came to teach me something and came so that I can use my voice to teach, inspire and be an advocate in places where advocacy is greatly needed. The black women and men on the front line in hospitals across this country and in health centers where people are being treated need to be supported and recognized for the lives they are saving every day. We must put people first. In the end, what we think about, what matters most are the relationships and the people we love.

My COVID19 Journey

McKenya Dilworth Smith, MAED, CPP
Executive Director, The Morning Bishop Theatre

COVID--those four letters never really held meaning for me before this pandemic. Sure, I had given paperwork to some people who needed it because they cared for a sick loved one or had a medical crisis themselves, so I knew what it was but never thought that I would be so intimately acquainted with FMLA until I was.

Two years ago, COVID 19 descended upon our nation, forcing life as we knew it to slow down and, in some cases, altogether halt. In Education, e-learning was quickly relied upon to replace in-person instruction temporarily. Teachers had to make quick transitions from their physical classroom norms to new virtual expectations and realities. I have to admit that my school did an impressive pivot because of the leadership we had when we were first introduced to COVID. Honestly, at the onset of the pandemic, I enthusiastically embraced certain aspects of the new 'normal'—having a theatre background helped me with my student engagement, so I did not experience student absenteeism like many of my colleagues. My home is also eclectic and inviting, so I was not concerned about my ability to turn my living space into a learning space. I had not necessarily factored in the emotional isolationism and what they would do to exacerbate my anxiety and depression.

I have been managing my conditions with diet, exercise, Kemetic yoga, and prayer. My doctors had even suggested that getting a cat would assist with blood pressure modulation, and after my divorce, I needed a reliable companion who wasn't necessarily clingy. While the days and months marched on its same beat, I was noticeably offbeat, out of sync with myself and this new normal. I sought medical assistance. I was

diagnosed clinically depressed with anxiety. This meant that I had to take off from work since the work served to become a trigger. So, I left a heartfelt explanation of my absence in my administrators for my 7th graders (and later learned that it had not been shared) and was away for six weeks without pay. That is exactly (3) pay periods without a paycheck when the bills did not take a hiatus. It was a financial strain and an emotional sacrifice because I was fighting an illness and the stigma our community has about mental health. After all, I was not what some colleagues shared with me as one who would be mentally ill. I was seemingly well adjusted, articulate, and outgoing. While most were well-meaning, it still stung that mental health perception is still so antiquated and reduced to some sense of brokenness.

Being away from my students and colleagues was a lonely, personally singular journey. I spent most days trying to stay rooted in what was and not what my mind had perceived or anticipated. COVID, an invisible enemy, had altered my sense of safety, and I had to fight my anxiety about getting physically sick and all that would lead to in my life. There were days I imagined myself sick with COVID, alone with no means of taking care of myself, sick and destitute. Fighting those thoughts was critical to me managing my anxiety and depression. While I had been given medicine, I certainly did not want to become dependent on something outside of myself to heal myself. I turned to my garden and knowledge of herbs and teas. There is something to nature, indeed. Based on both experience and research, I combined my doctors prescribed, Mother wit, and intuition about what was good for my soul and me. Even while I was healing, there would be a faithful bill to greet me, causing an immediate anxiety attack. I was on family medical leave without pay, and the school was still reaching out to me, not to inquire about my condition but rather to ask if I could enter grades or schedule a conference. I had to educate the educational managers that I could not work while I was on medical leave. It was possible to give me an accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act (because depression and anxiety are covered under that umbrella law) to continue to provide for myself financially. Adding to my concern was the fact that my bills did not stop because I stopped.

Before going on FMLA, I informed my school of my condition and asked if I could receive a(n) accommodation and virtually teach since one of my primary triggers was the building. They denied my request. I turned to write. The writing was one of the ingredients within that medicinal elixir that served to help me heal. And on the days this life with COVID lurking around determined to try to kill me, I turned to prayer. I went

through a range of emotions while on medical leave. I went from pity parties to rage rallies, and the common denominator of any event in my head was me. Me and COVID. Me and Poverty (at least it felt that way). Bills piled up, and the stimulus check was spent before it hit my account and the days began to dwindle of my medical leave, and the anxiety and depression were still ever-present. What was I going to do? What I did was learn how to manage my depression and anxiety; I went back to work (and became a leader among my peers and spoke up about virtual teaching as an accommodation, and it was given) and slowly began to regain financial control after not working. Putting my health before wealth was a decision that I should not have had to make if we had compassionate leadership locally.

