



Black Women

in the US 2017:
*Moving Our Agenda Forward
in a Post-Obama Era*



A signature program of the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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“Looking Back to Move Forward in a Post-Obama Era: The Power of Black Women-Led Organizing”

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*“Our nettlesome task is to discover how to organize our strength into compelling power” Dr.
Martin Luther King, Jr.*

The Black Women's Roundtable (BWR) is the women and girls empowerment arm of The National Coalition on Black Civic Participation (The National Coalition/NCBCP). The BWR promotes health and wellness, economic security & sustainability, education and global empowerment as key elements of success. **BWR established its Intergenerational National Policy Network in 2008**, which is comprised of a diverse group of Black women civic leaders representing international, national, regional, and state-based organizations and institutions. Together, the BWR membership represents the issues and concerns of millions of Black people who live across the United States and around the world.

The 2016 Presidential Election Cycle unleashed a growing racial and gender divide in our nation that has birthed a highly toxic political environment, increased racial tensions in communities and appears to be ushering in a reduction and devolution of federal domestic policy funding to states that is threatening to reverse hard won federal policy victories and executive actions during the Obama Administration Era. These victories included affordable health care, reproductive rights, workers’ rights, LGBTQ rights, voting rights protections, religious freedom, immigration reform, policing & sentencing reform, environmental protections, reducing school to prison pipeline, support for public education; protecting social security, Medicare and Medicaid expansion and more.

In the first 60 days of the Trump Administration and 115th Congress, rollbacks in progress have already begun from a recent failed attempt by GOP leaders to repeal the Patient Protection & Affordable Healthcare Act (Obamacare) with no viable replacement, to judicially challenged Muslim Bans, moving to build a wall on the Mexican border, initiating mass deportations of undocumented Americans, promoting increased use of private prisons; reversing gains in policing reform & workers’ rights, initiating unsubstantiated voter fraud investigations and deregulation of consumer protections. Also, in many states there is an elevation in attacks on women’s rights, workers’ rights and voting rights.

The BWR 2016 Report, “Black Women in the U. S. & Key States, 2016: *Power of the Sister Vote*,” **also revealed the importance of the NCBCP having a special focus on the South in its section**, “*Investing in Black Women’s Leadership and Work in the South Should be a National Imperative*,” written by Latosha Brown, Project Director, Grantmakers for Southern Progress, NFG. An excerpt of this section stated, “Supporting Black women’s leadership in the South is fertile ground for advancing social inclusion and progress. Many organizations and progressive efforts are being led by Black women and women of color. Further, according to the U. S. Census, over 55% of the Black population resides in the South.”

Over the past seven years, the NCBCP has invested a significant amount of its resources to supporting black women and youth-led leadership and base-building in several states in the South (AL, FL, GA, NC), as well as in MI, OH and PA; and plans to elevate that support and work moving forward. The 2016 BWR Report also unveiled that “throughout the South there are strong civic organizations and social justice groups led by brilliant and committed black women. Further, The South receives the least amount of philanthropic investment of any other region in the country. Additionally, programs that support Black women and girls in the South also receive less philanthropic, public and private investment than other communities. According to the *Unequal Lives* report commissioned by the SRBWI (Southern Rural Black Women’s Initiative), Black women and girls’ organizations in the South receive less than 1% of all philanthropic investment in the region.”

In order to assess the impact the new political landscape is projected to have on our work moving forward, the NCBCP hosted its Black Politics & Power Building Organizing Convening in Atlanta on January 27 – 28, 2017. Over 60 of our NCBCP board members, BWR and Black Youth Vote conveners, partners, donors and allies, engaged in critical strategy discussions to expand, build and strengthen Black political and voting power in the South and other key states across the country by developing a long-term strategy. Key organizing sessions included: 1) Developing a Strategy to Fund Our Own Politics; 2) Leveraging Our Voting & Political Power in a Trump Presidency Era & 115th U. S. Congress; 3) Expanding Our Voting & Political Power in the States: *Local, State to National (2017 – 2022)*; 4) Organizing for Census 2020/Redistricting Key for the Economic & Political Empowerment in Black America; and 4) Special Presentation - Women’s March on Washington, Next Steps.

Moving From Strength to Power

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once wrote, “Our nettlesome task is to discover how to organize our strength into compelling power.” As the BWR went deeper into its strategic planning process in 2016, it became clear how important it was to more effectively leverage these tremendous strengths into compelling power. Black women’s voices were being marginalized in public policy and even in progressive coalitions. Undoubtedly, Black communities needed to build power in the Obama era. The current political climate makes the work of the BWR even more critical.

Over the past year, the BWR went into deep listening mode to develop a collaboratively informed picture of what it meant to build power, for what and for whom. As part of the BWR’s participation in the *Make It Work* campaign in 2016, we reached more than 200,000 women in *Kitchen Table Conversations* to identify top equity priorities for Black women. Partnering with *Essence* Magazine, BWR also conducted an extensive opinion poll that reached more than 1,200 Black women. These efforts were followed up with town hall meetings, forums and voter mobilization campaigns across seven priority states (FL, GA, NC, PA, OH, AL, MI) to further refine our priorities.

