



# 11TH ANNUAL Black Women's Report

## **Black Women In The United States And Key States**

Owning Our Power in 2024: Now is the Time to Participate, Protect, Preserve, Promote!!

> 11<sup>th</sup> Edition 2024 NCBCP Black Women's Roundtable All Rights Reserved



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# **PRESIDENT & CEO'S LETTER**



Melanie L. Campbell President & CEO National Coalition on Black Civic Participation Convener, Black Women's Roundtable

September 10, 2024

Dear Readers,

Throughout American history, Black women have been a power house - advocating for change and putting their lives on the line for freedom. The resilience and tenacity displayed by our foremothers has given us the strength to fight against the consistent attacks on our rights and freedoms. This past year has demonstrated the increasing need for political participation at the ballot box and beyond. Our rights are being threatened, and we must continue to stand at the forefront of the battle lines, holding elected officials accountable, protecting our rights, impacting policy and empowering others to do the same.

Black women continue to be a political force - organizing communities, spreading awareness, and holding positions in the highest offices. We are not merely participants in the political system; we are change agents continuously working to make a transformative impact in the pursuit of a world that is more equitable, representative and just.

It is important that we celebrate the work of Black women all around the country who have dedicated their lives to protecting the rights and freedoms of others. We raise their voices today by releasing our 11th Annual Black Women's Roundtable Report, entitled "Owning Our Power in 2024: Now is the Time to Participate, Protect, Preserve and Promote!" This report highlights the urgency of activating our power by discussing the issues and policy priorities that impact Black women, our families and communities. The report's contributors represent various fields - civil rights organizations, the C-Suite, academia, healthcare, grassroot community organizations, and beyond. They include some of the most powerful Black women leaders and experts in their fields, with lived experiences that lend themselves to an understanding of challenges faced by Black women across the country, as well as solutions to those problems.

This report could not be more timely. Equality and protections for Black women must be centered in the decision-making process. The sections of the report serve as a call to action for us to participate in the





political system by leading, organizing and voting; protecting our rights, freedoms, and democracy; preserving Black history, media, culture and the right to live; and promoting diversity, equity, inclusion, equality, justice, and opportunity. The report provides policy solutions and analyses that represent the needs of marginalized and disenfranchised populations. It is also a diary of the country - one that speaks to our values and truths which we must not be afraid to speak aloud.

As we face the upcoming 2024 general election, we must continue to organize across the country to ensure communities are educated on the issues and empowered to exercise their right to vote. We are currently facing more than a choice between political parties or ideologies; we are confronting the protection of the moral integrity of the nation. Black women are rooted in that conversation, as our freedoms are being limited and our futures - economic, health, education, physical well-being and personal autonomy - are being threatened. If recent shifts in power and current political debates tell us anything, it is that Black people - women in particular - must continue to exercise our political power by organizing, leading, and advocating for change, as we have and continue to be heavyweight in the balance of power. The nation depends on it.

As you read this report, know that we are at a crossroads in this country. The decisions we make and legal precedents set in the most recent and current years will impact the future generations. It is time to commit to policies rooted in fairness and equity for all; time to follow the lead of Black women across the country who are owning their power and working collectively to safeguard democracy.

In Solidarity,

Melony lo

Melanie L. Campbell President/CEO, National Coalition on Black Civic Participation, Convener, Black Women's Roundtable



## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Black Women in the United States, 2024, is the eleventh annual report by the Black Women's Roundtable. It specifically examines the overall conditions and policy concerns of Black women throughout the nation. The report could not be timelier, as the country is balancing attacks against civil rights protections for Black people and other minoritized groups, with expressions of a refusal to turn back the hands of time. As we navigate a highly consequential Presidential election, we must ignore the attempts of political division and focus on the issues that really matter.

This year's report highlights the needs and conditions of Black women in the United States. It shares the voice, expertise and uniquely distinct experience of Black women along with detailed analyses and policy recommendations aimed at enhancing the well-being of Black women and families across various issues. The contributors to this year's report provide insights on the five categories listed below.

#### **PARTICIPATE...Lead, Organize & Vote**

• In 2024, a record 1,152 Black women are running for office across various levels, showing increased engagement compared to previous years, though many face hurdles including limited party support and attacks based on race and gender. Despite these challenges, Black women are winning elections at a high rate, with notable successes including the advancement of Angela Alsobrooks and Valerie McCray for the U.S. Senate, and Kamala Harris as the Democratic nominee for President.

• Being young, gifted, and Black carries significant power in shaping the future, underscoring the necessity for leaders to address the genuine needs and aspirations of this demographic. Key areas of focus include ensuring access to affordable education, closing the racial wealth gap, advocating for reproductive justice, and actively engaging young Black voters in the political process to drive meaningful change and hold leaders accountable.

• As Election Day approaches, Black women face an unprecedented political climate marked by attacks on civil rights and a rollback of DEI initiatives, with nearly 300 restrictive voting bills introduced across 40 states. Historically, Black women have been pivotal in the political process, and their high voter turnout and representation have led to substantial policy changes; thus, their engagement on November 5th will be crucial in shaping the future





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of the nation and defending democratic rights.

• As the 2024 Presidential election nears, Black voters are focused on economic, racial, and healthcare issues, with dissatisfaction growing over unmet promises made by the Biden Administration. Black Generation Z, in particular, is poised to play a crucial role, seeking candidates who address job security, racial equality, and healthcare effectively, and may turn away from parties failing to align with their concerns.

• As the 2024 elections approach, the urgent issue of family caregiving—encompassing childcare, elder care, and paid family leave—takes center stage, highlighting the need for comprehensive policies that support families without sacrificing wages. The lack of such policies, which disproportionately affects low-income individuals and women of color, underscores the critical need for voters to elect leaders who will address these gaps and invest in a more equitable and supportive caregiving system.

• Misinformation and disinformation, particularly targeting Black Americans through social media and foreign influence, have significantly undermined trust in elections and voter participation since 2016. With the rise of generative AI, there are heightened concerns about further exploitation and deception in political campaigns, prompting federal efforts to increase transparency and protect voters, especially within the Black community, from AI-driven disinformation.

• The Black vote is crucial in determining the next president, but recent polling shows a significant drop in Black voter enthusiasm for the 2024 election, with a notable decline among young Black voters. Key issues for Black Americans include the economy, racial discrimination, healthcare, and foreign policy concerns like climate change and weapons proliferation, highlighting the need for candidates to address both domestic and global issues in their campaigns.

#### **PROTECT...Our Rights, Freedoms & Democracy**

• Voting is crucial for shaping American democracy and ensuring that its principles of equity and justice are upheld, as the struggle for civil rights and inclusive progress continues. Despite historical advances, recent court decisions and political actions have threatened key freedoms and rights, making it essential for every generation to actively participate in elections to defend and advance the ideals of a fair and inclusive society.

• Historically, the U.S. federal judiciary has been predominantly White and male, with



# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

continued

significant strides in diversity only recently, including the appointment of a record number of Black women judges by President Biden. Federal judicial appointments profoundly impact American law and policy, making it crucial for voters to participate in elections to influence the selection of fair and impartial judges who will address key issues such as voting rights and affirmative action.

• The Voting Rights Act of 1965 and subsequent legal rulings transformed American democracy by expanding voting rights and addressing discriminatory practices like racial gerrymandering. However, recent Supreme Court decisions, including Shelby County v. Holder and Brnovich v. DNC, have weakened these protections, making it more challenging to address voting discrimination and impacting the ability of minority voters to elect their preferred candidates.

• Since the Shelby County v. Holder decision in 2013 weakened voting rights protections, efforts to limit the voting power of communities of color through redistricting and gerrymandering have intensified, resulting in significant racial disparities in voter turnout. Organizations like ProGeorgia are actively working to combat these challenges by investing in fair redistricting and voter engagement to ensure equitable representation and protect the voting rights of marginalized communities.

• Systemic issues within the criminal justice system disproportionately affect Black communities, resulting in higher arrest rates, harsher punishments, and ongoing post-incarceration barriers that limit access to housing, employment, and education. Clean Slate laws, which automatically clear eligible arrest and conviction records, have proven effective in offering a second chance and are crucial for addressing these disparities and breaking the cycle of poverty and recidivism for millions of Black Americans.

• Project 2025, driven by conservative groups, seeks to reshape federal policies in ways that could significantly undermine civil rights protections and exacerbate disparities for Black women. The agenda includes reducing access to healthcare and social services, influencing judicial appointments to favor conservative views, and worsening economic inequalities, potentially rolling back progress on racial and gender equity and increasing barriers to essential support and legal protections.

#### **PRESERVE...Black History, Media & Culture**



# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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• The attempt to erase Black history and contributions is a form of violence, reflecting a deeper discomfort with acknowledging that the United States' successes are deeply intertwined with Black Americans' experiences and struggles. Embracing and teaching the full scope of American history, including Black contributions, is essential for national growth, healing, and recognizing the complete truth of our shared past.

• During the 17th and 18th centuries, the European Enlightenment fostered scientific racism and sexism, classifying people of African descent and women as inferior based on flawed biological theories. Despite these historical prejudices, Black women have continually resisted and fought against such discrimination, exemplified by figures like Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm and current Democratic Presidential Nominee, Vice President Kamala Harris, who broke barriers in politics and demonstrated the ongoing resilience needed to challenge and overcome these entrenched ideologies.

• The alliance among non-White communities, often termed "BIPOC" or "People of Color," aims to counteract Us vs. Them identity politics by fostering solidarity among diverse racial and ethnic groups. However, this broad categorization can dilute distinct identities and obscure specific experiences of anti-Black racism, potentially undermining efforts to address the unique struggles faced by individual communities and perpetuating a homogenized view of racial oppression.

## PRESERVE...Affordable Healthcare, Mental & Maternal Health, Safety New

• A successful national healthcare reform agenda must comprehensively address access, quality, and affordability while specifically targeting health disparities among minority populations. The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) has made significant strides in improving Medicare affordability for women, yet ongoing efforts are needed to address persistent health disparities, particularly among Black children and women, by increasing access to primary care and protecting key health safety nets through supportive legislation and voting in upcoming elections.

• In 2024, Black women face a systemic assault on their health, wealth, and dignity, rooted in historical and ongoing inequalities that persist despite safety nets like Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act. The erosion of affordable healthcare and racial biases in medical treatment highlight the urgent need for more Black women in political leadership to advocate for equitable healthcare policies and address disparities effectively.

• Mental health in Black communities, particularly among Black women and girls, is deeply affected by racism, discrimination, and structural inequities, resulting in significant dispari-



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ties in mental health care and outcomes. To address these issues, a proposed Mental Health Collaborative aims to improve access and quality of care by integrating culturally competent services and education, alongside innovative treatments like Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), to better support Black individuals navigating mental health challenges.

• The dehumanization of Black women's pain and well-being, a legacy of 19th-century practices, persists today, exemplified by preventable maternal deaths and inadequate care for Black women. Despite the preventable nature of these deaths, legislative efforts to censor historical racism in medical education threaten to perpetuate these disparities, underscoring the need for expanded access to culturally competent care and policy reforms to address structural racism and implicit bias.

• Thirty years ago, a group of Black women established the Reproductive Justice framework, emphasizing the interconnectedness of reproductive rights with broader issues such as racism, sexism, and classism. This framework remains crucial today, as recent voting patterns and polls show widespread support for reproductive rights, despite ongoing legislative efforts to restrict these rights, underscoring the need for continued advocacy and action to ensure reproductive equity and justice.

• In Louisiana, nearly 85 percent of young children from economically marginalized households lack access to high-quality early learning programs, which impedes their future academic, health, and economic outcomes. This disparity, rooted in systemic inequalities, exacerbates the effects of poverty and stress on brain development, highlighting the need for equitable early childhood education and accessible child care, which can be influenced through active voting and community advocacy.

## **PROMOTE...Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Equality, Economic & Environmental** Justice and Opportunity

• Since the onset of the global reckoning on racism in May 2020, the concept of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) has shifted from addressing surface-level issues to focusing on race-based initiatives aimed at correcting systemic racism. However, recent trends show significant opposition, including over 100 anti-DEI bills, funding cuts, and legal challenges, which threaten to undermine DEI efforts in academia, business, and government, highlighting the need for strategic advocacy and adaptive approaches to ensure the progress and protection of DEI initiatives.

• Efforts to advance equity and inclusion (DEI) are under significant attack, especially at the state level, where conservative opposition is manifesting through measures that



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rollback educational programs, limit historical education, and restrict access to capital for disadvantaged businesses. This backlash undermines the foundational values of DEI—justice, equity, and inclusion—highlighting the need for strategic advocacy and public support to counteract these harmful trends and ensure that progress towards a more equitable society continues.

• By 2050, achieving educational equity in the United States would mean ensuring all students have equal access to high-quality education, enriched by diverse knowledge and experiences. This vision involves overcoming setbacks like the recent SCOTUS ruling that challenged affirmative action, continuing to advocate for inclusive programs, and ensuring that all students, regardless of background, have the opportunities and support they need to thrive academically and professionally.

• The U.S. Supreme Court's June 2023 decision to end affirmative action in college admissions has raised significant concerns about its impact on minority students' access to higher education and the exacerbation of existing disparities. The ruling threatens to undermine diversity and inclusion efforts, prompting a call for new strategies to address systemic barriers and promote equity in higher education.

• The looming largest transfer of wealth in American history threatens to further consolidate economic power, underscoring the urgent need for Black women to adopt comprehensive strategies for wealth creation and equality. Beyond mere financial wealth, building "DynasticWealth" involves cultivating various forms of wealth—such as Spiritual, Intellectual, and Relational Wealth—to empower Black communities, ensure their economic inclusion, and honor ancestral legacies.

• Black women must continue to advocate for justice and equitable public policies, highlighting the unique and compounded challenges they face in achieving equality and reparative justice. Despite efforts to promote inclusion through DEI programs and the potential of policies like Justice40, the historical and systemic barriers affecting Black women require a comprehensive reparations approach that includes direct payments, education, and entrepreneurship investments to address economic disparities and recognize their contributions effectively.

• There is a persistent lack of diversity at the Senior Executive Service level of the federal government, despite efforts and initiatives aimed at increasing representation. It calls for enhanced partnerships between Historically Black Colleges and Universities and the African American Federal Executive Association to provide targeted professional development and mentorship for African American women aspiring to SES positions, addressing the



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significant underrepresentation and barriers they face.

• High-speed internet service has become essential for remote learning, work, and accessing various services, but low-income households often struggle to afford it. The Affordable Connectivity Program, which replaced the Emergency Broadband Benefit, significantly helped bridge this gap, but its expiration in May 2024 without additional funding has left many families without vital internet access, undermining the success of related broadband expansion programs and the goal of universal internet access.

• The Equal Rights Amendment is experiencing a pivotal moment with strong leadership from figures like Vice President Kamala Harris, who has championed the ERA as a crucial issue for women's economic justice, and Representatives Ayanna Pressley and Cori Bush, who launched the first Congressional ERA Caucus to advance the amendment. Despite significant progress and support from diverse groups and Black women leaders at various levels, recent judicial setbacks highlight the need for the ERA to safeguard gender equality and counteract ongoing threats to women's rights.

PARTICIPATE... Lead, Organize & Vote





# **Black HERStory is Being Made**

**By Melanie Campbell** 

## President & CEO, National Coalition on Black Civic Participation National Convener, Black Women's Roundtable and Meshelle Foreman, Senior Advisor, Cultural Expressions, NCBCP/BWR

This moment has been a long time coming for black women. Here we are witnessing the first Black and South Asian woman being nominated to be a presidential candidate of a major party for the United States of America!

How did we get here? We got here because of the faith, fearlessness and unwavering blood, sweat and tears of our ancestors, who laid the foundation for where we find our collective selves in this American history moment.

This is also a Black HerStory moment. For we know that the promise of America has historically been broken and frankly unfulfilled for black women and families, and yet, we never stopped fighting for freedom, justice and equality. Black women have been the secret-sauce to black political power in this country, loyal, and unshaken amidst overt discrimination, disregard and violent pushback.

#### Black Women Lead the Way as Voters in Presidential Elections

In 2008, Black women demonstrated their political influence by overperforming other demographic groups, voting at a record 68.1 percent turnout for the first Black president of the United States. Many believe this was fueled by the inspiration of electing the first Black president, the frustration of the Bush Administration's handling of victims from Hurricane Katrina and the shrinking Black middle class caused by the 2008 Great Recession. In 2012, Black women did it again, voting in historic numbers at 70.1 percent, which was the highest voter turnout of any other group, voting out of concern to protect the passage of the Affordable Healthcare Act of 2010 and continue the advancement of criminal justice reform. In 2016, Black women maintained their voting strength at 63.7 percent. Black women voters have consistently outpaced overall turnout in presidential election years by an average of 6.7 percent.<sup>1</sup> (see chart below)

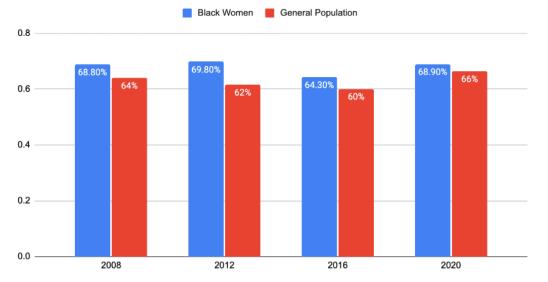
According to the US Census Bureau, the 2020 presidential election had the highest vot-

https://www.census.gov/topics/public-sector/voting.html



er turnout of the 21st century. More voters (154.6 million) turned out for the presidential election in 2020 than in 2016 (137.5 million), the largest increase between consecutive presidential elections since the inception of the Current Population Survey (CPS) voting supplement in 1964.

Black women led the way in the 2020 Presidential election with a historic turnout, that elected Kamala Harris to be the first Black and South Asian woman vice president of the United States. According to the League of Women Voters' article, The Power of Us: Black Women Deciding Elections, September 14, 2022, more than two-thirds of Black women turned out to vote in the 2020 Presidential Election. Further, a record number of Black women ran and won congressional offices in 2020. Between 2020 and 2021, Black women's state legislation representation increased. Black women reached a record high in state legislative representation in 2021. Black women now hold the top executive post of 8 of the most populous cities, matching our proportion of the U.S. population, which is 7.8%. In short, Black women continue to lead the way as protectors of our democracy.



Voter Turnout for Black Women Compared to General Population (Source: US Census Data)

\*Data sourced from US Census Bureau Reported Voting and Registration 2008, 2012, 2016, 2020.

#### We Stand on the Shoulders of Giants

Vice President Kamala Harris' path to becoming the first Black and South Asian woman Democratic nominee for President, has been paved by the leadership, sacrifice, faith and patriotism of generations of black women.



Never wavering, our ancestors, challenged America to provide access to the liberties that its Constitution promised. Ella Baker's precedence for behind the scenes leadership, as co-founder of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, headed by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., provided the blueprint for present-day organizing and shaped the development for the Civil Rights Movement in America.