Challenges and Triumphs in the Age of COVID

Janice Mathis, Esq.
Executive Director, National Council of Negro Women

Leaving NCNW headquarters on Friday, March 13, 2020, I never imagined that two years later I would still be working from a spare bedroom in my home. Pandemic was something familiar only from the movies. The first few months were fun. No rushing to get the dog fed and walked before boarding Metro for the short ride from PG County into DC. No more wondering what to wear to work – black leggings and a t-shirt sufficed.

NCNW had begun to offer online programming, so I had a cursory understanding of ZOOM and MS Teams. If everybody who could was working from home, there would be lots of new ZOOM accounts. No stock market wizard, it made sense to invest a few bucks in the company. Sure enough, the price rapidly shot up from $150 per share to more than $400, creating a nice addition to the 401K account.

In April, 2020 it became apparent that not everyone was suffering from COVID in the same way. Only 20% of Black folk had jobs that provided the safety and security of working from home. Black folk were dying from COVID at twice the rate of the overall population. It seemed unfair that people doing the hardest work were bearing the brunt of the pandemic. The grocery store clerks, nursing home aides, garbage guys, meatpackers and EMT workers were "necessary" and, thus required to go on as if there was no life-threatening disease. Why weren't they paid commensurate with the sacrifice they were making for all the rest of us? Other than writing about it, what could NCNW do to make conditions more equitable? Survivor's guilt set in.

In October I had a ZOOM birthday party. Fifty people would never have fit comfortably into my modest home. But there were no hugs or home-cooked treats to make the affair truly festive. After many more months of watching church on television, ordering everything from cosmetics to office supplies from Amazon and playing ZOOM bingo with family, the monotony started to set it.

A good friend's father lives 500 miles away from the DMV. He was in the mortuary business and could not understand why he must refuse to bury those who succumbed to the dreaded ailment. "I have served these families all of my adult life," he complained. "I can't abandon them when they need me the most." My friend was at her wit's end trying to help convince him to stop offering in-person home-going services so important to Black culture. I washed and tried to style my own natural unruly hair – afraid to venture out to a salon. Eventually, I found a Dominican shop near home that was usually empty on week-day mornings and that religiously required staff and patrons to mask up.

All of this occurred against a background of craziness from the federal government. Bleach, ultra-violet light and livestock medications were seriously recommended despite advice from the scientists at the CDC, Kaiser and NIH. NCNW's board voted to host its 59th bi-annual convention entirely online, a decision with lots of positive aspects and few negatives. Attendance grew from about 600 in 2018 to more than 2000 in 2020. Getting rid of travel, food and lodging expenses made attendance possible for more of our members. Big city Mayors from Chicago, San Francisco and Atlanta spoke to us digitally - unhampered by their hectic schedules.

January, 2021 was a turning point. There were three vaccines. But the social determinants of health are relentless in perpetuating health disparities. Frontline workers faced greater risk. Fascinated by the Internet, Black folk disproportionately decided the vaccines were less safe than COVID-19. In February, 2021 NCNW created Good Health Women's Immunization Networks (www.GoodHealthWINs.org) to address access to vaccines and vaccine hesitancy. We also hosted the IDEAs (Inclusion, Diversity Equity and Access) Symposium to celebrate NCNW's 85th Anniversary and the legacy of our legendary founder, Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune. That experience launched NCNW's national Health Equity Committee, comprised of a fabulous group of young Black health professionals. We were confronted in that work by an orchestrated anti-vax campaign that hijacked a GOOD Health WINs webinar. In March, 2021, Facebook banned the "disinformation dozen", who were responsible for 65% of anti-vax content circulating on Facebook and Twitter.

Unvaccinated people are at particularly increased risk for infection, severe illness, and death. Black and Latino folk are just about as likely to be immunized against COVID-19 as any other groups of Americans. One colleague's much beloved niece wanted to visit her home. She declined, telling her niece politely, but firmly, that she could not have unvaccinated visitors. The niece decided to take the shot. We have learned that quiet conversation with loved ones is the best way to help people make good healthcare decisions.

ADDENDUM

2022 Black Women's Roundtable National Policy Agenda

https://www.ncbcp.org/2022_Final_BWR_National_Policy_Agenda3.30.2022.pdf

2022 Black Women's Roundtable/Essence "Power of the Sister Vote" Poll

https://www.ncbcp.org/BWR_Essence_Black_Women_Key_Isuess_Poll_2022.pdf

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