We conducted our signature BWR strategies to promote the well-being of black women and girls through our annual national summit, annual policy forum, *Healthy, Wealthy, Wise Women’s Empowerment and Power of the Sister Vote Initiatives*. Further, the BWR’s national and state-based networks were highly focused in maximizing the power and influence of the Black women’s vote in the 2016 Presidential Election. The BWR partnered with ESSENCE Magazine, Labor Project for Working Families/Family Values @ Work, NCBCP and BWR state-based Networks and others in 2016 to achieve these goals. Finally, The National Coalition convened key leaders and partners in January 2017 to collectivize our observations and develop action plans based on our findings.

The main findings from this more than one year listening process are:

1. *There are large, untapped communities of motivated, passionate Black women leaders that are committed to advocating to improve conditions in their communities. They are seeking safe, collaborative spaces where they can work with others who share their values and respect their time and contributions. The Southern Region shows particularly untapped promise.*

2. *Black communities in the South are hard hit by more than a decade of public policy assaults including deep cuts in public programs, but these impacts are often ignored by the press, politicians and even many progressive coalitions.* For example, Black women and their families are more likely to be negatively affected by funding cuts because as workers, they are disproportionately more likely to be employed in the public sector. Attacks on public workers, public benefits and civil rights are all examples where Black women are disproportionately targeted.

3. *Although the South is hard hit by adverse public policies, it is also home to some of the most cutting edge, savvy organizing in the country.* Black women are leading initiatives that are making a difference in local communities – on school boards, in criminal justice reform, at the statehouse and in their neighborhoods. Alabama is a stunning case in point where key urban communities including Birmingham elected Black women to elected office in record numbers in 2016, including five judges.

The BWR believes it is vitally important for Black women’s perspectives, methods and leadership to be supported in these critical times to achieve genuine equity in America. Black women are overrepresented in the public employee sector, among those disabled, in poverty and in the criminal justice system. As immigrants, we are targeted for deportation and have more difficulty entering the country in search of sanctuary. The time is now for the NCBCP’s Black Women’s Roundtable to leverage its unique role as a diverse, intergenerational engagement table to raise the visibility of and support for this important intersectional work in our communities.

The National Coalition and BWR are on the verge of an exciting transition that roots our work firmly on the frontlines of change in this country. By prioritizing Black women-led organizing and focusing more intensively on the South and other key states, we are headed in a vital new direction that will help amplify the voices and power of communities deeply affected by this new policy context.

Black Women in the US, 2017

Moving Our Agenda Forward in a Post-Obama Era

Executive Summary

By:
Avis A. Jones-DeWeever, Ph.D.
Editor-in-Chief

Black Women in the United States, 2017, is the Fourth Annual Report by the Black Women's Roundtable (BWR) meant to provide an in-depth analysis of the needs and condition of Black women throughout the nation. This year's report, however, is positioned somewhat differently than previous publications. At the dawn of a new political era, we thought it wise to not just describe how Black women are faring, but instead, examine their challenges and needs through a prescriptive lens. As such, in this year's report, we don't merely highlight a variety of indicators related to the Black woman's experience, instead we very purposefully lay out a path forward towards continued action on those issues that are most critical to our needs, even in the face of a very different political landscape. As such, this year's report is focused around five pillars: Black Women's Health & Humanity; Black Women and Education; Black Women's Politics and Perspectives; Entrepreneurship & Technology; and finally, Challenges and Change Agents—Telling Our Stories.

Included herein are the voices of scholars, advocates and practitioners; each with deep expertise and involvement in the issue-areas covered throughout the report. What follows is well beyond theory. It is a practical sharing of not only where Black women are today, but how we move forward to create a better tomorrow.

The following are some of the key findings from the report:

A Sense of Responsibility and the Importance of Jobs Drove Voters to the Polls

- ❖ NCBCP Exit Polls in Charlotte, North Carolina and Cleveland, Ohio following the 2016 Presidential Election. Survey results found that Black voters were drawn to the polls less in support or even against any particular candidate, but rather, because of a strong sense of responsibility to vote.
- ❖ Ohio voters were especially motivated by a sense of responsibility as more than 4 in 5 indicated that responsibility was their greatest pull to the polls, while only 5.6% came mainly to support a specific candidate and just while 8.7 % indicated that they were primarily motivated to vote against a candidate.

- ❖ While most North Carolina voters were drawn to the polls out of a sense of responsibility as well, the degree to which responsibility was their primary motivator was well below the Ohio (63.5% vs. 83.9%). Instead, North Carolina voters were three times as likely as Ohio voters to be motivated to vote in support of a specific candidate (15.9% vs. 5.6%). And just 11.5% were motivated to vote specifically against a candidate.
- ❖ Overall, the top issues for Black voters in Ohio and North Carolina in the Presidential election were jobs/employment, followed by quality education and affordable healthcare.