Foremother, Fannie Lou Hamer, Chair of the racially integrated Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, questioned the legitimacy of America as the land of the free, the home of the brave, during her testimony at the 1964 Democratic National Convention, amid her denial as a member of the Mississippi delegation.

Further, it was the leadership and tenacity of Black women leaders who made this moment in history possible---Black women leaders like Amelia Boynton Robinson, who put their lives on the line on the Edmund Pettus Bridge on "Bloody Sunday" in 1965 to secure our voting rights; and civil rights and political pioneers, like Dr. Dorothy Irene Height, Diane Nash, Coretta Scott King, Evelyn Lowery, Dr. C. Delores Tucker, Willie Barrow, Shirley Chisholm, Barbara Jordan and so many more.

As a daughter of The South, I was honored to speak at the 2024 Democratic National Convention as a part of the civil rights tribute to Reverend Jesse Jackson, Jr., to lift up the contributions Black women have played in achieving this milestone in American history. When I walked on that stage, I thought about my mother, my grandmothers and the countless Black women who are no longer invisible. Vice President Harris has broken a centuries old glass ceiling for Black women and girls to dream big dreams and achieve them.





# The Political Landscape of Black Women Running in 2024 - Mid Year Report

**By Holli Holliday** 

President, Sisters Lead Sisters Vote

## Looking Back - A Bit

In 2018, Democrats won a historic 41 seats in the House of Representatives to take back control; Democrats lost two seats in the Senate and captured seven seats for governor. This was also an historic year for Black women in politics, as we saw Black women running for top positions, including Governor, U.S. Senate, and U.S. Congress. The big win for Black women was Congress, where 20 Black women were elected to serve in the House, including five new congressional members - Rep. Lauren Underwood, Rep. Ayanna Pressley, Rep. Johanna Hayes, Rep. Ilhan Omar, and Rep. Lucy McBath. In the same election year, more than 468 Black women ran for office, including more than 17 running for statewide office and 40 running for congressional seats. It is also true that while we saw some success, we also experienced heart-wrenching losses like Stacey Abrams' race for Governor in GA.

It is with this backdrop that African American women, including the members of Sisters Lead Sisters Voice board of directors, begin to ideate on what it would take to:

- Elect Black women in every state
- Elect a Black woman governor
- Confirm a Black woman to the Supreme Court, AND
- Elect a Black woman as President.

The audacity of these ideas was fueled by three key facts: One, 2018 marked the 4th consecutive cycle where Black women's vote turnout outperformed the electorate share, solidifying their position as one of the most reliable voting blocks, particularly for Democrats. Two, in 2018 hundreds of Black women ran for political office despite our voting power, limited funding, and limited institutional support. Sadly, most lost. Three, racist and sexist-fueled mis/dis information was the basis of most attacks on Black women's eadership and campaigns with NO effective playbook on how to respond.

Since 2018, Sisters Lead Sisters Vote (SLSV) has worked to continue the work that Luvvie Ajayi Jones started through crowdsourcing and researching all the Black women running for office.



## Here is what we know as of June 25, 2024.

Year	# of Black Women Candidates	White House	Senate	House of Representative
2018	603	0	7	80
2020	130	1	13	117
2022	832	0	22	134
2024	1,152	1	14	104

#### Black Women Candidates

Every year we look for opportunities to enhance this research and bring more depth to help understand how Black women candidates experience politics. We do this so that we can provide insights to level the playing field and write a playbook to defend against race and gender-based attacks which greatly contributed to unfair election conditions and heartbreaking losses. Our work tracks the position that each candidate is running for, their incumbent status, their campaign social media accounts, personal contact information, and their current and previous elected office experience. This work is extremely valuable because it allows us to identify the following:

- the number of Black women running for office this election cycle;
- how that number compares to previous election cycles;
- the number of Black women running for federal, state, and local offices;
- the success rates of Black women winning statewide primary races and local races that do not follow the national election calendar.

Data are collected from responses sent in by Black women running, either from emails and Google forms sent out from SLSV, social media posts made by the candidates, and through other Black women networks. Through extensive research and the recorded data, 1,152 Black women have been identified as running for elected office during the 2024 election cycle.



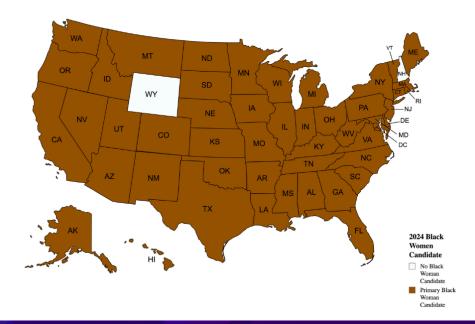
# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Below I will outline how that 1,152 number is accounted for across state and federal races. Understanding the Landscape: Midterm Report

At this midway point, we can already point out some key observations that help us to understand the 2024 election landscape for Black women.



States where Black Women Ran in 2024 Black Women Ran in 48 States





• Black women are candidates in 48 States in 2024, which is up from 44 states in 2022.

• Most of the candidates tracked are NOT incumbents. Out of the 1,152, the number of incumbents running for re-election is 412. Of the 412 candidates running for re-election, 123lack a campaign social media presence.

• Georgia stands out as the state with the most Black women running for office with 196 Black women candidates.

• 36 Black women who have run for statewide positions have been identified, a small decrease over the 66 Black women who ran for statewide positions in 2022.

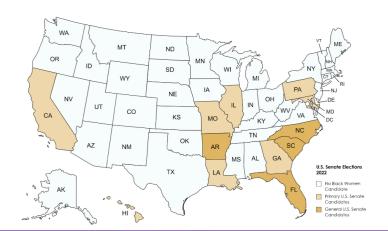
• Of the 1,001 Black women who have had their primary and general elections, 721 won their primary/general election (72.1 percent success rate).

#### **Federal Congressional Races**

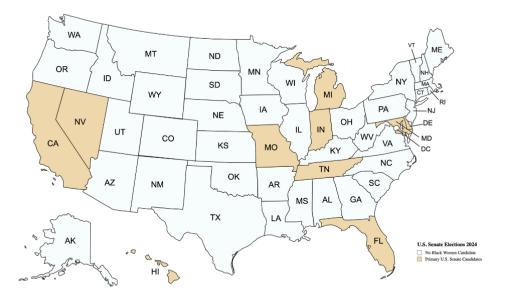
From this incredible number of 1,152 Black women, we have identified as running for elected office, 118 have announced their candidacy for a seat in the US Congress. That number includes 14 running for the Senate, 104 running for the House of Representatives. Breaking that 118 number down: 55 have advanced from their primary, 55 lost their primary, four were removed from the ballot, and four are currently waiting for their primary day.

In the US Senate races, we identified a total of 14 Black women who have announced their candidacy. Only three candidates have received national attention from the party and media: Barbara Lee of California, Lisa Blunt Rochester of Delaware, and Angela Alsobrooks of Maryland. Alsobrooks advanced to the general election, and Lee lost her primary. Rochester's primary is not until September. Even though the other nine candidates have received miniscule attention from the party and media, Valerie McCray (D) is running in Indiana and has advanced to the general election. Scottie Griffin (D) lost in the Maryland primary.

States where Black Women Ran for U.S. Senate in 2022 Black Women Ran for US Senate in 14 States

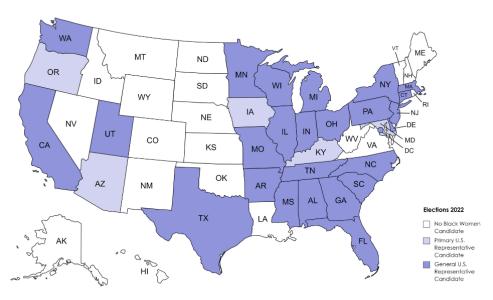






States where Black Women Ran for U.S. Senate in 2024 Black Women Ran for US Senate in 9 States

In terms of US House races, SLSV has identified 104 Black women who have announced their candidacy for the US House of Representatives. Currently, 51 Black women have advanced from their primary, 46 have lost their primary, and four were removed from the ballot or disqualified from the race. We are currently awaiting the results of three other Black women's House races.



#### States where Black Women Ran for U.S. Congress Candidates in 2022 Black Women Ran for US Congress in 30 States



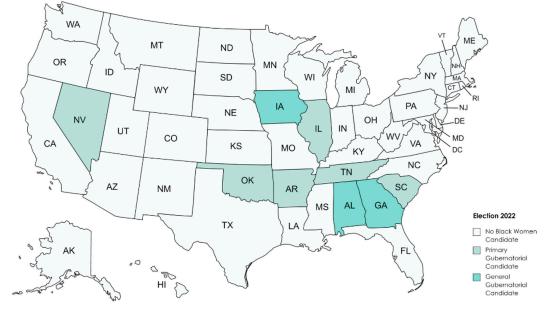


#### States where Black Women Ran for U.S. Congress Candidates in 2024 Black Women Ran for US Congress in 25 States

## **State Races**

SLSV identified three Black women running for Attorney General positions. Satana Deberry (D) - NC, Keir Bradford-Grey (D) - PA, and Shaina Maxey Pomerantz (D) - OR. While all were viable and competitive candidates, each lost amid attacks based on race and gender stereotypes, both overt and covert. Ms. Dewberry notes in her Facebook Live commentary on electability "They go with somebody who doesn't...even come close to having the experience that you have and the abilities that you have because of some kind of, group think amorphous idea that the only people qualified to do anything are men or white men" (Dewberry, 2024). In gubernatorial races, five Black women announced their candidacies, only two are still in the running: Esther Charlestin (D) - VT and EL'ona Kearney (D) - WA. Cherelle Booker (D) -NC and Jamie Reitenour (R) - IN lost their primary elections and Ambra Mason [Constitution Party] - WA will not be on the ballot in November (Ballotpedia, 2024).





#### States where Black Women Ran for Gubernatorial Candidates Candidates in 2022 Black Women Ran for Governor in 9 States

States where Black Women Ran for Gubernatorial Candidates Candidates in 2024 Black Women Ran for Governor in 4 States





To date, we have identified 505 Black women running for a seat in their respective states' state legislature--354 have advanced from their respective primaries. Two Black women are still in the running for their primaries, 149 have either lost their primary election or have been disqualified.

In mayoral races, 14 Black women have been identified as running for mayor with one woman winning her mayoral race so far: Renee Baskerville - Montclair, NJ. Of the remaining candidates, six Black women have lost their mayoral race. One candidate, Alyia Gaskins of Alexandria, VA advanced from the Democratic primary. Two candidates, Vivian Flowers of Pine Bluff, AR and Flo Cofer of Sacramento, CA have advanced from their primary run-off election to the general election. Flowers beat Shirley Washington, the incumbent, who is also a Black woman, in the primary.

Black women are running for elected office in large numbers. Many are winning despite the rampant attacks that they face. Now is the time for us to invest in Black women-led organizations who are doing the work to support Black women candidates. Your investment will continue the SLSV work on our playbook to prepare both current and future candidates to inoculate themselves and help candidates defend against these attacks. Whether it is struggles with public visibility, having your qualifications and ability to carry out a role be questioned to an antagonistic degree, or America's inability to redefine or eliminate its status quo, Black women face the unfortunate battle of advocating for one's value and place in society.

## **Final Analysis**

In summary, data results are painting a positive picture for Black women running for office during the 2024 election cycle and beyond. In 2024 alone, based on the number of Black women who have already experienced a primary or general election, Black women are winning their elections or advancing to the general election at nearly a 75 percent rate. Of the 412 incumbents, 339 Black incumbents have won their primary election, and 43 Black incumbents have won their general election. The incumbent success rate so far is 92.7 percent. The success of Black women this election cycle cannot be overlooked or understated. As we come to the primary election in states that have a higher percentage of Black voters, the overall success rate for Black women running, and the number of incumbents advancing to the general election should only increase.

While this is wonderful news, as well as an increase in win percentages over 2022, too many Black women will face limited party support from party or institutional supporters and big donors. This results in a viable and electable candidate facing additional and unwanted bar-



riers. And if that is not bad enough, they may face the "super tax" of mis- and disinformation, which generally plays to harmful race or gender-based stereotypes.

Luckily as we turn to the US Senate and the Executive Office, we have an opportunity to defy the odds. Two Black women have secured the Democratic nomination for US Senate - Angela Alsobrooks of Maryland and Valerie McCray of Indiana. This number will likely increase to 3, as Lisa Blunt Rochester will likely be the nominee for US Senate from Delaware after their September 10th primaries. Similarly, Vice President Kamala Harris is the Democratic nominee for President - the first Black woman in history to advance to the General Election. Black women continue to overcome the impossible. This is made more likely when Black women show up and vote, show up and donate, show up and enthusiastically engage. As we support each other, Black women are the model and are unwavering in their mission to advocate for the progression of Black families, individuals, and Black lives all together.

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## What Black Youth Want for Their Vote

By Rachael Carroll

NCBCP Thomas W. Dortch Jr. Institute Fellow

To be young, gifted, and Black is a profound and empowering identity. As the future of this country, we hold an unmatched amount of power in the ballots we cast. The weight of this responsibility should be reflected in the policies and promises made by our leaders. Yet, the political landscape is often marred by broken promises and unattainable goals. It is crucial to address the genuine needs and aspirations of young Black voters, ensuring that our voices are not only heard but also heeded.

## **Education**

Access to education stands as a cornerstone for young Black voters today. The importance of affordable college education and student loan forgiveness cannot continue to be overlooked. For many Black students, the financial burden of higher education can be overwhelming, creating a significant barrier to achieving academic and professional goals. According to the Federal Reserve, Black students are more likely to take on student loan debt and are disproportionately affected by its long-term financial impacts (Wright, 2023). As of 2023, on average, Black college graduates owed \$25,000 more in student loans than their white counterparts, even after accounting for higher education attainment (The Federal Reserve, 2024). This student loan debt can stifle potential, prevent home ownership, and delay economic stability.

Education should be a fundamental right, not a privilege reserved for those with financial means. Investing in affordable education and forgiving student loans will provide more Black students with the opportunity to learn and grow without the crippling stress of high costs and exorbitant interest rates. This investment is not just about individual success but about building a stronger, more equitable society. By empowering young Black students with access to affordable education, we are investing in future leaders, educators, entrepreneurs, and innovators who will drive positive change and contribute meaningfully to our communities. For example, the Education Trust highlights how investments in education equity can close achievement gaps and promote long-term economic growth (Morgan, 2022).

## **Economic Opportunities**

Economic opportunities are another critical area where young Black voters seek meaningful progress. The racial wealth gap remains a stark and persistent issue, with Black communities often facing systemic barriers to economic success. According to the U.S. Census, the



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median wealth of Black families is roughly one-tenth that of white families (Sullivan et al., 2024). Economic empowerment means creating environments where Black-owned businesses can flourish and where there is equitable access to capital and resources. Black-owned businesses continue to face significant barriers to accessing capital, which affects their growth and sustainability.

Creating economic opportunities also involves advocating for policies that ensure fair wages, job security, and career advancement opportunities for all. The Economic Policy Institute (EPI) reports that Black workers earn about 23.4 percent less per hour than white workers on average and face higher unemployment rates (Maye, 2023). Economic justice is not a mere catchphrase; it is an essential step toward achieving true equality. The promise of a fair and just economy requires tangible efforts to close the racial wealth gap, support Black entrepreneurs, and ensure that economic policies benefit all citizens, not just a privileged few.

## **Reproductive Justice**

Reproductive justice is another area where young Black voters are calling for significant change. This issue encompasses more than just access to healthcare; it involves the right to make autonomous decisions about our bodies, families, and futures. The Guttmacher Institute reports that Black women face higher rates of unintended pregnancies and have less access to comprehensive reproductive health services (Fuentes, 2023). Ensuring comprehensive reproductive health services, education, and support are crucial components of reproductive justice. Young Black voters demand policies that protect these rights and promote health equity.

Reproductive justice is deeply intertwined with racial and economic justice, recognizing that the ability to make informed and empowered choices about one's reproductive health is a fundamental aspect of personal freedom and equality. Ensuring access to these services is not just a matter of individual rights but also a critical component of broader social justice (Onwuachi-Saunders, et al., 2019).

## Activating the Youth Vote

Young Black people possess the power to dramatically influence elections. Our votes can shape policies that reflect our values and priorities, and in a democracy, every vote counts. Politicians must recognize the power of the Black youth vote and engage with us in meaningful ways. According to a Pew Research Center report, Black voters, particularly younger ones, played a pivotal role in recent elections, demonstrating their capacity to drive significant political change (Cox, 2024). This means addressing our concerns with concrete actions rather than relying on empty promises. The ability of young Black voters to



mobilize and drive systemic change underscores the importance of our participation in the political process. Our collective voices can create a groundswell of support for policies that advance equity and justice, making it imperative for politicians to engage with us genuinely and respectfully.

As we look toward the future, it is vital to prioritize the issues that matter most to young Black voters. We must hold politicians accountable, demanding that they fulfill their promises and address the concerns of our communities. Our votes are not just a means to an end but a powerful expression of our agency and aspirations. By participating in the electoral process, we honor our past struggles, shape our present conditions, and pave the way for a more equitable future. We are not just the leaders of tomorrow but the changemakers of today. Our voices matter, and it is time for the political system to recognize and respect our power.

Together, we can build a society that values and uplifts all its members. A society where every vote counts, and where the dreams of young Black people are realized. By focusing on the genuine needs and aspirations of young Black voters and holding our leaders accountable, we can ensure that our political system reflects the diverse and dynamic nature of our communities. Our collective efforts will drive meaningful change and create a future where everyone can succeed and thrive.

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# Power of the Ballot: Leveraging the Power of the Black Women's Vote in 2024. We Turn Out, We Win Elections, and We Represent Our Community

By Ebony M. Baylor, MPA

Vice President of Policy and Strategic Alliances, National Coalition on Black Civic Participation

November 5th (Election Day) is quickly approaching, and this is an unprecedented time in the United States (U.S). Civil rights are being attacked (Brown, 2024) and after commitments made following the senseless murder of George Floyd and others like Breonna Taylor (Watson, 2024), the DEI movement is being rolled back. According to the Brennan Center, close to 300 pieces of legislation designed to restrict voting have been introduced in forty states. Our existence, our progress, our rights, OUR DEMOCRACY are on the ballot. Black women are ready (as always) to register people to vote, lead voter education, and employ voter turnout strategies that willget the community to the polls and ensure our votes are counted.

In the 2020 presidential election, over two-thirds of Black women reported they voted, making Black women the highest voting bloc among women of color voters and third overall (Center for American Women and Politics, 2024). Black women overwhelmingly supported Biden at 95 percent with the collective Black vote being 92 percent (Igielnik, 2021).

Black women had been leveraging the power of the ballot box, even before getting the right to vote. Once Black men were granted the right to vote after the passage of the 15th Amendment, Black women participated in the political process by accompanying their male counterparts to the voting booth and lobbying elected officials (Hine, 1988). Black women then fought for the passage of the 19th Amendment so that the interests of Black women would be a part of the political landscape, not necessarily in solidarity with all women rights (Hine, 1988, p.12). Black women saw the ballot as a mechanism that would provide opportunities for their families by ending discrimination around education and employment. Patricia Hill Collins reminds us that the suppression of Black women's rights drives how we approach activism including political participation (Collins, 2002). The suppression gives Black women a unique standpoint while existing in the United States political arena. "Understanding the complexity of Black women's activism requires understanding not only the need to address more than one form of oppression, but the significance of how singular and multiple forms of oppression are organized" (Collins, 2002, p.203).



#### When Black Women Win, Our Communities Receive Substantive Representation

In Philpot & Walton's article, One of Our Own: Black Female Candidates and the Voters Who Support Them, it is highlighted that Black women apply their race and gender when making political decisions (2016). Nadia Brown (2014) found that Black women legislators use their policy recommendations to best represent Black women and other disadvantaged communities.

Black women are connected, defined, and intertwined in culture because they live in a country that uses race and racism, gender, sexism, and patriarchy as cultural, political, and economic controls in its exercise of power. Black women's relationships have a linked fate and are shaped by collective race and gender identities and their individual experiences as Black women (Brown, 2014, p.5).

Gillespie and Brown (2019) assert that "electing Black women leads to substantive policy changes, dynamic symbolic engagement, and inclusive advocacy for disenfranchised populations and underserved communities" (p.50). Black women representation continues to grow on the federal, state, and local levels. Our voices are being heard in the White House through Vice President (and now Democratic Presidential Nominee) Kamala Harris; on the highest court through Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson; through the 29 Black women's voices of 118th Congress (Schaeffer, 2023); and hundreds of Black women elected leaders in state legislatures and local government (Haines, 2024).

As we look toward the 2024 election, Black voters will help determine the composition of the US Senate with more than a third of eligible voters in the state of Maryland and the White House particularly in Georgia (Krogstad & Moslimani, 2024). According to In Our Own Voice: National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda, eight out of ten voters believe that the Black community has the power to change the outcome of the election, and most of the respondents feel it is important for Black women to be elected and nominated to positions of power.

We understand the importance of collective political organizing and representation. Mary McLeod Bethune, founder of the National Council of Negro Women, uplifted that Black women who were adequately trained could lead to the integration of all "Negro people in the political, economic, education, cultural, and social life of their communities and the nation" (Hine, 1988). Our leverage at the ballot box leads to substantive change in our communities. Our lived experiences, our mere existence drives why we vote, how we vote, and the policy recommendations implemented. When we do not fully participate in the voting process and make informed decisions, generations are impacted by the legislative



and judicial decisions of the elected or appointed leaders. We now exist in a country where our rights are moving quickly back toward the Jim Crow era. On Election Day, we have the power to decide the direction of our country. Will you use it?

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## Weslyn Harmon, 2024 Graduate

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As the 2024 presidential candidates seek new voters, the state of the country under the Biden Administration is a primary concern of Black voters. The monumental role of Black voters is crucial to federal election outcomes. According to Elliott, since 1992 "[n]o Democrat has captured their party's nomination without the Black vote" (2023). A Pew Research study titled "Behind Biden's 2020 Victory" disclosed that Biden received 92 percent of Black voters' support, contributing to his overall success (Igielnik, 2021). President Biden's 2020 campaign promised to economically invest in Black communities, lower Medicare drug prices, and close funding gaps in education, yet many Black Americans are left with unanswered promises.

A national survey of 702 Black women by the Highland project, entitled "Black Women Deserve to Thrive," showed a 69 percent dissatisfaction rate among Millennials and Gen Zers of the country's current state (Wyatt, 2023). Another survey of 1000 Black voters conducted by the Carnegie Endowment of International Peace found that 29 percent reported the economy, 21 percent reported racial discrimination, and 17 percent reported healthcare as primary concerns as the 2024 presidential election draws closer (Shell, 2023). These results align with the Highland Project's survey of Black women, which reported concern with reducing gun violence, protecting abortion rights, and fighting the rise in hate (Wyatt, 2023). The ballot decisions made by Black Generation Z voters (18 - 27) will be critical of the U.S. economy, reproductive and healthcare legislation, and combating racial discrimination.

## **Economic Concerns**

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported in April 2023 that of the 300,000 new unemployment cases, 267,000 were Black workers (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023). This rate was double the White unemployment rate, and the scarcity of jobs will significantly impact Black voters' decisions at the poll. They will support candidates prioritizing lower to middle class workers' job security to combat the trickle-down economics theory. As young Black voters enter the workforce, many face job insecurity or low wages, regardless of their qualifications. Young Black voters are concerned with career stability, increased homeownership rates, and long-term wealth. They will seek concrete solutions concerning minimum wages and work-related issues from candidates in the 2024 presidential election.



#### **Racial Discrimination and Societal Concerns**

Both Black Democrats and Republicans care about racial equality, yet they differ in their approaches. Kiana Cox, a senior researcher at the Pew Research Center, found that "Black Republicans differ from Black Democrats in one keyway: They tend to support individualistic approaches to addressing racial inequality, while Black Democrats tend to support institutional approaches" (Cox et. al, 2022). Most Black Democrats argue that racial inequality is ingrained in U.S. laws and institutions; Black Republicans believe that personal efforts will overcome inequity (Cox & Edwards, 2022). As the 2024 election progresses, Democratic candidates must have aligned perspectives on racial issues to garner support. Members of Black Generation Z have been dissuaded from both parties by politicians' criticism of the 2020 police brutality protests, and they are seeking political action with long-term solutions.

#### **Reproductive and Healthcare Concerns**

Access to healthcare is a consistent concern of Black voters. A Pew Research study on "Black Americans' views about health disparities" found that "47 percent [said] hospitals and medical centers giving lower priority to their well-being [was the] major reason for differing health outcomes" (Funk, 2022). Gender also plays a role in healthcare, and the Highland Project survey on Black female voters suggests that over 75 percent described wanting reproductive and abortion protection legislation (Wyatt, 2023, p. 15). Black women describe racial bias and stereotyping in healthcare as they seek care throughout their lives, directly affecting Black Maternal Health.

#### Conclusion

The decisions of the current Administration and presidential candidates on these critical issues - the economy, racial discrimination, and healthcare - will impact how Black voters within Generation Z choose to participate electorally. The rising education levels and awareness of societal issues among Black voters will generate more questions for the incoming president. The caliber of 2024 presidential candidates will affect the enthusiasm Black Generation Z voters take to the polls, and candidates with misaligned views may discourage them from engaging in the electoral process. Nonetheless, the issues that Black Gen Zers find the most impactful remain the same, whether or not they participate in voting in the election. Young Black voters intend to protect their freedoms and advocate for what they believe is morally right, domestically, and internationally. The pivotal role that Black voters of all ages play in federal elections will continue to influence the country's direction, and digital communications will be an asset for the voting public. If the Democratic Party does not take the concerns of the Black Generation Z population seriously, many may mobilize against them.



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## Nurturing Our Nation: The 2024 Elections and the Future of Family Care

#### By Tamieka Atkins Executive Director, ProGeorgia

With each passing year and election, we have a chance to demand more from our elected officials when prioritizing policies that allow for a basic human need, which is to care for our families without the threat of lost wages. As we rapidly approach the 2024 elections, there are few issues on the ballot more pressing than the crucial matter of family caregiving. From childcare to elder care and paid family leave, our choices at the polls this year will shape the landscape of care and caregiving policies across our nation.

No matter your race, class, or gender, we will all age. It is inevitable. Each passing year presents a chance for us to honor our elders with the dignity of care and to lay the groundwork for our transitions into elderhood. And children - the next generation, are what the future of our country is built upon.

What happens when families make impossible decisions that leave our most vulnerable even more at risk? And what message are we sending to these generations about their value in our society when we leave them without adequate care?

The lack of comprehensive, nationwide family caregiving policies continues to have farreaching economic implications, particularly for low-income people and women of color. A recent report by the National Partnership for Women and Families found that 106 million people, about 73 percent, lack access to paid family leave through their employers (National Partnership for Women & Families, 2024). That means an overwhelming majority of people in the United States may have to regularly make the choice between caring for a family member or getting paid for their hard work.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the absence of paid family leave contributes to increased turnover rates and decreased productivity. Additionally, the burden of caregiving responsibilities often falls disproportionately on women, furthering the gender pay gap and limiting their career advancement opportunities.

It cannot be overstated how critical this gap in policy is for women of color, low-income households, and single parents. For Black women in particular, the data is shocking. The Center for American Progress reported in 2022 that "more than 6 in 10 leaves needed by Black women are not taken or taken without pay" (Williamson, 2024).



Far too often in this country, our policymakers have treated child rearing and childcare as merely a personal responsibility rather than a collective investment in the future. The foundation of a thriving society lies in the well-being and development of its youngest members.

In states across the country, the struggle for affordable and accessible childcare has been an ongoing battle that forces parents to make the impossible choice between having enough money to survive and having safe childcare. According to the Department of Labor, in the United States, "childcare prices range from \$4,810 (\$5,357 in 2022 dollars) for school-age home-based care in small counties to \$15,417 (\$17,171 in 2022 dollars) for infant center-based care in very large counties" (Grundy, 2024). Under the 2021 American Rescue Plan, there were critical provisions for childcare funding, which helped provide a much-needed band-aid for childcare workers and parents. Unfortunately, when that funding ended last year, it once again left an even wider need gap that will impact as many as 10 million children (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2023).

Nationally, organizations such as the National Women's Law Center champion policies that advocate for increased federal funding for childcare assistance programs (National Women's Law Center, 2024). We must understand that supporting families and building a more robust economy means investing in high-quality early childhood education and affordable daycare services. That requires supporting the candidates and organizations working tirelessly to bridge the childcare gap, ensuring that every child, regardless of their socioeconomic background, has access to quality early childhood education.

Investing in family caregiving policies is not just a moral imperative but an economic necessity. Leaders must recognize that by enacting policies that support families in times of need, we can create a more resilient and prosperous society. Importantly, we must also push them to do so. The 2024 elections provide an opportunity for voters to choose leaders who understand the moral and economic benefits of investing in family caregiving and are willing to champion these policies on a national and state level.

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## **Manipulating the Republic:** The Impact of AI-Driven Disinformation on Black Voter Engagement and What We Can Do About It

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Misinformation and disinformation have become ingrained in the American political landscape, resulting in cynicism and anxiety among voters, and ultimately leading them to question the value of participating in elections. Since the 2016 election, researchers have uncovered evidence of these online misinformation campaigns, some of which were openly visible while others operated in more clandestine ways through social media pages created by foreign nationals, taking on the identities of Black Americans. According to a 2016 Senate Report, "no single group of Americans was targeted by [Russia's Internet Research Agency] information operatives more than [Black] Americans" (S. Rep. No. 116-XX, 2016).

Although Black Americans represent a relatively small percentage of the U.S. population, audience segments in the categories of "African American Politics and Culture" and "Black Identity and Nationalism" accounted for over 38 percent of the ads purchased on Facebook by the Russian Agency (Overton, 2020). Black audiences were targeted with ads that either ignored the election, discouraged Black Americans from voting, or advocated for third-party candidates with minimal chances of winning (DiResta et al, 2019). These factors collectively contributed to a significant decrease in Black voter turnout during the 2016 election dropping from 66.6 percent in 2012 to 59.6 percent (Krogstad & Lopez, 2017).

#### The Implications of AI (Artificial Intelligence) in the 2024 Elections

The implications for Black Americans regarding the 2024 campaigns and elections are both significant and concerning, as generative AI will likely be used widely in political campaigns. The emergence of this technology in political campaigns poses significant promise, as it enables the rapid production of targeted campaign communications-allowing a candidate to respond in record time at little to no cost. However, it also provides the opportunity for nefarious actors to take the deceptive practices of the 2016 election and combine it with generative AI technology to further exploit and deceive voters, allow for the impersonation of candidates, and undermine the integrity of elections at an unprecedented scale and velocity.



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Furthermore, more recent developments in the use of AI in political campaigns have further highlighted these significant concerns. One notable incident involved AI-generated robocalls impersonating President Joe Biden in the January 2024 New Hampshire primary. The message played an AI-generated voice similar to President Biden's that used his phrase "what a bunch of malarkey" and falsely suggested that voting in the primary would prevent voters from casting ballots in November (Ramer & Swenson, 2024).

Similarly, AI-generated images of former President Donald Trump interacting with Black voters have also surfaced (Daniels, 2024), adding another dimension to the potential misuse of AI in political campaigns. These images are designed to create specific narratives and influence public perception within the Black community, complicating the task of distinguishing authentic campaign materials from AI-generated fabrications.

Another notable instance of Artificial Intelligence (AI)I misuse involved a pro-Governor Ron DeSantis ad that used an AI-generated voice to mimic former President Trump, based on his tweet criticizing Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds. Although President Trump never actually spoke the words, the ad falsely presented them as if he had, showcasing how AI can also fabricate content to manipulate political narratives within the Republican Party (Jacobsen & Loreben, 2023).

In 2023, the Republican National Committee (RNC) released an AI-generated campaign ad in response to President Joe Biden's reelection announcement. The ad, created entirely with AI, depicted a grim hypothetical second term for the Biden-Harris Administration, invoking worrisome apocalyptic images. While the ad included a faint disclaimer stating it was "built entirely with AI imagery," without federal action, voters cannot assume all political ads using generative AI will disclose this, making it difficult for voters to differentiate between real and AI-generated ads.

#### Federal Government Responses to AI Misinformation

The federal government has acknowledged the need to address the challenges posed by AI in political campaigns. The Federal Communication Commission (FCC) approved a rule classifying AI-generated voice calls as "artificial" under the Telephone Consumer Protection Act, making voice-cloning technology in robocall scams illegal (FCC, 2024). FCC Chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel proposed a rule in May that would require political advertisers to disclose AI-generated content in TV and radio ads (FCC, 2024). The Federal Election Commission is also moving toward requiring clear disclosures on AI-generated content in political ads to ensure transparency and prevent voter deception.



Further, in May 2023, Rep. Yvette Clarke (D-NY) introduced the REAL Political Advertisements Act, mandating that political ads disclose the use of generative AI. Additionally, other bills aim to ensure AI transparency and accountability in elections, supported by the Bipartisan Senate AI Working Group's newly released AI roadmap emphasizing ethical AI use in elections. On June 7, 2024, Rep. Joseph D. Morelle (D-NY) with co-sponsor Rick Larsen (D-WA) introduced HR 8668, addressing "transparency" in the use of generative AI in political advertisements. Despite these efforts, more substantive work is needed to fully address the complexities and potential risks associated with AI within the context of political campaigns.

#### Strengthening Black Voter Protection Against AI-Driven Disinformation

Combating this new wave of AI-driven voter disinformation will require concerted efforts from both the public and private sectors, along with vigilant participation from the Black community.

To protect Black voters from deceptive tactics, a combination of legislative action, public awareness, community engagement, and technological solutions is essential. Proactive measures such as voter education programs, collaborations with tech companies, legal support, and ongoing research are crucial for safeguarding electoral integrity and ensuring a transparent and fair electoral system in 2024 and beyond. Promoting responsible sharing practices within the Black community can further help mitigate the impact of misinformation. For instance, it is important to avoid sharing information too quickly within our community before verifying its authenticity. Always check if the information comes from a reputable news source, use fact-checking websites, and be cautious of sensational headlines.

By implementing these strategies, we can help protect voters from manipulation, effectively addressing the impact of Al-driven disinformation on Black voter engagement and countering the manipulation of the republic.

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## Will Foreign Policy Impact Black Voter Turnout in the 2024 Presidential Election?

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The Black vote is a significant factor in determining who will be our next president. However, polling suggests fewer Black people are interested in voting in the 2024 election compared to four years ago. According to a recent Washington Post-Ipsos poll, 62 percent of Black Americans are certain they will vote in the November presidential election, which is down a significant 12 points from the last election (Wootson, et al., 2024). Furthermore, the poll showed a drop in young Black voters with 41 percent saying they will certainly vote in November.

The economy and jobs, racism and racial discrimination, and healthcare are still top issues influencing Black Americans' votes, with 82 percent expressing that domestic policy should be the focus of the next administration (Cox, 2024). However, Black voters care about foreign policy, and that will have some weight on the results of the 2024 election. In a Carnegie Endowment for International Peace survey of Black Americans, 83 percent of respondents reported foreign policy is important to their decision in the vote (Shell, 2023). Across parties (Democrats and Republicans), 39 percent expressed that foreign policy was very important in their voting decision.

Race is a central theme and the lens through which Black Americans view the world and foreign policy efforts. According to a Carnegie survey, Black voters want the United States to lead in resolving global collective action issues such as preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (Shell, 2023), taking action on climate change, and fostering human rights and democracy globally (Cox, 2023). These issues are a priority for Black voters as they evaluate the immediate and long-standing foreign policy approaches in their voting decisions. For young Black voters, the current war in Gaza is a top foreign policy issue (Shell, 2023).

Black Americans see the intersections between an increase in weapons of mass destruction, human rights and environmental justice. Uranium extraction and nuclear testing both have devastating impacts on Black people and on the environment in the regions — mainly Africa — where those activities take place. Black American see this as an example of the northern countries exploiting the Global South to achieve their agendas (Shell, 2023). More than half of Black voters (54 percent) want the U.S. to lead a coalition of countries to stop the proliferation of these weapons.



A Brookings poll indicates that the vast majority of Black voters (88 percent) are concerned about climate change (Donoghoe et al., 2023). Black voters' concern is higher than the national average and are also more likely to support policies. Black Americans see that the impacts of climate change — including extreme heat, hurricanes and other severe weather conditions — are hitting the southern portion of the U.S. very hard. The concern Black voters have about climate change impacts at home, supports their need to have the U.S. take a leading role globally to address the degradation of the environment.

Black Americans have historically made the connection between the struggle for human rights and democracy here in the U.S. and struggles for decolonization across regions. We saw this in Black people's rallying demand for divestment to support the eradication of Apartheid in South Africa. Black Americans also recognize new human rights challenges brought to the forefront through neo-colonialism and witnessed through foreign policy initiatives (Shell, 2023).

Millions of Black Americans have served in the U.S. military. Today, Black Americans represent 14 percent of the population but make up 18 percent of the armed forces (Shell, 2023). However, Black voters do not widely support the U.S. leading an international response to the competition for power with China and Russia. A Carnegie survey reports that just 36 percent of Black people believe the U.S. should play a leading role in coordinating an international response to China's rise, and 32 percent feel the U.S. should lead in providing military and humanitarian assistance to help Ukraine defend itself against Russia (Shell, 2023). This does not mean Black voters do not care about the people of Ukraine or Taiwan and other countries impacted by China, but they are not all necessarily in favor of the U.S. engaging in power struggles with other countries that may cost American lives.