Black Women Expanding Political Power

- ❖ In both 2008 and 2012, Black women redefined voting history by becoming the largest demographic group to cast ballots in an election. In 2016, not only did Black women continue to vote at high levels, they also expanded their grasp on political power. Black women increased their numbers in Congress (from 20 to 21 women) and for the first time in 18 years, a Black woman, Kamala Harris was elected U.S. Senator.
- ❖ Two of three African Americans elected Mayor in a top 100 city were women, and smaller jurisdictions in Arizona, Arkansas and Florida, each elected their first Black woman mayor.
- ❖ Several cities that witnessed high-profile police killings (Orange County, Florida; Chicago, Illinois, and St. Louis, Missouri) each elected Black woman prosecutors.
- ❖ The state of Texas elected its first Black woman Sheriff, Zena Stephens.
- ❖ Jefferson County, Alabama elected nine Black women to the judicial bench.
- ❖ In the state of Georgia, a key battleground that is demographically shifting rapidly, 29 counties have an absolute majority of Black women as registered voters.
- ❖ In an effort to further expand political power in the future, a new Initiative is poised to be launched which aims to leverage the power of Black women in ministry to provide civics education to the next generation of Black voters.

Black Women and Girls Are Caught in the Crosshairs of Human Trafficking

- ❖ According to the Justice Department, just over 40% of sex trafficking victims are Black, far outpacing White (25.6%), Hispanic (23.9%), Asian (4.3%) and Other (5.8%) victims.
- ❖ Women are slightly more than twice (68 percent) as likely as men (32 percent) to be trafficked for sex.
- ❖ There are several resources available for combatting human trafficking including city-based Human Trafficking Task Forces, Trafficking Hotlines (available in select states), and the International Black Women's Public Policy Institute's ARCH Initiative, which focuses on meeting the specific needs of Black women and girls impacted by human trafficking.

Black Women's Health Still in Peril

- ❖ Although the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act survived political threat and remains the law of the land, Black women are still disproportionately effected as part of the 24 million Americans negatively impacted by states that refused to accept Medicaid expansion.
- ❖ Black women continue to face a wide range of alarming health disparities, including heart disease, breast cancer, HIV, maternal mortality and exposure to violence.
- ❖ Over a third of Black women in the workforce still have no access to paid sick days
- ❖ In the face of challenges, Black women must prioritize and engage in radical and intentional self-care. This includes creating safe and inclusive spaces to learn from one another, while also continuing to hold elected officials accountable for policies that help to improve overall health and well-being.

Black Girls Ensnarled in the Juvenile Justice System for Non-Criminal Acts

- ❖ Black girls are 2.7 times more likely than White girls to be referred to the juvenile justice system from other social service agencies such as schools, mental health facilities or the child welfare system. They are often accused of committing “technical” violations such as truancy, running away, underage drinking and being “hard to control.” Such violations make up nearly a third (31%) of the offenses that are responsible for Black girls being incarcerated.

Black Women Excel in Higher Education, but Still Have Room to Grow in STEM

- ❖ Black women earned 67% of Associate Degrees and 65% of Bachelor Degrees earned among Blacks. And while all women across race are more likely to complete higher education than their male counterparts, Black women outpace their male peers by more than any other group.
- ❖ Black women though, continue to lag behind when it comes to those enrolled in a major reflective of the STEM Fields (10.6% Black women vs. 19.3% Black men respectively).
- ❖ Moving forward, it's critical to continue the collection of Civil Rights data collection related to education, and to nourish a greater focus on expanding STEM opportunities and achievement for Black girls.

Black Women Are Building Businesses and Breaking into Tech Entrepreneurship

- ❖ Black women remain the fastest growing group of entrepreneurs. As of 2016, there were an estimated 1.9 million Black women-owned firms, employing 376,500 workers and generating \$51.4 billion in revenues.
- ❖ Between 2007 and 2016, the number of Black woman-owned firms increased by 112%, more than doubling in number and far out showing the overall 45% increase among all women-owned firms.
- ❖ Although for years, Black women have led the nation in business start-ups, breaking into the Tech space has typically been significantly more difficult, as the majority of tech startups led by Black women receive virtually no venture capital funding.
- ❖ The average amount of venture capital funds raised by Black women founders is just \$36,000. That compared to \$1.3 million in venture capital funding raised by White men for *failed* business ventures.
- ❖ Currently, less than 20 Black women-led tech startups have raised more than \$1 million of the \$28.3 billion in tech investment funds.
- ❖ Despite the challenges, some Black women tech founders have broken through by raising more than \$1 million dollars to grow their companies including people like Camille Hearst, Co-Founder and CEO of Kit, who raised \$2.5 million for her social recommendation platform; Kelle James, Founder and CEO of Mercaris, who raised \$3.4 million for her organic and certified agricultural commodities exchange; and Jessica Matthews, Founder and CEO of Unchartered Play, who raised \$7 million for her renewable energy start-up.

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