Black voters in America are not a monolith; we consist of Black people from many regions of the world. Our worldviews go beyond the east coast versus west coast. In general, Black voters are practical and care about "kitchen table" issues. Like most Americans, we may not understand all the nuances of foreign policy. However, we do understand that our domestic issues are interconnected with our foreign policy. This means that if getting Black voters to the poll is a priority, candidates and campaigns should not ignore foreign policy and be sure to connect it to the domestic issues most important for Black people.

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# Our Rights, Freedoms & Democracy





## **Freedom is Not Only for the Privileged Few**

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Voting is the means of voicing our opinions, concerns and desires for how we envision the maintenance of our American Democracy. Our democratic system, as outlined through the Constitution, provides for three branches of government intended to provide checks and balances. This American Democracy is by no means perfect. Since its founding, our nation has fought wars, engaged in civil disobedience and other means to rail against the historical discriminatory underpinnings of how it was originally established. However, through such milestones and movements in our history including the Civil War, Reconstruction, the Women's Rights Movement, the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950's and '60s, and despite setbacks, we have seen progress in the attainment of the ideals of our American Democracy. That progress has often been with the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) being the protectorate of the ideals of our U.S. Constitution and ultimately our democracy. Progress is just that – a movement towards better opportunities for all – not just the privileged few.

As a former track athlete and now a coach, the idea that the struggle for the promise of an equitable and inclusive democracy is, "a relay race" resonates with me. This race requires each generation to take the baton and utilize our talents to move forward with the goal of achieving a better future for each successive generation. If the vote is the baton, as part of this race, Americans must get it around the track and use their vote to impact all branches, including who will determine the makeup of the SCOTUS. Sadly, not accurately moving the baton across the track can not only cost a team dearly (i.e. the U.S. Men's 4x100 Olympic team), but in politics, this mistake can cost Americans in the battle to protect our civil rights and freedoms enshrined in the U.S. Constitution. Even though SCOTUS receives thousands of petitions per year, it typically only hears approximately 10 percent of these cases. While the cases have been limited, they have critically shaped our course of history and exercise of Americans' freedoms and liberties. To name a few, the unfettered right to vote, to have freedom to control your own reproductive choices, to learn and think critically, to live one's own truth without fear of anti-LGBTQ bigotry, to have equitable economic opportunity, and more, is at stake of being eradicated for generations by the SCOTUS and subsequently state legislatures if American voters sit on the sidelines.

#### The Freedom to Vote

August 6, 2024, marked 59 years since the signing of the Voting Rights Act (VRA), yet this monumental Act no longer has the impact as intended since the 2013 Shelby County v.



Holder ruling and more recently, cases such as Brnovich v. DNC that undermined both Section 5 and Section 2 respectively. Since Shelby County, the turnout gap between White voters and voters of color throughout the country has unfortunately increased (Crayton, 2024). Because of the lack of a fully functional Voting Rights Act, state legislatures have been acting with impunity to decrease the political power of Black and Brown communities out of fear of losing their own power. We have seen this in Alabama, where despite a win at the SCOTUS in the case of Allen v. Milligan, which stopped the use of racially discriminatory congressional and state legislative maps, Alabama is still attempting to pass state laws that limit the political power of the Black community. These voter suppression tactics are critical tools of those who fear change and recognize that it is easier to undermine a democracy than to live by its ideals of fair representation for all (Arwine, n.d.).

#### The Freedom to Choose

Fifty-one years after the SCOTUS decided Roe v. Wade, and over two years after a now politicized SCOTUS decided Dobbs v. Jackson, women and men now are prohibited in many states from making their own healthcare decisions that impact the overall well-being of their family, including their financial viability. It is estimated by the Guttmacher Institute that "3.7 million women of reproductive age in the United States live in a county without access to abortion and with no or low access to maternity care" (Guttmacher Institute, n.d.) and at least twenty-one states have now eliminated or restricted abortion and other reproductive care (Reproductive Freedom for All, 2024). This lack of freedom detrimental impacts women of color, with estimates that "one in four Native American babies and one in six Black babies were born in areas of limited or no access to maternity care services" (Titus & Rummel, 2024). Moreover, this devaluing of women's reproductive health impacts the entire family structure. Despite this being the 60th Anniversary of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Black women are still only paid 69 cents for every dollar made by white, non-Hispanic men. When we connect these dots, the underlying story is that reproductive freedom, including maternal health, the right to birth control and an abortion is not just about a woman's womb. This freedom is about the ability to control one's own body, one's family, one's life journey and ultimately one's destiny. While women have outnumbered men in the United States since 1950 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023), we are still less than one-third of the leaders in state legislatures across the country (Center for American Women and Politics, n.d.), yet it is these same legislatures that want to determine how many people in the country control their bodies and their family structure. The absurdity of this reality should be obvious to anyone who reads this essay.

#### The Freedom to Challenge Hypocrisy

The list of monumental cases that the SCOTUS has decided leading to the elimination of



freedoms and liberties by Americans in this country is not only tragic, but an attack on the promise of our democratic principles. While past SCOTUS cases have undercut freedoms, there are even more pending cases that will be heard during the 2024-25 term that are challenging the freedoms of the transgender community and will reverse the progress made in limiting discrimination against marginalized communities (Pappy, 2024).

Today, Americans must grapple with the reality that this generation of voters have less rights than their parents and grandparents. The destruction of our democracy through the attacks on our freedom to learn is a further tool being utilized to mask efforts to turn back the clock, allow blatant discrimination, and undermine the ideals of an inclusive and multiracial democracy. So, if the promise of America has been that all people, regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, disability or other immutable characteristics should have the equal opportunity to make a life for themself and their family and achieve success in whatever way that matters most to them, we must come together to protect one another. One person's gain does not have to be another person's loss, yet this is what a vocal minority is perpetuating. We must call out the hypocrisy of those that claim the moral high ground by opposing a woman's right to choose her own reproductive health. We must stand against those who want to rewrite history so future generations do not understand the battles fought to obtain civil rights, and then want to block the ability of voters to participate in elections to prevent the perpetuation of these cruel actions in our democratic system.

#### The Freedom to Fight for a Better Future Together

The vote matters because it determines the trajectory of our democracy and impacts all aspects of our lives. While the Constitution provides the basis for the greater ideal of "freedom and liberty for all," SCOTUS is not immune to human biases that undermine this ideal. Hence, if we truly believe in this ideal, then we must not remain in our silos and open our eyes to the connectivity of all the various efforts to limit freedoms, including undermining the SCOTUS. As a Black woman, I have no choice but to exist in this intersection. It is my daily reality. It is my continual hope though, that we are all in this together. America is better than what we have experienced in the past decade, but only if we choose a path to make it better. So, let us do that. Patriotism is not the ignorant acceptance of bigotry because of the fear of diversity and supposed loss of power; it is the ability to see beyond our individual needs, and understand that as we lift others, we lift ourselves. Freedom is for all, not just the privileged few.



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## Judicial Makeup and Its Implications on Our Rights and Freedoms

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For many years, the U.S. Federal judiciary has been a White man's club. The first Black man to serve on the Federal bench was William Hastie who was appointed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1937 to serve on the Federal District Court of the Virgin Islands. The first Black woman, Constance Baker Motley, was not appointed until 1966 when President Lyndon B. Johnson appointed her to the Federal circuit court. No Black women served on the Federal appellate courts until 1979 when Amalya Kearse was appointed to the Second Circuit. As of January 2024, only 98 Black women have served as Federal judges. Interestingly, a little over one-third of that number have been appointed by President Joe Biden.

All federal judges are appointed by the President of the United States, but they must be confirmed by the U.S. Senate. One of the most important reasons why Black people need to vote in the upcoming November election is to ensure that people who are fair and impartial arbiters are appointed to the federal courts. When Trump ran for President in 2016, he ran on a platform of getting a Supreme Court that could overturn the Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision. Unfortunately, he was successful in making good on his promise. Not only did he appoint three Supreme Court Justices, but he also appointed 54 judges to the appellate courts and 174 judges to the U.S. district courts. In one term as President, he appointed over one-fourth of all Federal judges. With lifetime appointments and many relatively young nominees, his influence on the federal courts will be felt for many years.

There is a significant difference in the number of appointments made by Trump, Obama, W. Bush, and Clinton when gender and judicial appointments are considered. Clinton, Bush, and Obama helped to improve gender diversity. Trump helped to reverse the positive changes made by his predecessors (Jeknik et. al, 2021). Obama appointed 315 judges during his two terms, 47 percent were women (Gramlich, 2023). Comparatively, only 24 percent of Trump's appointments were women. Biden is the first President to appoint more women to the Federal judiciary than men — 64 percent (Mourtoupalas, 2024). It should be noted that Biden has appointed a record number of Black women to the bench, including the appointment of the first Black woman Supreme Court justice. At the end of February 2024, the U.S. Senate reported that they had confirmed a record 36 Black women judges nominated by Biden.



#### The Importance of a Diverse, Qualified Judiciary

When I wrote my master's thesis on federal judges and political change in Louisiana from 1959-1965, there was an expectation of some resistance to new Federal civil rights legislation by deep South judges. Yet, mostly, judges were not expected to be activists who came to the courts to push a political agenda that had no grounding in democracy and due process. Today, there are Supreme Court justices whose wives are political activists who support organizations and movements that seem to be anti-democratic. Some judicial nominees with no judicial experience, and others who have openly opposed the Affordable Care Act have received appointments. Overturning Roe v. Wade became the litmus test for nomination before it was overturned in 2022.

Elections have consequences, and some of the consequences can have detrimental effects on the everyday lives of Black women and their families. Presidential and senatorial selections can influence lives for many years to come because federal judges have lifetime appointments. For example, a 37-year-old woman received a lifetime appointment to the Circuit Court of Appeals in 2019 by a party-line vote of 53-44. She was even on the list of judges considered for the Supreme Court when Justice Ginsberg died in 2020.

There will be future challenges to the Voting Rights Act (VRA) and voting rights in general. The Shelby v. Holder ruling in 2013 invalidated Section 4(b) of the Voting Rights Act that provided the formula for determining which jurisdictions must seek preclearance for new voting law changes. States that were covered in the VRA have passed laws or approved of voting maps that are viewed as discriminatory and designed to reduce voter registration as well as voter participation by Black citizens. For example, despite the Supreme Court's affirmation of the district court's ruling that the Alabama congressional district maps violated the Voting Rights Act, Alabama redrew districts that were rejected by the Supreme Court.

There are cases and/or issues that will be brought to the federal courts that directly or indirectly affect Black women. Some are already on their way through the system, and they will be resolved by elected officials who will be on the ballot in November. For example, the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals in a 2-1 decision found that the Fearless Fund's grant program for Black women violates the 1866 Civil Rights Act. In addition, cases related to affirmative action, Diversity Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), as well as school curriculum can be expected to be heard at all levels of the court system.



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## Impact of Redistricting and Partisan Gerrymandering on Rights, Freedoms & Democracy

Marcia Johnson

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Throughout its history, the United States has struggled to live up to the ideals of its founding. In the beginning only White men with property could vote, about 10 – 15 percent of the population. After the U.S. Civil War, a series of constitutional amendments expanded the right to vote. Notably, in 1870, the 15th Amendment prohibited voting discrimination and in 1920, the 19th Amendment prohibited voting discrimination on the basis of sex. However, it was not until the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 ("the VRA") that all eligible citizens gained the right to vote, transforming American democracy and ensuring that voters of color could elect their candidate of choice. The equal opportunity to elect a candidate of choice is determined by the redistricting of electoral districts after each decennial census. And it was three years before the passage of the VRA that the U.S. Supreme Court rejected the argument that redistricting was a political question and not subject to judicial review, ruling in Baker v. Carr that "the right to elect legislators in a free and unimpaired fashion is a bedrock of our political system."

Since its passage, the VRA, along with the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, provide legal protections against voting discrimination in the redistricting process. This discrimination has been achieved in several ways: 1) racial gerrymandering - when voters are placed in electoral districts predominantly on the basis of race known; 2) packing - when African American voters are packed into a single district in order to limit their opportunity to elect more than one representative of choice; and 3) cracking - when African American voters are split into multiple districts in order to prevent them from forming a majority and undermining their ability to elect their candidate of choice. Two seminal provisions of the VRA - Section 2 which codified the 15th Amendment prohibiting voting discrimination, and Section 5 which required jurisdictions with a history of discrimination in voting to submit voting changes for federal review before they could be implemented - formed the backbone of the fight against voting discrimination. Studies have found that most cases filed under Section 2 of the VRA were filed in jurisdictions that had to submit voting changes under Section 5.

The VRA opened the door to African American representatives in the Congress. In 1972, Barbara Jordan became the first Black woman elected to the Congress from the South.



Before 1990, most Southern states had not elected an African American representative to Congress since the end of Reconstruction. Following 1990, because of the protections of the VRA, the number of Black representatives in Congress from states fully covered by Section 5 increased significantly. Today, there are 18; most of these members are Democrats.

Following the 1990 redistricting, in Shaw v. Reno, a case in which white voters in North Carolina brought a racial gerrymandering claim challenging a district to provide African American voters the opportunity to elect their candidates of choice, the Court ruled that voters could not be placed in districts predominantly based on race. African American voters began bringing racial gerrymandering claims to address the cracking and packing of African American districts.

In 2019, in Rucho v. Common Cause, the Court ruled that partisan gerrymandering was not subject to judicial review. This holding occurred at a time when states accused of racial gerrymandering defended maps that made it harder for African Americans to elect their candidate of choice by claiming they assigned voters to districts based on partisan, not racial considerations. This past July, in Alexander v. SC NAACP, the Supreme Court rejected the lower courts' finding that the state engaged in racial gerrymandering at the expense of African American voters, ruling that plaintiffs must show that the state could have achieved its partisan interest without harming minority voters.

In 2023, the Brennan Center for Justice reported that of the 38 cases challenging redistricting maps as being discriminatory after the 2020 Census, 29 are in states that used to be subject to federal review under Section 5 of the VRA (Brennan Center for Justice, 2024). These states are no longer subject to Section 5 because in 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court, in Shelby County v. Holder, weakened VRA protections when it nullified its application after determining that the formula that determined which jurisdictions had to submit voting changes for review was unconstitutional. This weakening continued in the 2021 Brnovich v. DNC decision when the court adopted new deadlines that will make it harder for voters to bring claims under Section 2.

The combination of the Shelby County, Brnovich and Alexander decisions now make it more difficult to challenge voting discrimination. The new requirement to disentangle race from partisanship is particularly challenging when the majority of Democrats in Congress in the Deep South are from majority-minority districts.



District							1		
District	Hispanic or Latino	White	Black or African American	American Indian and Alaska Native	Asian	Native Hawalian and other Pacific Islander	Other	Multiple races	Representativ party (2023)
Alabama's 7th District	3.39%	36.82%	55.64%	0.21%	1.20%	0.00%	0.37%	2.36%	Democrati
Texas' 33rd District	60.14%	13.12%	16.48%	0.13%	7.81%	0.09%	0.15%	2.07%	Democrat
Texas' 34th District	91.45%	6.90%	0.45%	0.11%	0.60%	0.00%	0.04%	0.45%	Democrat
Texas' 35th District	53.67%	27.80%	11.02%	0.07%	3.40%	0.07%	0.95%	3.02%	Democrat
Texas' 36th District	33.13%	47.91%	10.51%	0.10%	4.45%	0.07%	0.21%	3.62%	Republica
Texas' 37th District	30.25%	49.83%	6.14%	0.09%	8.72%	0.06%	0.64%	4.27%	Democrat
Texas' 38th District	27.52%	49.05%	9.71%	0.14%	10.10%	0.02%	0.42%	3.04%	Republica
/irginia's 3rd District	8.48%	39.58%	42.49%	0.20%	2.98%	0.31%	0.59%	5.37%	Democration
/irginia's 4th District	8.77%	41.35%	42.00%	0.12%	2.75%	0.06%	0.30%	4.66%	Democrat
/irginia's 11th District	14.95%	47.55%	9.28%	0.17%	22.14%	0.06%	0.95%	4.90%	Democrat
Florida's 9th District	52.99%	29.08%	9.66%	0.03%	4.12%	0.04%	0.60%	3.48%	Democrati
Florida's 10th District	30.27%	34.41%	24.75%	0.08%	4.72%	0.04%	0.92%	4.81%	Democrati
Florida's 14th District	28.71%	45.95%	16.80%	0.05%	3.81%	0.09%	0.56%	4.03%	Democrati
Florida's 15th District	28.34%	49.91%	12.87%	0.04%	4.52%	0.04%	0.59%	3.69%	<ul> <li>Republicar</li> </ul>
Florida's 20th District	24.53%	19.69%	47.73%	0.12%	2.70%	0.00%	1.14%	4.09%	Democrati
Florida's 22nd District	27.53%	47.95%	18.10%	0.07%	2.67%	0.07%	0.87%	2.75%	<ul> <li>Democrati</li> </ul>
Florida's 24th District	39.73%	16.02%	39.05%	0.10%	1.47%	0.01%	0.74%	2.90%	
Florida's 25th District			14.68%						<ul> <li>Democrati</li> </ul>
	45.00%	31.95%		0.16%	3.79%	0.08%	0.89%	3.45%	<ul> <li>Democrati</li> </ul>
Florida's 26th District	73.39%	18.12%	5.65%	0.04%	0.96%	0.02%	0.40%	1.42%	Republicar
Florida's 27th District	73.09%	17.63%	4.92%	0.08%	1.88%	0.03%	0.41%	1.97%	Republicar
Florida's 28th District	73.06%	14.32%	8.68%	0.02%	1.48%	0.03%	0.52%	1.88%	Republicar
Georgia's 2nd District	6.74%	39.05%	48.58%	0.25%	1.20%	0.06%	0.51%	3.60%	Democrati
Georgia's 4th District	9.53%	26.39%	54.33%	0.10%	5.48%	0.00%	0.29%	3.87%	Democrati
Georgia's 5th District	7.74%	34.95%	47.35%	0.08%	4.79%	0.03%	0.66%	4.41%	Democrati
Georgia's 7th District	22.00%	29.75%	30.43%	0.08%	13.30%	0.03%	0.57%	3.83%	Democrati
Georgia's 13th District	11.78%	14.62%	65.02%	0.08%	3.77%	0.12%	0.81%	3.81%	Democrati
ouisiana's 2nd District	7.89%	27.14%	58.06%	0.33%	2.54%	0.02%	0.53%	3.50%	<ul> <li>Democrati</li> </ul>
North Carolina's 1st District	6.75%	47.29%	40.25%	0.60%	0.79%	0.02%	0.37%	3.93%	<ul> <li>Democra</li> </ul>
North Carolina's 12th District	13.89%	40.92%	35.00%	0.15%	6.05%	0.03%	0.26%	3.70%	Democra
Ohio's 11th District	7.96%	41.23%	43.61%	0.04%	2.58%	0.02%	0.58%	3.97%	Democra
Pennsylvania's 2nd District	27.97%	36.02%	21.92%	0.10%	9.85%	0.01%	1.02%	3.11%	Democra
Pennsylvania's 3rd District	6.09%	31.43%	51.54%	0.16%	5.96%	0.05%	0.75%	4.04%	Democra
South Carolina's 6th District	5.08%	42.50%	47.13%	0.32%	1.43%	0.08%	0.51%	2.95%	Democra
nnessee's 9th District	8.09%	24.94%	62.53%	0.03%	1.84%	0.05%	0.29%	2.24%	Democra
Texas' 2nd District	32.82%	45.96%	11.60%	0.10%	4.55%	0.08%	0.60%	4.31%	e Republic
Texas' 5th District	30.07%	46.65%	15.67%	0.21%	3.87%	0.01%	0.53%	2.99%	e Republic
Texas' 6th District	34.03%	43.44%	14.08%	0.10%	4.10%	0.07%		3.55%	e Republic
Texas' 7th District	34.52%	25.63%	17.77%	0.11%	18.24%	0.07%	0.59%	3.07%	Democra
Texas' 8th District	32.52%	45.80%	11.93%	0.17%	5.79%	0.06%	0.31%		Republic
Texas' 9th District	39.73%	12.76%	35.85%	0.08%	8.75%	0.03%	0.49%		Democra
Texas' 11th District	41.95%	40.79%	11.15%	0.15%	1.79%	0.22%	0.50%		e Republic
Texas' 15th District	80.86%	15.60%	1.19%	0.07%	1.15%	0.05%	0.14%		e Republic
Texas' 16th District	82.62%	10.80%	3.29%	0.23%	1.38%	0.15%	0.37%		Democra
Texas' 18th District	46.49%	15.51%	30.24%	0.10%	4.48%	0.02%	0.27%		Democra
Texas' 19th District	40.28%	49.13%	4.97%	0.39%	1.54%	0.03%	0.25%	-	Republic
Texas' 20th District	70.37%	17.24%	5.57%	0.07%	4.05%	0.05%	0.32%		Democra
		38.49%			-		-	-	
Texas' 22nd District	30.38%		10.81%	0.08%	15.19%	0.17%	0.40%		Republic
Texas' 23rd District	65.64%	26.34%	3.15%	0.29%	2.12%	0.04%	0.32%		e Republic
Texas' 27th District	56.21%	35.79%	3.76%	0.18%	1.54%	0.05%	0.15%		e Republic
Texas' 28th District	77.19%	15.63%	4.25%	0.13%	0.85%	0.10%	0.34%	-	Democra
		7000/	15.02%	0.09%	1.90%	0.07%	0.31%	1.05%	Democra
Texas' 29th District Texas' 30th District	73.68%	7.90% 17.64%	37.35%	0.14%	3.73%	0.05%	0.44%		Democra



**Note:** The 2022 American Community Survey demonstrates most Democrats in congressional delegations from the Deep South come from majority minority congressional districts.

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## Navigating the Maze: Redistricting, Gerrymandering, and the Threat to Voting Rights

#### Tamieka Atkins Executive Director, ProGeorgia

In the decade since the landmark Supreme Court case Shelby County v. Holder (2013) dealt a severe blow to voting rights protections, there has been a concerted and insidious effort across the country to use redistricting and gerrymandering to limit the fundamental right to vote for communities of color.

Decades of discriminatory practices, from Jim Crow laws to voter suppression tactics, have sought to marginalize the voices of Black and brown citizens. Those consequences are embedded deeply within the fabric of our democracy. The Brennan Center for Justice found that in areas of the country previously covered by Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act, which Shelby v. Holder dismantled, racial disparities in voting grew exponentially. In a March 2024 report, the Center highlighted that "between 2010 and 2022, the gap between White Americans and Americans of color grew by five percentage points to 18 points" (Morris & Grange, 2024). The report goes on to say that in 2020, 9 million more ballots would have been cast. This points to an astronomical suppression of votes.

In Georgia, we have had to become more vigilant and innovative each year in fighting voter suppression bills introduced and passed by our general assembly. For example, Senate Bill 202, enacted in March 2021, introduced stringent voter identification requirements for absentee ballots, limited the use of ballot drop boxes, and prohibited the provision of food and water to voters waiting in line. The bill also reduced the number of days for requesting absentee ballots and allowed state takeover of local election boards, which sparked wide-spread controversy and legal challenges. Another significant piece of legislation, House Bill 531, sought to limit weekend early voting days, restrict mobile voting units, and reduce early voting hours, but it stalled in the Senate and did not become law. The opportunistic nature of those bills and their impact on rolling back voting rights in our state and across the country is a problem of universal concern that is neither one-sided nor partisan. From progressives to moderates to conservatives, people on all points of the political spectrum are rightfully profoundly concerned by the broken promises of our democracy.

My organization, ProGeorgia, has invested funds, manpower, and resources in fair districting since 2018. From humble roots more than a decade ago, starting with a small circle



of 13 founding organizations, to a cohort of 61 member organizations in 2023, ProGeorgia has become the leading convener of democracy-aligned nonprofits across the state. With footprints in rural, urban, and suburban communities, our partners are focused on every-thing from environmental and reproductive justice to LGBTQ+ rights, civic and democratic engagement for justice-impacted individuals, redistricting, immigrant rights, election administration, and a host of issues in between.

ProGeorgia partners have been instrumental in helping to get 97 percent of Georgia residents registered to vote. Last year, we launched two new workgroups - a Rights Restoration Workgroup, which plans to engage 600+ justice-impacted citizens to reinstate their voting and other rights, and a Youth Engagement Workgroup, which aims to increase civic participation and uplift young people and youth leadership. We are keeping our eyes toward 2030 and have been laying the groundwork to educate voters on how they can maintain and strengthen their democratic power. One key element in this fight was the launch of Georgia Redistricting Alliance (GRA), which has been blazing a trail forward over four years.

Communities of color have always been at the forefront of this struggle, facing the dire repercussions of gerrymandering on top of a host of other voting rights threats and challenges. Part of the work of fighting these issues is the tireless education required to demonstrate to Georgians that gerrymandering is not merely a political maneuver; it is a threat to the core of our democracy—the right to vote.

GRA has been beating the drum that the act of strategically carving out districts allows politicians to manipulate the electoral process and silence our voices. It has also advocated for comprehensive electoral reforms prioritizing fairness, transparency, and equitable representation. Redistricting processes guided by principles that ensure the protection of minority voting rights and the voices of communities of color must be central to the decision-making process.

Today, redistricting stands as a contemporary battleground where the fight for equitable representation continues, and the gerrymandering we are seeing not only undermines the democratic principle of fair representation but poses a direct threat to the voting rights of marginalized communities.

The echoes of historic injustices persist in our electoral system, and it is our responsibility to dismantle the barriers that threaten the voting rights of communities of color. Through education, activism, and advocacy, we can build a more inclusive democracy that truly reflects the rich tapestry of our nation's diversity.

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## The Relief of Automatic Record Clearance for Black Communities

Sheena Meade CEO, The Clean Slate Initiative

Readily available data support what we know — systemic issues within the criminal justice system disproportionately impact Black communities. From being arrested at higher rates to receiving harsher punishments, the legal system today is the result of longstanding inequities stemming from policies and practices that have led to decades of over-arresting and over-incarceration. However, even after the arrest or conviction Black communities carry a disproportionate burden of navigating the post-incarceration impacts.

Today, 70 to 100 million people in America have an arrest or conviction of some kind (The Sentencing Project, n.d.). That is about one in three adults, and nearly half of all Black adults in the U.S. have an arrest or conviction record (The Clean Slate Initiative, 2024). The consequences of having a record reverberate long after satisfaction of judgment and permeate through almost every aspect of an individual's life after serving their sentence. For Black people, a criminal record can have heightened effects on their ability to attain life-sustaining opportunities for themselves and the people who depend on them.

From harmful stigmas to being denied housing, jobs, access to education, and more, individuals seeking to rebuild their lives after an arrest or conviction must often navigate countless barriers — or approximately 44,000 collateral consequences (National Inventory of Justice, 2018). Employment opportunities become scarce as background checks pull individuals out of the running for meaningful employment. Quality housing becomes harder to obtain, as landlords often deny housing based on past convictions. Advancing education or attaining certain occupational licenses becomes difficult as a record makes meeting requirements seemingly impossible. Research shows that 94 percent of employers, 90 percent of landlords (Nelson, 2019), and 72 percent of colleges and universities use background checks to screen out applicants (Stewart & Uggen, 2020). These constant barriers perpetuate a cycle of poverty and inaccessibility that disproportionately impacts Black people, their families, and more broadly, their communities.

The impact of a record on our communities is generational. Black Americans are more likely to live with a record for a multitude of reasons, which means Black children are more likely to have a parent with a record. Data shows that 11 percent of Black children have a parent with a record compared to 1.7 percent of white children and as parents are shut



out from better opportunities, those who depend on them are as well (Vallas et al, 2021). Research also shows that children with parents who have been incarcerated are more likely to become involved in the legal system as well (Vallas et al, 2021). Having a record can have negative consequences that impact the socioeconomic status of families and create cycles of incarceration.

The truth is that the pathway for an individual to change the trajectory of their life is not easily accessible. Even after an individual has served their sentence, met eligibility requirements, and so on, the process to clear their record and create a new start is inundated with hurdles and red tape that block millions of people from doing so. Studies show that even if an individual has earned the right, the record clearance process is so bogged down with bureaucratic measures that less than 10 percent of those eligible to get their record cleared actually complete the process (Prescott & Starr, 2019). Today, more than 30 million people are eligible to get their records cleared (Chien, 2020). That is more than 30 million people who have earned their second chance but are being denied the opportunity to contribute to their families, communities, the economy and so much more that work for everyone's good.

However, there is a solution: It is one that has already been proven to be successful and has already changed countless lives. At The Clean Slate Initiative, we advocate alongside partners across various industries for policies that automatically clear eligible arrest and conviction records across the U.S. — and it is working. So far, Clean Slate laws have been passed and signed into law in 12 states, creating a pathway for more than 14 million people to clear their records fully; and this work has the potential to be a catalyst to counter disparate impacts on Black communities. In the states that have passed Clean Slate legislation, over two million Black adults are now eligible for full record clearance, and over 2.5 million are eligible for full or partial clearance. These policies are vital to making second chances a reality for millions - but we are just getting started.

If we can ensure Clean Slate laws pass in all 50 states, over four million Black adults would be eligible to receive full record clearance, and eight million Black adults with records would be eligible for full or partial record clearance. That means millions of people getting back to work, getting access to quality housing, pursuing educational opportunities, and disrupting a cycle of poverty and recidivism brought on by lack of opportunity.

As we strive to create a more just and equitable society around us, we must address issues that deeply plague our criminal justice system and disproportionately put Black communities at a disadvantage. Clean Slate policies are not just about record clearance. They are about creating pathways for individuals to be defined beyond their mistakes,



contribute wholly to the future of their communities, and dismantle inequity models that further marginalize certain groups.

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## **Project 2025: What Black Women Need to Know**

Gabrielle Gray, Ph.D. Researcher & Strategist, Gray Consulting

Project 2025, spearheaded by the Heritage Foundation and other conservative groups, seeks to fundamentally reshape the federal government, with potential implications that could significantly impact Black women. The policy agenda promotes a new form of federalism that combines a state-centric approach with authoritarianism at the executive level. The anti-movement (anti - Black, regulatory, choice, equity, immigrant, environmental protection, etc.) has been successful in instilling fear in Americans. That fear and threat of attack has been explained by right-wing politicians in the media, in the courtroom and in documents such as the 1776 Commission which presented a nationalist curriculum similar to the governing agenda of Project 2025. Instead of succumbing to the potential threat, it is crucial that those who would be most impacted by the policies proposed - Black women specifically - be educated on what they can do to safeguard their freedom.

Project 2025 presents an agenda intended to undermine civil rights protections. As written, the document proposes policy changes and shifts in federal priorities that would have several negative effects on Black women in the United States. Areas of potential concern include:

Diminished Civil Rights Protections: Project 2025 calls for changes in civil rights enforcement that would undermine racial equality. Such effects would be seen in the prosecution of government agencies, institutions of higher education, corporations and private employers trying to proactively promote DEI policies. This would give space to discrimination and negatively impact many, Black women specifically, from seeking justice in cases of workplace and housing discrimination. In addition, there would be major blows to voting. For instance, the plan calls for criminalizing the voting process.

Reducing Healthcare Access: Project 2025's proposed changes to healthcare policy could significantly reduce access to reproductive health services (i.e., nationwide abortion ban and elimination of access to the abortion pill), maternal care, and overall healthcare equity for Black women. It is undeniable that pervasive racism in the healthcare field is an attributing factor to disparities in birth outcomes, as Black women, regardless of income, education or geographic location, are three to four times more likely to die from pregnancy-related conditions (McLemore & D'Efilippo, 2019). The health outcomes for Black women, such as during childbirth, will worsen under Project 2025. If implemented, the cutting of funding for



essential services, elimination of lower prescription drug costs, and restrictions on access to health coverage (i.e., elimination of Medicare and Medicaid), including abortion services, would disproportionately impact women of color and low-income families (Dehlendorf et al., 2013).

Influencing Judicial Appointments: Project 2025's focus on influencing federal judicial appointments would lead to the appointment of judges with conservative views, even more so than we saw during the Trump Administration. This would potentially undermine legal protections for Black women. This could impact their access to justice and protections on critical issues such as reproductive rights, voting rights, employment discrimination, and broader civil rights, exacerbating existing disparities and limiting their legal recourse in areas where they face significant challenges.

Broaden Economic Disparities: Policy changes under Project 2025 that emphasize deregulation and reduced government intervention could worsen economic inequalities, particularly impacting Black women. With a focus on cutting support for initiatives like job training and small business assistance, and implementing tax cuts that disproportionately benefit White Americans, Black women—already facing significant economic disparities—might experience diminished economic security and fewer opportunities for entrepreneurship. In truth - Black women are lagging economically. According to the Urban Institute, Black women with a college degree earn less than their White counterparts without one, and unlike for White women - marriage or education does not help Black women close the gap (Watson & Biu, 2022). In the current state of our economy, households across the country are already troubled by rising costs and inflation; the proposals given in the plan would only widen economic gaps between White and Black people.

Project 2025's proposed changes to social services and welfare could severely impact Black women by reducing access to critical support systems. With plans to strip away protections related to voting rights, eliminate the Department of Education, and target Black borrowers with debt regulation reversals, this initiative risks exacerbating systemic inequalities. By advocating for cuts and restrictions in social programs—such as healthcare, education, and housing—that disproportionately benefit Black women, Project 2025 could create significant barriers to essential services and support for these communities.

The proposals presented in Project 2025 would essentially rollback the hands of time to an era prior to the civil rights acts. As the document's primary goal is to maintain power in the hands of a small, White power elite, Project 2025 would socially engineer a society similar to post enslavement/Jim Crow of the past. We, as a people, have come too far and we still have a long way to go to reach a level where we are recognized and treated



with the same rights and protections guaranteed in our country's founding documents. It is essential to remain vigilant and proactive in addressing these threats to prevent detrimental outcomes and ensure that the needs and rights of Black women are safeguarded. Black women must stay informed and engage in not only the upcoming election, but beyond to mitigate negative impacts.

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ELACK WOMEN'S ROUNDTABLE

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## Black History is American History: We Will Not Be Erased!

#### **DeJuana L. Thompson** Founder and Chief Believer, Woke Vote

#### "To handicap a student by teaching him that his Black face is a curse and that his struggle to change his condition is hopeless is the worst sort of lynching." - Carter G. Woodson, The Miseducation of the Negro

The attempted erasure of Black history, culture, contribution, struggle, and ancestry constitute violence. And one must ask themselves - what is behind this coordinated attempt to diminish and demoralize Black people?

I have heard it argued that the telling of Black history creates an uncomfortable environment for the descendants of those who perpetuated systems like Jim Crow, slavery, mass incarceration. My concern with this argument against that claim is threefold. First, education is meant to expand, challenge, and provide a critical lens to observe and participate in the world around us. Second, I have yet to see statistical data which prove this point. However, if we are to hold this as true - we should not teach about the American Revolution, the Tea Party, Pearl Harbor, or any other difficult, bloody, complicated, or uncomfortable component of our history. If we do not believe our students have the ability to comprehend hard concepts without internalizing them into self-hatred, hatred of country or community, then we must cease all "uncomfortable" teaching. Third, the hypocrisy of being concerned about the mental state of the white child learning Black history and not the historical impact of trauma or reliving of that same history for the Black child is insidious.

I believe the real concern is not individuals being uncomfortable with this country's record on the treatment of Black Americans and the African Diaspora. Rather, it is the discomfort that comes from having to acknowledge the fact there would be no United States of America without Black Americans. This country's successes and failures are woven into the complicated histories of ALL its people, its policies, and its struggle to balance its ideals.

There is power in accurately and fully telling America's story! The preservation and sharing of our truth are what proves to the world what it means to be "a more perfect union." To run from the truth and attempt to submerge parts of our story to benefit one's own narrative reveals a country that has yet to mature. We must grow up, America!



I am from Birmingham, Alabama - a hero city. A city where four little girls' last breaths breathed possibility into the passing of the Civil Rights Act. The tearing of student flesh and the tiring of feet worn from bus boycotts starved the Jim Crow.

As stated by Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth (1966), "[s]ome men may little note or soon forget what we say here: but the Nation will never forget what we did here together. We were not satisfied with the few scattering cracks in the Segregation wall, and decided to effect a major confrontation with evil." What happened in cities like Birmingham made the world take notice and it demanded that this country live up to its values and its ideals.

Let us be clear - you cannot have it both ways. You cannot applaud the brilliance of Black people while simultaneously attempting to erase our contributions. To erase Black history is to erase American inventions.

No Black history means no Garrett Morgan, inventor of the traffic light. No Black history means no Marie van Brittan Brown, inventor of the home security system. No Black history means no Frederick Jones, inventor of refrigerator food trucks. No Black history means no Dr. Marian Croak, inventor of VoIP. No Black history means no Dr. Gladys West, inventor of GPS technology.

We are in a dangerous era of illogical revisionist and romanticized history where some people want to pick and choose the story written in the history books to fit a narrative not representative of this country's truths. America is beautiful because of its composition, and that is not always a pretty composition. Our history is one marred with violence, filled with rape and fueled by hate! But it is also a history overflowing with resiliency, stocked with hope, and protruding with ingenuity. We must tell the full story, and that full story is Black history as a part of American history.

Every great nation shares its complete history because they understand something we seem to struggle with, and that is - no matter what the history, it is ours. Imagine the healing that could take place if we embraced, explored, and emerged from our history instead of using it to further divide us. The power of collective memory is that it can spur collective action. When we work together, remember what we have accomplished and how we have moved from tragedy to triumph - that is the story of a great nation. A nation which holds itself accountable for its greatest fractures and allows herself to rebuild with truth. Truth endures to generations.

Black history is American history. There is no getting around that.



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## **Black Women Resist!**

By Klaudette Spencer Graduate Student, Clark Atlanta University

Growing up in a small town in Indiana the sacred hands of a Black woman protected me. Those hands oiled my scalp, pressed my hair and my school uniform, turned the pages of a thousand books as I fell asleep against a beating heart, ushered me to sleep on the coldest nights, and prayed for me when I did not ask. My Bigma, as we called her, was no-nonsense. When I thought the world was crumbling beneath my feet, my Bigma would say to my insistent complaints "words do not equate to actions." Michelle Obama shared a similar anecdote recently about her late Mother. She said her mother would say to her similar disdain, "Do something!" Hailing from a long line of powerhouse women, often questioned and undermined for their persistence to "do something about it" we must acknowledge the vast and complex history that illuminates a world where we are mistrusted.

During the 17th and 18th centuries, European Enlightenment emerged and paved the way for blazing racism and sexism. Individuals of African descent, women, and many others were cast as inferior by the evolving science of the time. Race was considered a biological taxonomy, and Black women were put at the bottom of the hierarchy.

In Appropriating the Idioms of Science: The Rejection of Scientific Racism, Stepan and Gilman (1993) center concepts of scientific racism that emerged throughout the western world's transformational period of enlightenment. According to these scholars, "[s]cientific racism... provided a series of lenses through which human variation was constructed, understood, and experienced from the early nineteenth century...if not until the present day" (p. 170-171). Scientific racism attempted to indicate that people of color were not intellectually sufficient, and therefore an inferior class. As this new science developed, a blistering sexism was also being conditioned simultaneously. The Doctrine of Separate Spheres emerged, stating that men and women were different and created to serve different purposes (Rosenberg, 1982). It argued that a woman's place was in the house, and they did not mean Congress. This new branch of science, which was used to undermine the humanity of many people, also led to a brutal colonization across the world.

Sadly, the disproven scientific research of the Enlightenment period is still a pervasive thought in modern times. Just a few weeks ago white nationalist attempted to use an outdated Supreme Court decision stating that enslaved persons were not American citizens in order to argue that Kamala Harris is ineligible to run for President of the United States. It is obvious that the legal question at hand - her right to citizenship reflects the racism rooted



in the founding of our country (Kilander, 2024).

Resistance - "the act of fighting against something" or "refusing to accept something" is known well by Black women. Black women, who are all too familiar with the intersection of sexism and racism, have resisted these complex ongoing ideologies throughout history. We have used our voices, writing, and audacious willful acts in a refusal to accept this rhetoric. When the ground shook beneath our feet, we did not lose balance or falter in our pursuits. We did something about it; we turned our words into actions.

We ran for office - In 1968, the very first Black woman was elected to the United States Congress. Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm was a fierce resister of the brutality of sexism and racism. Although many attempted to deter her, Congresswoman Chisholm advocated for civil rights and social justice, becoming a founding member of the Congressional Black Caucus. And when she saw more changes needed to be made for the betterment of the country she ran for President. Since Chisholm, 33 Black women have been elected to Congress. Despite sentiments of their inferiority, these audacious Black women have acquired enough seniority to chair committees and serve in leadership roles. Similarly, Black women have ascended to the Executive Office and Supreme Court. Each woman after the other willfully resisting the deep- seeded hate that emerged at the same time as progress. They made their voices heard, continued to push the needle forward, and cracked the glass ceiling. They did something about it!

The scientific racism of the past continues to haunt our country. And we must continue to challenge that narrative. We do so when we fight back! Black women are powerful, intelligent, determined, moving, innovative, and audacious resisters. Just as Congresswoman Chisholm ignored the constant badgering of those who demeaned her and deemed her as inferior, we must continue to resist because our lives depend on it.

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## **Somewhere Over the Rainbow...Identity Matters**

**Gwen McKinney** 

#### **Creator & Campaign Director, Unerased Black Women Speak**

In this day of deep racial and cultural divides, an alliance of non-White communities delivers strength in numbers. Individually we are marginalized as "ethnic minorities," but together our expanded ranks transform plural identities into a solidarity bond. It is commonly embraced as People of Color or BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color).

Unity among Indigenous and transplanted people of Africa, Asia and Latin America is certainly a blow against Us vs Them identity politics. But how real is "BIPOC unity"? When does the brilliance of the rainbow become the tyranny of multiculturalism?

Unapologetically committed to the interests of Black women, I am convinced that within the big multiracial tent exist complex and thorny questions about assimilation, multi-racial unity, and anti-Black racism that are rarely addressed. Lines blur between unity and dilution; projecting new narratives and ignoring old unresolved truths; challenging racial inequality and conflating cultural heritage and lived experiences. Despite well-meaning intentions, "People of Color" is not fungible nomenclature. It is often an insidious filter that renders Blackness invisible.

A broad brush to paint the identity of myriad racial groups does not unify but undermines our individual political struggles, reducing this vast collection of humanity to a homogenized stew. It reflects everyone and no one.

Labels are ingrained in the American psyche, and Blackness, whether fused into a rainbow or on its own, invokes implicit and overt contempt. While race may be defined as an artificial construct, Blackness (both in colorism and cultural experience) is a strident marker deeply fused into the racist birth of our nation.

I am a child of the mid-20th Century, a binary world of Black and White. Witness sepia-tone news images of water hoses and dogs, unleashed on people who looked like me by haters who I could never be. The images became a dual construct – blackness reflected through survival and resistance, and whiteness, a bulwark of privilege and oppression.

The era of color TV and proliferating mass media captured the social and political dynamics that would reframe race as technicolor. The explosion of Black liberation, radical feminism



tinged by the grievances, and mass movements of Mexican farmworkers, Indigenous Nations and global immigration created a "third world" in our "first world."

As unifying as People of Color may seem, it is a dismissive shorthand that undermines real identity. At best it is a benignly convenient cover-all, and at worst, an erasure of distinct experiences and realities. Somewhere between struggle and solidarity, multicultural unity shifted into one-size-fits-all advocacy. Whether by intent or accident, the rainbow is a foil that can distort real data, producing inaccurate assessments and flawed policies. We cannot redress injustice without actions that respond appropriately to structural inequality, from Day One rooted in anti-Black racism.

For instance, COVID-19 exacted a disproportionate deadly toll in Black communities. To speak of the victims anecdotally as "People of Color" or even as "Black and Brown" does violence to solutions to stem the death of all people – but disproportionately across the toll of Black lives. More insidious, the obfuscation also explains away the Black death tolls as some genetic or social pathology having nothing to do with the systemic impact of centuries of health disparities and racial inequality.

Similarly, skyrocketing Black maternal deaths (across all socioeconomic strata), infant mortality, and cardiovascular disease are today widely recognized as social determinants in health that disproportionately impact Black people. The unspoken banner: Anti-Black racism kills.

Other social injustices – police abuse, book banning, voter suppression, assaults on diversity and inclusion, reversals of affirmative action – certainly affect Native Americans, Latinos, and Asian Pacific Islanders, but the extent, impact, and push for solutions demand strategies based on each racial and ethnic group.

The first solution to amorphous labeling is easy. Call us who we are. If the reference is to Black Americans, Indigenous or American Indians, Asian Pacific Islanders, South Asians, Arab Americans, Mexicans, Salvadorans or Dominicans, grant the name each identity and narrative deserves. Doing so will consume more time and space in a limited character-driven world. But it beats using the broad brush that colors far-flung constituencies into a nondescript monochrome.

Our individual and collective experiences of oppression can bridge intractable racial divides that have defined this country for centuries. The experiences of Black people, or any group of oppressed people, should not be subverted or erased in the quest for an elusive rainbow. Unity among "nonwhite" people – aka people of color, women of color, Black and Brown, racial minorities, ethnic communities – is an important weapon against structural racism.



Drawing from a shared experience of racialized oppression means locking arms to then travel to the other side of the intractable racial divides that define this country. The possibilities of breaking down barriers across race, ethnicities, and culture have transformative value. But the push to the goalpost must spring from truth more than ideals.



# Affordable Healthcare, Mental & Maternal Health, Safety Net





## Preserving and Protecting the Safety Net: Addressing America's Health Care Disparities and the Impact on Black Women

#### Clayola Brown President, A. Philip Randolph Institute

Successful national health care reform agenda must address access, quality and affordability in a comprehensive approach. The idea of providing health care for all must also recognize and address health disparities that exist among minority populations.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) is helping Medicare which nearly 30 million women now enrolled in Part D (2024). Before the passage of the IRA, in 2020, about 733,000 women enrolled in Medicare Part D and B would have benefited from the IRA's \$35 insulin cap. In 2021, about 2 million women would not have had any out-of-pocket costs for recommended adult vaccines covered by Part D if the IRA had been law (Bosworth et al., 2024). The IRA passage provides cost saving for women who are enrolled in Medicare. About 857,000 women enrollees, who currently do not receive financial assistance, are projected to save \$1,000 or more in 2025. Additional benefits are expected for women from other IRA drug-related provisions.

It is important to highlight health disparities that impact Black children and women to have successful healthcare reform. For example, according to the Children's Defense Fund, Black children in the United States are five times more likely to die from asthma than their White peers (Children's Defense Fund, 2010). An early study conducted in 2009 by the Mount Sinai School of Medicine found that Black women are more likely to have low birth weight babies, a condition that can contribute to infant mortality (cite). A recent study in the February 2021 Journal of Women's Health entitled, Health Equity Among Black Women in the United States indicated that "Black women in the United States have experienced substantial improvements in health during the last century, yet health disparities persist. These health disparities are in large part a reflection of the inequalities experienced by Black women on a host of social and economic measures" (Chinn et al., 2021). That is why comprehensive health care reform must include an effort to give minority patients access to primary care. It will require establishing more primary care facilities in minority communities so that patients in those communities can have health conditions diagnosed and treated early, before they precipitate into more serious conditions.



The good news is that there are several ways to preserve and protect our health safety net, which includes Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security and Affordable Drugs. How? By enforcing legislation that is designed to protect our safety nets. The American Rescue Plan Act and the Inflation Reduction Act are examples of legislation that have been signed to protect Medicare, Medicaid, and improve our current healthcare system. The Inflation Reduction Act, for example, changed how Medicare pays for prescription drugs. In fact, President Biden''s Budget Proposal seeks to expand access to healthcare, lower costs and improve Medicaid home and community-based services. In March 2024, the White House produced a fact sheet that spoke to the President's budget recommendations which outlined the Administration's actions to protect and expand Americans' access to quality, affordable healthcare. The fact sheet pointed out that the Administration continues to build on, strengthen, and protect Medicare, Medicaid, and the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and now more Americans have health insurance than under any other President (White House, 2024).

Every one of us can play a role in ensuring that we are able to preserve and protect OUR Safety Net: Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, and Affordable Drugs. GET OUT AND VOTE IN THIS NOVEMBER 2024 ELECTION---VOTE AS IF YOUR LIFE DEPENDS ON IT—BECAUSE IT DOES!

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## The Impact of Medicaid Unwinding and Reduction of Access to Affordable Healthcare for Black Women & Families

#### **Rev. Shavon Arline-Bradley, MPH, Mdiv** President & CEO, National Council of Negro Women (NCNW)

In 2024, war has been declared against Black women. We are strong willed, educated, and carry the world on our shoulders; we are a force to be reckoned with. This did not just happen in 2024, but since the start of civilization. Because of this, the world wants to make sure we do not have all those things that ensure we are made whole - health, wealth, and dignity.

Everyone knows the saying, "if you have your health, you have everything." I believe this wholeheartedly. Being in good health allows one to live a comfortable life by being able to earn a decent wage to support one's family, while enjoying those extras in life that allow one to live life and not life to live them. While we have safety nets such as Medicare, Medicaid, and the Healthcare Marketplace mandated by the Affordable Care Act, as well as employer health insurance, social and political determinants still impact healthcare. These determinants are based on zip code, education, and employment to name a few; creating an ecosystem that dictates our life cycle. Where you live, work, worship, and play all impact your experience with health in this country. With Medicaid unwinding and the reduction of access to affordable healthcare for Black women and their families, we know that policies continue to be enacted that disregard these very social determinants more times than not. According to KFF, "between 8 million and 24 million people will lose Medicaid coverage during the unwinding of the continuous enrollment provision" (Tolbert & Ammula, 2023). Overall, it is believed that racism is the main factor why healthcare is not affordable and often subpar for Black women and their families as claimed by this very research.

One of the most unprecedented political healthcare discussions we have seen has been about the autonomy and agency of women to make decisions for their bodies. The conversation for Black women is not abortion, but reproductive access, saving Black women's lives in childbirth, and healthcare access. When we see a Black mother not being believed about her pre-labor pains it can result in the death of a child and/or the mother. Black lives are not deemed important due to prejudice, and we cannot afford to be silent.

Healthcare is a billion-dollar industry and along the way we have sacrificed the patient protection approach to the work in exchange for big profits. In this fight, the Black



community has "lost the game" around issues on health disparities and health inequities. How do we make change? By creating opportunities for more Black women at the political table because we have an innate nature to make sure that everyone has a voice. Understand, I wholeheartedly believe with Black women leading the charge, we can get back to addressing this issue. This can be done through advocating for the standardization of the unwinding and re-enrollment process on the state level for Medicaid and partnering with community-based health centers and organizations that understand and provide stellar functionality and patient care. Black women can and will always stand on the side of people, not policies and paperwork. The question is, will our country stand with us?

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## REIMAGING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR BLACK WOMEN AND BLACK GIRLS

**Rev. Dr. Judith Campbell Moore** Founder & CEO, Sisters Saving Ourselves Now/ Pittsburgh-Western PA BWR Affiliate

#### & Minister Tawanda Rodriguez

#### Program Coordinator, Sisters Saving Ourselves Now

Mental health in Black communities is highly influenced by racism, discrimination and structural inequities, as well as trauma and violence. These factors create a different reality for Black people, especially Black women and girls in comparison to the experience of their White counterparts. According to the Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health, Black adults in the United States are more likely than their White counterparts to report persistent symptoms of emotional distress (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.). In general, one in three Black people will receive mental health care over the course of their life (National Alliance on Mental Illness, n.d.). Also, Black adults are less likely to receive guideline-consistent care, are less frequently included in medical research and are more likely to use emergency rooms than primary care facilities.

The level of the mental health crisis that is occurring in Black communities is both alarming and heartbreaking. Prior to the pandemic, there were frequent crises that occurred in Black communities, mostly due to unaddressed and prolonged mental illnesses. Even in the aftermath of the pandemic, Black people, women and girls in particular, lack the mental health care they need. Mental health disparities are stark for Black girls who suffer from higher rates of poverty, birth defects and school arrests. The need for emotional wellness as Black girls navigate through these challenges should be prioritized. According to National Black Women's Justice Institute, between 1991 and 2017, suicide attempts by Black youth increased, while suicide attempts among youth across other race and ethnicities decreased (National Black Women's Justice Institute, 2022). Shockingly, suicide death rates for Black teenage girls increased by 182 percent during this time period.

#### **Mental Health Collaborative**

Correcting the system requires removing a cultural barrier. Clients are more likely to readily identify with someone of their race and gender who understands their cultural norms. Therefore, we propose an action-oriented Mental Health Collaborative to provide access, solutions, and resources to improve the delivery of mental health services to Black Women and girls.



The Collaborative would be composed of mental health professionals, major healthcare providers and insurers, community-based healthcare centers, and a range of healthcare professionals who are committed to servicing the community in ways that are accessible and affordable. This practice of care would take into consideration the many stressors and traumas experienced by this demographic in order to truly address their needs.

In addition to providing mental health services, the Collaborative would provide educational resources on different types of mental illnesses and effective treatments. Specifically, as part of the Collaborative, our Mental Health Ambassador Program will train Black women on how to access services. These resources and training will be helpful to counter misdiagnoses and stigmas about mental health held in the Black community. If we are to expect Black people to be effective advocates for their health and wellbeing, we must give them the tools to do so.

We have already begun the work in Pennsylvania where we have initiated the following training programs: PA Community Health Worker, Peer to Peer Specialist, Mental Health First Aiders and Self-Development courses. Additionally, we seek to disseminate educational resources to medical professionals so they can make internal and external changes to their health care facilities and application of programs concerning the diagnostic treatment of Black women and their families.

#### **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Black Women and Girls**

Studies show astonishingly high levels of trauma exposure for Black girls (Smith Evans, et al., 2014). Approximately one third of the Black young women have witnessed someone being violently assaulted or killed, and nearly half lost someone close to them through violence or sudden death. Nearly 38 percent of girls in this group display signs of PTSD, double the rate of military members returning from Iraq and Afghanistan (Rand, 2023).

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is a talk-therapy that aims to break the cycle of selfreinforcing negative thoughts. With proven results amongst women of color (Williams et al., 2016), CBT helps to reduce rates of depression by focusing on the present, rather than trying to uncover the causes of deep-seated neuroses. We believe implementing CBT in a schoolbased setting will have positive effects for Black school-aged students, especially girls who can face hardship not only in their daily lives but also by the realities of American society.

It is critical that we take a more innovative approach to mental health, especially for Black women and girls. Through a full-circle approach to health and wellness, like the Mental Health



Collaborative and restorative therapy practices, such as CBT, we can begin to provide the type of therapeutic health resources to heal Black women and girls.

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## Dying To Be Mothers: Why We Need to Look At Race to Save Black Lives

Maya Wiley, J.D.

#### President & CEO, The Leadership Conference on Civil & Human Rights

Dr. James Marion Sims, a 19th century surgeon and slave owner, was considered the father of gynecology and even served as the president of the American Medical Association (Holland, 2017). His notoriety earned by dehumanizing experimentation on enslaved Black women, without anesthesia, under the racist assumption that Black people did not feel pain. Nearly 200 years later, the dehumanization and disregard for Black women's pain and well-being that were prevalent in Sims' era continue in subtle and not-so-subtle ways in today's health care practices.

In Brooklyn, NY, a 30-year-old Black woman, Christine Fields, died after giving birth by cesarean section (Goldstein, 2024). Christine Fields bled to death in the hours following the surgery. The surgical team appears to have failed to alert other medical staff to complications after the surgery. Doulas, birth support professionals, often point to ignoring Black women's reports of pain, or failing to take seriously the complications and conditions that point to dangers to health and life that can be addressed, like preeclampsia. An investigation at the same hospital found that an anesthesiologist botched epidurals that led to the death of at least two Black mothers.

April 11-17 was Black Maternal Health Week to raise awareness of this national and preventable shame. What preceded it was North Carolina Rep. Greg Murphy's introduction of a bill to prohibit medical schools teaching the history of racism in obstetrics and gynecology, like that of Dr. James Sims (Ellis, 2024). The bill, disingenuously entitled "Embracing anti-Discrimination, Unbiased Curricula and Advancing Truth in Education" or EDUCATE, is about slapping a gag on the mouths of educators who dare to tell the truth about our history to help inform our health care. This "war on woke" is a war that tries to prevent this nation from solving preventable deaths.

Black women are dying needlessly because we want to be mothers. As the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states, most, more than 80 percent, of pregnancy related deaths are preventable, and as Black women, we are three times more likely to die from pregnancy related causes than White women (2024). In some places the rates are significantly higher. The rates are not only high, but they have also been rising, more than doubling since 2000. In San Francisco, for example, Black women are five out of 10



reported maternal deaths (SF Black Infant Health Program, n.d.). That is half of all deaths. In New York City, Black maternal deaths are nine times that of White women. This is not just a race-neutral poverty problem. Black women die at higher rates despite income levels. The wealthiest Black woman in California, for example, is at a higher risk of maternal mortality than the least wealthy White woman (Winny & Bervell, 2023).

Let us be clear. No pregnant woman should fear death because she wants to have a baby. But there is no question that prevention is not happening for Black women, or we would not see these despicably high rates at all. When the CDC points to "implicit bias" and "structural racism" along with "social determinants of health," it is calling our attention to the fact that we must look at the conditions of Black disparities to address them. In other words, color blindness can be a death sentence. The curricula under attack by proposed legislation seeking to silence medical education to train physicians to understand what they may not understand can literally deny Black women life-saving fair and appropriate health care.

We know how to save Black women's lives (Winny & Bervell, 2023). Expanding Medicaid for higher rates of insurance is critical to accessing prenatal and postpartum care. Paid leave after childbirth is also critical. Half of maternal deaths happen in the first year after childbirth. Allowing time to heal and get healthy matters for Black women. And having access to a provider that shares the patient's racial identity and can provide culturally competent care also matters (Lacy & Fung, 2023). If we ignore that doctors need to be more diverse and better trained to understand the serious health needs of Black women, rather than ignoring their pain, their complaints, and their health care, we will continue to be a rich nation with shocking rates of maternal deaths of Black women.

And let not forget having the right to full access to all the medical interventions available to save our lives. Abortion is medical intervention that, in too many states, is being banned or curtailed even when in a medical emergency (Snipe, 2024). Federal law requires access to emergency health care, and the Supreme Court is considering right now whether that requires emergency abortions or not. Black pregnant women are more likely to need an emergency abortion.

Black women have real power to protect our right to be mothers without risking our lives and demanding that we have control over our bodies and our health care. That power - the power to require that this country and its lawmakers and medical professionals learn from the past and pay attention to us as Black women - is a vote away. When we demand that anyone who wants to serve us agrees to see us, and vote accordingly, we can be authors of our own healthy future.



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## Remembering, Restored and Ready: The Radical Roots and Ongoing Fight for Reproductive Justice!

#### **Krystal Leaphart**

#### Senior Policy Analyst, Reproductive Health Impact: The Collaborative for Equity and Justice

Thirty years ago, Dr. Toni M. Bond Leonard, Reverend Alma Crawford, Evelyn S. Field, Terri James, Bisola Marignay, Cassandra McConnell, Cynthia Newbille, Loretta Ross, Elizabeth Terry, 'Able' Mable Thomas, Winnette P. Willis, and Kim Youngblood came together to coin the Reproductive Justice framework. Reproductive Justice is defined as the right to have a child, the right to not have a child, the right to raise your children in safe and sustainable communities and the right to bodily autonomy (Sister Song, n.d.). This group of Black women, who later referred to themselves as the Women of African Descent for Reproductive Justice, believed it was necessary that reproductive rights and health work take intersectionality into consideration, in every way and at all times.

The Illinois Pro-Choice and Ms. Foundation for Women hosted a conference in hopes of presenting a statement in response to former President Bill Clinton's universal health care plan. This event purposefully happened before the International Conference on Population and Development, which has just reached a vital decision regarding family planning. The framers of Reproductive Justice were critical of the health care plan. They published a statement called "Black Women on Universal Health Care Reform" with 800+ signatures in Roll Call and the Washington Post (Williams, 2019).

Reproductive Justice is rooted in Black Feminism, civil and human rights frameworks. It uniquely declares that it is impossible to discuss the reproductive health and rights of Black women and other women of color without talking about racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, xenophobia and all forms of oppression. The Women of African Descent for Reproductive Justice are an example of the long legacy of Black women that have organized around racialized gendered oppression. Black Women have always understood that the fight for Black maternal health and wellness, reproductive chronic illness detection and treatment, and the right to safe and legal abortion are inherently tied to climate change, access to affordable housing and the health of our democracy overall.

The overturning of Roe vs. Wade makes it clear why the Reproductive Justice movement is not just essential, but necessary. While the Dobbs decision has had an unprecedented



harmful impact on access to abortion and reproductive health, rights and justice overall, the country's stance is clear. Vermont, Michigan, California, Kansas, Kentucky, Montana, and Ohio have had recent ballot initiatives that spoke directly to abortion and reproductive health, rights and justice. And in all seven states the voters voted in favor of strengthening and protecting the right to abortion and other forms of reproductive healthcare. While this may be a surprise for some, most of our nation has been in favor of the tenets of reproductive justice (Pew Research Center, 2024).

Various organizations have done polling to better understand how people are connecting their values with voting. According to KFF, voters across party lines believe that getting an abortion should be a personal decision and should not be regulated by the law (Kearney et. al, 2022). Half of those polled also expressed that they are committed to defending the right to an abortion. Additionally, the organizations under the umbrella of Intersections of Our Lives, which are In Our Own Voice: The National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda, National Asian American Women's Forum and the National Latina Institute for Reproductive Justice, conducted polling to better understand how women of color think about their voice and votes! In a national poll, 86 percent of women of color want politicians to respect a woman's right to their own reproductive health decisions (Intersections in Our Lives, 2019). Also, some of the top issues that are on their minds are access to clean water, health insurance and they want their leaders to do more about racial and ethnic discrimination. This polling combined with what has happened in recent elections proves that reproductive justice is a winning electoral strategy!

As we look forward to the general election, there will be even more opportunities to defend the right to bodily autonomy and other vital reproductive health, rights and justice concerns. According to the Guttmacher Institute, in 2023 there were 2,393 provisions introduced to protect reproductive health and rights overall and 1,098 provisions to restrict those same exact rights (Forouzan & Guarnieri, 2023). And while there seems to be more support for these rights, the reality is about 15 percent of both categories have been enacted, with a small majority in support of reproductive rights, health and justice. With that, opposition to progress is aiming to restrict ballot measures in favor of reproductive justice, which is a direct attack on democracy (Ollstein & Messerly, 2023).

In this election, the nation will decide if it is for reproductive coercion and control or if it is for reproductive equity and justice. Those that believe will continue to fight until reproductive justice is everyone's reality.



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## Growing Minds, Shaping Futures: The Power of Child Care for Black Families in Louisiana

#### **Candace Alfred Weber, PhD**

#### Partnerships Director, Louisiana Policy Institute for Children

Nearly 85 percent of children in Louisiana under the age of four who reside in economically marginalized households lack access to publicly funded high-quality early learning programs, despite research showing that such education puts children on track for greater academic success, high school completion, and improved health and economic outcomes (Louisiana Policy Institute for Children, 2021). This issue is deeply rooted in historical and systemic inequalities that disproportionately affect low-income, Black communities. Childcare, a critical component of early childhood development, remains inaccessible to many Black children in Louisiana, resulting in profound implications for the social, economic, and educational outcomes of these communities.

During the first four years of life, a child's brain undergoes rapid development, forming the neural connections that serve as the foundation for learning, behavior, and health. Research in developmental neuroscience indicates that approximately 90 percent of a child's brain development occurs before the age of five (Center on the Developing Child, 2007). During this critical period, experiences such as nurturing relationships, exposure to language, and early learning opportunities significantly shape the brain's architecture. Positive early experiences, such as responsive caregiving and stimulating environments, promote healthy brain development, leading to better cognitive, social, and emotional skills (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Conversely, negative experiences, such as exposure to stress, trauma, or neglect, can disrupt brain development, resulting in difficulties in learning, behavior, and overall mental health. These early experiences are particularly critical for Black children, who often face systemic barriers that hinder their development.

Poverty is a significant risk factor for disrupted brain development. Children growing up in poverty are more likely to experience stressors such as housing instability, food insecurity, and limited access to healthcare (Yoshikawa, Aber, & Beardslee, 2012). These stressors can lead to what is known as "toxic stress," which occurs when a child experiences prolonged adversity without adequate support. Toxic stress can alter brain architecture, leading to difficulties in areas such as attention, memory, and emotional regulation, all of which are critical for academic success (Shonkoff et al., 2012).



#### **Emotional Regulation and the Brain**

#### Forebrain .....

#### The pre-frontal cortex:

- The thinking part of the brain.
- Controls executive functioning,
- reasoning, problem solving, etc.When regulated, a child's forebrain
- is engaged and ready to learn

#### Midbrain ...

#### The limbic system:

- The feeling part of the brain.
- Where emotions are experienced.
- When engaged, there is less connection with the forebrain. A child will seem emotional, demanding, needy, uncooperative, nervous, etc.

#### Hindbrain

#### The brain stem and amgydala:

- The survival part of the brain.
- Controls fight or flight instinct
- When engaged there is no connection to the forebrain. A child may hit, bite, scream, spit, run away, shut down, etc.

#### Social-emotional development begins at an early age

Early childhood education programs that provide enriching learning experiences and supportive relationships can mitigate the effects of poverty and other adverse experiences (Barnett, 2013). However, systemic inequities often result in Black children attending under-resourced programs that do not provide the same level of support as those available to their white counterparts (Bassok, Latham, & Rorem, 2016).

For many Black families in Louisiana, childcare is not just an educational issue but an economic one as well. The cost of childcare for an infant can exceed \$8,000 per year, which is higher than the average cost of in-state tuition at a public four-year college, imposing a significant financial burden on low-income families. The lack of affordable childcare options forces many parents, particularly mothers, to choose between working and staying home to care for their children, perpetuating cycles of poverty and economic instability. Without sufficient financial support, many Black children are left in lower-quality care settings or informal arrangements, which do not provide the same level of educational and developmental benefits as licensed childcare centers.

Voting is a powerful tool that Black families in Louisiana can use to influence the policies affecting their access to childcare. Elected officials at the local, state, and federal levels make decisions about funding for early childhood education, subsidies for childcare costs, and the regulation of childcare providers. Over the last decade, Louisiana has made significant strides in strengthening its early care and education system, largely due to the growth of coalitions across the state advocating for increased state funding for early care and education. Community mobilization around childcare issues has led to greater accountability for elected officials and more responsive policies that address the specific challenges faced by Black families. By participating in elections, Black families can help ensure that their needs and priorities are represented in the policymaking process.



Ultimately, the availability and quality of early childhood care are pivotal in shaping the future of Black children and families in Louisiana. By addressing the systemic inequities that limit access to these essential services, we can ensure that all children can reach their full potential, both academically and economically. Empowering Black families through informed voting and community advocacy can drive the changes needed to create a more equitable early childhood care system. This is not just an investment in the future of individual children, but in the future of entire communities, helping to break the cycles of poverty and build a stronger, more just society for generations to come.

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## Promote... Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Equality, Economic & Environmental Justice and Opportunity





## **The Evolving State of DEI**

**Dee Marshall** 

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Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) has undergone a significant transformation over the years, particularly since The Diversity Tipping Point, the period beginning May of 2020 when the United States was amid a global reckoning of racism against Black people. Initially, DEI was defined to address surface-level matters related to diverse representation, equitable compensation, and inclusive work environments where all people were welcomed, seen, valued and respected. However, in today's context, DEI has become a politicized umbrella term reference focusing largely on race-based programs, initiatives, and efforts intended to correct years of systemic racism and level the playing field for historically marginalized groups.

DEI in academia was once synonymous with affirmative action, which was overturned in 2023. Similarly, DEI efforts in the realm of minority-owned businesses, such as the Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA) and the 8(a) program, find themselves attached to broader debates and controversies. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are encountering funding challenges, with programs serving Black communities coming under scrutiny. Organization leaders have been advised to remove references to Black people and broaden their target demographics. Despite the absence of explicit laws or bans against DEI in the commercial sector, alarming trends have emerged across various sectors:

• Over 100 anti-DEI bills have been passed in 30 states, indicating a concerted effort to undermine DEI initiatives.

• First Amendment rights are being challenged, particularly regarding discussions and activities related to DEI.

• Under pressure from corporate counsel, corporations are canceling DEI programs and terminating DEI staff, signaling a trend toward precautionary action.

• Government programs like the MBDA are opening to all races, diluting the focus on historically marginalized communities and putting programs like the 8(a) program in limbo.

• Some officials are calling for a cease and desist on DEI efforts, further exacerbating the challenges faced by DEI advocates.



The impact of these actions is profound and far-reaching, affecting various aspects of society:

• Jobs are at risk as DEI initiatives face opposition and funding cuts.

• Psychological safety in the workplace is compromised as DEI discussions become contentious.

• Small businesses, particularly those owned by minorities, are at risk of losing support and opportunities.

• Public-private partnerships and funding for DEI programs are in jeopardy, hindering progress in addressing systemic inequalities.

• The pipeline to jobs for college students from underrepresented backgrounds is threatened, potentially perpetuating cycles of exclusion and marginalization.

From Critical Race Theory to DEI the complex power struggle has unfolded. In June 2023, Republican Attorney Generals from Alabama, Arkansas, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, South Carolina, Tennessee, West Virginia sent a letter to Fortune 100 CEOs to cease and desist, labeling "diversity, equity, and inclusion" illegal. In response, Democrat Attorney Generals from Nevada, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Hawaii, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Washington sent a letter to Corporate CEOs reminding them of their obligation as employers under federal and state law, clarifying intent of the law is to address racial disparity, reduce racial inequities, and expanding opportunity for all.

The EEOC issued a statement affirming, "It remains lawful for employers to implement diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility programs that seek to ensure workers of all backgrounds are afforded equal opportunity in the workplace." The Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) responded to Corporate CEOs, reminding them that they pledged over \$50 billion three years ago for undoing years of oppression in which they have been active participants. Corporations were asked to reaffirm their commitments to DEI and reiterate their dedication to upholding these values in their daily decision-making processes. "We are troubled that some corporations that made pledges in 2020 have taken several steps in the opposite direction. The business case for DEI has never been more evident; research makes clear that corporate DEI efforts improve profitability and performance," said the CBC.

In March of 2024, we met with Senator Schumer, Majority Leader of the United States Senate and Kristen Clarke, Assistant Attorney General of the Department of Justice, to highlight the importance of engaging with public officials to share insights, observations, and the impact of anti-DEI movements. This underscores the collective responsibility of all



branches of government, as well as the role we have as Black women leaders, to advocate for and protect the interests of our community in the face of evolving challenges to DEI.

In navigating the evolving state of DEI, several strategies emerge as potential paths forward:

• It is crucial to tell the story of DEI from a social and cultural context, reclaiming the narrative to counter attempts to gaslight or deny the original purpose and intent of the EEOC and the early years when employment discrimination cases triggered the establishment of DEI.

• Engaging with funders to understand changes and requirements for remaining partners in DEI initiatives is essential. Adapting initiatives to match corporate language found in press releases, annual reports, and Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) reports can help maintain alignment and support.

• Leveraging consumer power, particularly the estimated \$1.7 trillion buying power of Black communities, can influence corporate and government actions in support of DEI.

• Escalating concerns to elected officials and those in power is necessary to hold the opposition accountable and ensure the protection and advancement of DEI initiatives.

In conclusion, the evolving state of DEI reflects broader societal shifts and challenges, requiring adaptive strategies, collective action, and advocacy to ensure progress toward a more inclusive and equitable society. By understanding the dynamics at play, engaging with stakeholders, and advocating for meaningful change, we can navigate and shape the future of DEI in a rapidly changing world.





**DEI: A Call to Action** 

Holli Holiday J.E.D.I Master and DEO, Holliday Advisors

Across the country, efforts to advance equity and inclusion are severely under attack. Particularly at the state level, where conservatives persistently assail these initiatives. From rolling back higher education admissions programs, to limiting information in schools about the history of diverse people, to allowing businesses to restrict who they allow in their store to limiting programs providing access to capital for disadvantaged businesses based on race, the ways in which DEI opponents are using courts are nefarious.

First, let us define the term. Let us begin by acknowledging D.E.I. as an acronym, not a three-letter word. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion identifies three distinct strategic values. The values help us to inform an approach to achieving an aspiration that all people should have the opportunity to achieve their best lives absent unfair treatment and oppressive barriers.

#### Justice: Acknowledging Some Assumptions

The fight for diversity, equity and inclusion assumes that people are aligned on some basic assumptions of fact:

1. People have and continue to experience generations of unfair treatment and conditions based on flawed systems and cultural norms intentionally created to foster unearned advantages for some people.

2. Intentional actions are required to reform flawed systems and reimagine culture to remove barriers to opportunity.

3. Diversity, equity and inclusion is a value-centered strategic approach to breaking down systemic oppressive barriers and advancing fairness.

Accepting these basic assumptions is the cornerstone of justice. Justice is the intentional dismantling of systemic barriers that support oppression in any form. When we acknowledge justice, we are pushed to create opportunities and access, and to be intentional about culture within our workplace. In other words, we must seek to apply equity strategies. By doing so, we recognize important historical and contextual background for all workplace team members, allowing us to implement policy, programs and practices that not only consider our intentions but our impact. Harm has not, and does not, occur in equal mea-



sure. "One size fits all" and "check the box" approaches are outdated. Through equity, we examine our intent and our impact, seek to minimize harm by having more shared outcomes and experiences.

Justice provides us with the construct to recognize that frequently our identities are marginalized and, many times, subject to harm in and out of the workplace. This is a critical piece that many institutions (and some legislatures) would like for us to skip because it forces us to come face-to-face with our humanity and challenges us to do much better. The reality is people have layered complicated identities. Some of these identities (not all but usually more than one) are subject to historical and current harms based solely on these identities inside and outside the workplace. This simple truth impacts workplace culture, and in many cases, job performance.

#### **Diversity Defined**

Diversity is much larger than a race-based construct as conservatives have grossly misinterpreted it. Diversity is the understanding and recognition of people's unique, layered, and evolving identities and ideas. As the world becomes increasingly more diverse, "single" identity approaches to diversity, equity and inclusion have become extinct. Anti-DEI supporters want to cast diversity as a race-based construct (or any single identity). The reality is that it is not. Race is a part of the story, but it exists as only the first chapter in a long book.

#### **Key Laws Which Protect Diversity**

- Equal Pay Act of 1963
- Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964
- Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967
- Rehabilitation Act of 1973
- Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978
- Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990
- Civil Rights Act of 1991
- Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act of 2008
- Pregnant Workers Fairness Act of 2022

In the US, Diversity is largely protected by the Constitution and anti-discrimination laws at every level of government to acknowledge and protect our most marginalized identities and freedom of expression. New federal data show that the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) is cracking down on unlawful workplace practices.



According to a recent report from the EEOC, 143 discrimination or harassment lawsuits were filed in fiscal year 2023. This was more than a 50 percent increase over the filings from fiscal year 2022 (Seyfarth, 2024).

Even though there are chronic violations to these laws, and they are not accepted throughout society, we must continue the fight to uphold these protections and freedoms. Due to the government acknowledging our layered identities and the harm related to them, our identities are no longer denied. Unfortunately, recognizing diversity is not enough on its own.

#### **Equity Defined**

All people experience harm. Sometimes that harm is derived from the oppression experienced based on the diversity of a person. As a result, people have vastly different experiences, outcomes or impacts from each other even though they may share the same space. Some spaces are dangerous for some and not for others based on their identity.

Imagine having an approach that would allow us to offer support to people experiencing the full range of these harms and indignities. Imagine that opportunities are available to all and for those who have experienced past harm, generational harm. Where systemic barriers exist, additional support will be provided to eliminate the harm and allow you to have similar experiences, impact and outcomes as others who are not subjected to these harms. Sounds good, right? That is equity. Equity is the commitment to fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all, by acknowledging that there are historically marginalized, underserved, and underrepresented populations. Equity offers a remedy or approach to repair systems that have harmed and are harming people based on their identities.

#### **Inclusion Defined**

Inclusion pushes us to not only look at special programs or change in attitude to have more use of equity strategies to create better inclusion. It also considers sustainability in our systems, including accessibility and belonging. Inclusion is symbolized by a long-term commitment through systems to continue to evolve workplaces as diversity changes and new equity strategies. Essentially, inclusion is an environment or system where any individual or group feels welcomed, respected, supported, and valued to fully participate or engage.

#### Key Ways Conservatives Use State Laws to Attack Equick and Inclusion

State laws are either silent on equity and inclusion, following the Federal approach or focused on limiting or defunding efforts which address root causes of discrimination (i.e. equity) and improve systems which marginalize protected classes (i.e. inclusion)



- Rolling back broad environmental, social, and governance (ESG) initiatives
- Restricting teachers from teaching broad historical topics in their classrooms
- Defunding DEI programs in higher education
- Prohibiting the use of DEI policies in hiring decisions

#### **Call to Action**

It is time to stop using DEI as a word and start using our grown-up words like justice, equity diversity, inclusion, belonging and accessibility to ensure that we are manifesting a world where we are intentional about remedying harm and eliminating systemic barriers. This may seem aspirational, but by joining people and communities who value diversity, equity and inclusion, the foundation that has been built can continue to expand.

#### Here are three important actions to take:

1. Vote for and donate to candidates who support diversity, equity, and inclusion, especially at the state and local levels.

2. Support businesses, organizations and institutions that embrace diversity, equity, and inclusion. Let them know that the public supports them and do it publicly.

3. Ask questions and encourage your place of work, worship, and service to share their positions on diversity, equity, and inclusion openly. Request regular updates on progress to be more inclusive and equity programs that work.

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## **Access to Higher Education:** The U.S. Supreme Court Decision Against **Affirmative Action's Impact on Access to Higher Education for Black and Other Minority Students**

**Krysta Jones** 

**Co-convener, Black Women's Roundtable Virginia** 

"No one benefits from ignorance. Although formal race linked legal barriers are gone, race still matters to the lived experiences of all Americans in innumerable ways, and today's ruling makes things worse, not better."

#### - Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson

Imagine it was the year 2050 and we had achieved educational equity in the United States, what would that look like and how would we get there? There is no doubt that any educational equity strategy should involve equal access to quality education for students from all backgrounds and focus on an exchange of knowledge and experiences which benefits all students - critical components of effective affirmative action programs.

In June 2023, The Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) ruled that the admissions policies at the University of North Carolina, one of the country's oldest public universities, and Harvard University, the country's oldest private university, violated the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment.

In 1996, I was a proud Florida high school graduate headed to the University of Florida (UF) in Gainesville, FL. Due to costs, an in-state school was my only option. My African American guidance counselor had prioritized ensuring that Black students in our small primarily white school and town had opportunities to excel in our classes and in leadership roles in high school via a local DEI program. She wanted to ensure we understood all our options to have the same experience in college.

At UF I was a part of the STEP-UP program for students of color in math and science fields. STEP-UP was another DEI program which provided the mentoring, enrichment and social support that I desperately needed to navigate a new environment. At the time UF had about 40,000 students and 5 percent (and this number has remained constant)



were African American. As a beneficiary of affirmative action and DEI programs, I received a quality education and had critical experiences which contributed to my success, and I believe I also impacted the UF community.

The SCOTUS decision has contributed to a ripple effect across our institutions. It has emboldened legislatures to roll back programs they were never comfortable with. Today, several universities, including UF, have also eliminated or redirected "DEI" or race-based initiatives that were creating more diverse campus communities which benefit all students.

California provides an example of the potential impact of the SCOTUS affirmative action decision. In 1996, California voters approved Proposition 209, an affirmative action ban at public universities in the state. Before the ban, the University of California at Berkeley and the University of California at Los Angeles were roughly representative of the California high school graduate population who were eligible for enrollment at universities. "A quarter-century after California banned race-based admissions at public universities, school officials say they have not been able to meet their diversity and equity goals — despite more than a half billion dollars spent on outreach and alternative admissions standards" (Bowman, 2023).

Black and Latino students were also less likely to earn graduate degrees or enter lucrative STEM fields. According to economist Zachary Bleemer, for the subsequent 15 or 20 years after graduation, they are earning about 5 percent lower wages than they would have earned if they had access to more selective universities under affirmative action (Bowman, 2023). The ban has acted as a deterrent to prospective Black and Latino students, and Bleemer's study found that high-performing minority students were subsequently discouraged from applying to schools where minority students were underrepresented.

It is reasonable to assume that changes in affirmative action policies will increase admissions at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). The tradition of excellence, quality education and additional support for these institutions is critical. Yet not all Black students will thrive at HBCUs, and we must continue to protect the diversity at all schools and give our students the choice to attend the school which is best for their educational and social growth.

So, how can we reach educational equity by 2050? As a beneficiary of affirmative action in the 1990's, my future career was greatly impacted by my time at UF, now ranked by Forbes as a top 10 "New Ivy" in the United States. While we all define "successful" equity differently, for me it would look like long term professional and personal impacts. That requires opportunities for students to pursue paths which are best for them. That means we cannot be restricted from certain institutions because our presence and success make



others uncomfortable. Another essential component is a sense of inclusion and belonging while achieving one's education. Despite the affirmative action ruling, it is up to us to continue our advocacy for diverse quality opportunities for all students, so we can indeed achieve educational equity by 2050.

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## Implications of The Loss of Affirmative Action in Higher Education

#### **Stephanie Hall**

#### **Doctoral Student, Howard University's School of Education**

The U.S. Supreme Court's decision in Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President and Fellows of Harvard College, which ruled against affirmative action in college admissions, has sent shockwaves throughout the higher education community. As a Black woman working in legislative affairs within higher education, I am deeply concerned about the potential impact of this decision on access to higher education for Black and other minority students.

The decision, handed down on June 24, 2023, marked a significant setback for pursuing diversity and inclusivity in higher education. Affirmative action in college admissions was essentially declared illegal by the Court's decision, which held that it violated the 14th Amendment's equal protection guarantee. Education professionals, civil rights activists, and legislators who have long understood the value of affirmative action in advancing diversity and justice in higher education have widely criticized the decision.

The statistics are stark: according to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2020, only 12.5 percent of African American students, 13.1 percent of Hispanic students, and 14.2 percent of American Indian students attended four-year colleges or universities, compared to 44.6 percent of White students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). The gap is even more pronounced regarding graduate school attendance: in 2020 the same report showed only 5.3 percent of African American students, 6.3 percent of Hispanic students, and 7.2 percent of American Indian students earned advanced degrees, compared to 25.4 percent of White students.

The elimination of affirmative action will only exacerbate these disparities, as colleges and universities will be forced to rely on other factors to promote diversity and inclusion. This is problematic. Research has shown that relying solely on other factors, such as socioeconomic status or extracurricular activities, is ineffective in promoting diversity and inclusion (Maye, 2023).

Moreover, the elimination of affirmative action will disproportionately impact Black and other minority students who have historically been marginalized and excluded from higher education. Systemic obstacles have frequently prevented these students from



enrolling, such as limited access to college counseling services, underfunded K-12 education, and high tuition costs.

The impact of this decision will be felt not just in terms of access to higher education but also in terms of student success and outcomes. Research has shown that students from underrepresented backgrounds who attend colleges and universities that actively pursue diversity and inclusion are more likely to persist in college and graduate at higher rates (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Furthermore, eliminating affirmative action will also have broader implications for society. A more educated and diverse population is better equipped to address our nation's complex challenges, from healthcare to economic development to social justice.

In response to this decision, it is imperative for educators, policymakers, and civil rights advocates to find meaningful solutions that will advance diversity and inclusion in higher education. This may involve revising college admissions processes to emphasize factors not directly tied to race or ethnicity.

Additionally, policymakers must work to address the systemic barriers that prevent Black and other minority students from accessing higher education in the first place. This may involve increasing funding for K-12 education, providing more resources for college counseling and preparation programs, and implementing policies that promote more significant equity and inclusivity in higher education.

Finally, we must recognize the value and importance of affirmative action in promoting diversity and inclusion in higher education. Affirmative action is not a form of reverse discrimination or racial preference. Instead, promoting equity and ensuring that all students have access to the same opportunities is necessary.

In conclusion, the Supreme Court's decision against affirmative action has significant implications for access to higher education for Black and other minority students. The elimination of affirmative action will exacerbate existing disparities and undermine efforts to promote diversity and inclusion in higher education. As educators, policymakers, and civil rights advocates, we must work together to find alternative solutions that promote equity and ensure that all students have the same opportunities.

We must acknowledge the significance of affirmative action in advancing diversity and inclusivity throughout higher education. We must also work to address the systemic barriers that prevent Black and other minority students from accessing higher education in the first



place. By doing so, we can create a more equitable and inclusive society that recognizes the value and potential of all individuals.

Ultimately, it is not just about creating a more diverse student body but a more just society that values equity and recognizes the inherent worth of all individuals. Moving forward from this decision, we must be committed to justice, equality, and fairness for all individuals – regardless of race or ethnicity.

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# Beyond Generational Wealth: Black Women in the U.S. Building Wealth Dynasties

### LaTanya White, Ph.D., M.B.A. CEO & Founder, Concept Creative Group LLC

The largest transfer of wealth in American history is looming ahead, further concentrating economic power into fewer and fewer hands. Unless Black women have the tools to take drastically different measures that will result in wealth equality, the importance of Black communities—especially those in key states throughout the U.S.— will continue to be squeezed into the slimmest margins of the global economy.

Generational wealth is celebrated as an economic game changer as research shows that our high net worth (HNW) and ultra-high-net worth (UHNW) counterparts are not focused merely on transferring financial wealth to the next generation. They are building, transferring, and inheriting wealth dynasties (Collins & Hoxie, 2018).

By academic definition, a family reaches dynastic status after three consecutive generations of control of their wealth and assets (Jaffe & Lane, 2004). These families are known to cultivate five forms of wealth, not just financial wealth. To be sure though, without Financial Wealth, there will never be a dynasty. Black wealth creation through building (Quadrini, 1999) or buying a business, the strategic use of cash-value life insurance, longterm stock investing, or through other proven means is the basis of rewriting Black history and owning our power. What most of our communities understand as generational wealth is the equivalent of only one form of wealth in building Dynastic WealthTM (White, n.d.).

The next most salient form of wealth that Black women must lead our families in creating is Spiritual Wealth. While not necessarily couched in religion, Spiritual Wealth is the idea that the work that Black women are doing—this generative work—is for something greater than ourselves: The future of our families, the improvement of our communities, and the betterment of the Black lived experience.

Through Spiritual Wealth, we understand that there is a greater purpose to be served than merely financial gain. Envisioning Spiritual Wealth requires that the family come together to discuss and document Family Identity, Family Values, and Family Vision for Wealth. This heavy and heart-centered work will be futile unless it is properly packaged, protected, and



passed down. Dynastic families translate these ideas into their family constitutions, which becomes the governing language of their Family Trust reinforced during their annual Family Retreat.

At a Dynastic Wealth<sup>™</sup> Family Retreat, each generation has a designated role. The youngest generation ceremoniously opens the Family Retreat by reading the Family Constitution. This reinforces for that generation from whence they came (King James Version, Hebrews 11.15). This is identity construction. It provides those youngest members of the family (possibly Generation Alpha and Generation Z) a deep sense of belonging that they do not need to seek from social media or popular culture. In the next generation up, Millennials and Generation X family members are likely to lead the family's investment portfolio analysis posing questions like "What did we earn this year? What did we lose and what did we learn?"

The Baby Boomers of the family are most likely going to be reviewing requests for distributions from the family trust, which for many of us first-generation Black wealth creators might take anywhere between 5-10 years to mature. While every member has equal access to the trust funds, equal opportunity is not implied. These fiduciary agents of the family are objectively assessing how the requested funds will be used, how the trust and the family will experience recompense —through quantitative and qualitative returns—and how active the family member has been in contributing to the success of the family overall.

For those of us that are blessed to have four or five living generations in our families, these "great" grandparents are members of the Silent Generation. They were born between 1928 and 1945 and were children of the Great Depression and World War II. This generation will likely be standing aside literally enjoying the fruits of their labor.

Imagine the Wealth of Knowledge coursing through your veins and flowing through the room when we elevate and amplify the rich wisdom and insight from the lived experience of our family members. Knowing where everyone's passion, skills, and abilities creates pathways for the family to invest in Intellectual Wealth. This is where, collectively, the family helps each member to self-actualize through a literal investment in each other. Whether it be a financial or emotional investment, it is a concerted effort to aid others in the family developing themselves and reaching self-mastery in areas that are important to them.

Finally, there is the development of Relational Wealth, where the strength of relationships within one's family and community advances economic mobility. Building Relational Wealth creates social capital, provides entrepreneurial exposure, facilitates leadership development and introduces service and philanthropy—all within the safe and healthy confines of the family. Figure 1 provides a visual model of the evidence-based framework for Building



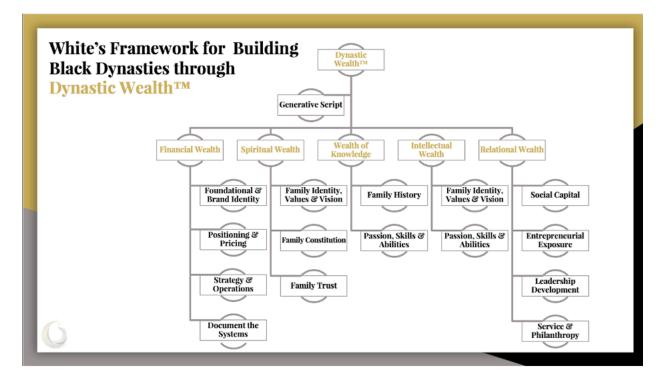


Figure 1. White's framework for building Black dynasties through Dynastic WealthTM (2021).

The model for Dynastic WealthTM cries out to honor Black ancestors, the pain they felt being ripped from their families, and the fear, doubt, and insecurity that often plague Black wealth creators today as vestiges of racialized trauma (Degruy-Leary, 2017). It is contrary to the idea that generational wealth and financial assets are the only thing that Black women, Black families, and Black communities need to focus on to level the economic playing field. The model for Dynastic WealthTM truly gives us the tools for owning our power. From research on the impact of structural racism on the Black entrepreneurial experience (White, 2022), we learn why entrepreneurial equity is essential. Applying the evidence-based framework of Dynastic WealthTM, we know that we will not be erased but we must go beyond generational wealth: It is time that we begin building Black dynasties.

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## **Justice40: The Case for Reparations**

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The Black Women's Roundtable (BWR) is in the forefront of championing justice and equitable public policies. Despite advocacy over generations, Black women continue to face obstacles in their pursuit of equality and reparative justice. Reparations are often framed as the ultimate solution to address historical injustices and ongoing disparities; the reality is far more complex for Black women. It is crucial to recognize the unique challenges faced by Black women.

• Attacks on Inclusion: Black women's efforts to increase inclusion through initiatives like Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs are often met with resistance and labeled as racist or unconstitutional. Despite being the single most marginalized group, Black women encounter opposition when advocating for policies that advance equality of opportunity.

• Erasure of Intersectional Identity: Black women face unique challenges that stem from the intersection of race and gender. By excluding race from criteria for determining disadvantage, policymakers fail to acknowledge the distinct experiences and barriers faced by Black women. This erasure perpetuates the invisibility of Black women's struggles and hinders efforts to address their specific needs.

• Masking Structural Racism: Race-based exclusion obscures the role of systemic racism in perpetuating disadvantage. Black women are disproportionately affected by discriminatory policies and practices in areas such as education, employment, healthcare, and criminal justice. Ignoring race as a factor in determining disadvantage overlooks the structural inequalities that contribute to the marginalization of Black women.

• Neglect of Historical Injustices: Race-neutral approaches ignore the historical injustices and legacies of slavery, segregation, and discrimination that continue to shape the socioeconomic status of Black women. By failing to consider the historical context of systemic oppression, policies and initiatives intended to address disadvantage may fall short in effectively supporting Black women and their communities.

To successfully address the challenges faced by Black women, policymakers must recognize and prioritize the intersection of race and gender in policies and initiatives aimed at promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion.



Black women are disproportionately impacted by environmental degradation and pollution, which have devastating effects on their health and economic well-being. The intersection of race and environmental injustice highlights the urgent need to address the unique challenges faced by Black communities.

With all its promise, Justice 40 is a policy set forth in Biden Executive Order 14008 (Exec. Order No. 14008, 2021). The historic federal investment and commitment to Justice40 presents an unprecedented opportunity to rectify systemic environmental injustices. If Justice40 delivers 40 percent of the investment dollars to disadvantaged communities the policy will play a significant role in addressing environmental injustice by investing in sustainable infrastructure, clean energy initiatives, and community development projects that prioritize the health and well-being of Black women and their families. However, just as President Lincoln's Field Order 15 granting Blacks 40 acres of land was rescinded by Andrew Johnson, Justice 40 can be challenged and undone. While the policy is in place, Black women must work to ensure that it is beneficial to Black America. However, Black women must not depend upon policy as the ultimate solution. Powerful forces cannot begin to fathom Black excellence nor entertain the enormous debt owed to Black women. It is imperative that Black women lead the charge for comprehensive solutions, reaching far beyond the status quo.

The demand for reparations is gaining traction defined by scholars like William Darity Jr. who emphasizes the necessity of direct payments to individuals (Darity, 2023). Darity also acknowledges the importance of including allocations for education and entrepreneurship. Recognizing that Black women constitute a significant majority of Black college degree recipients each year, their role in educating the next generation should be prioritized along with efforts to close achievement gaps affecting Black men.

Education plays a pivotal role in the advancement of Black women, allowing them to transition from low-paying caregiver roles such as cooks, housekeepers, and nannies into more lucrative professional fields. However, despite their educational achievements, individual efforts alone are insufficient to address the deep economic wounds that have constrained generations of Black women and their families.

Reparations must encompass a comprehensive approach that recognizes the multifaceted barriers faced by Black women. Direct payments can provide immediate relief and acknowledge the historical injustices endured by individuals. Investments in education and entrepreneurship are essential for empowering Black women to achieve economic independence and generational wealth.



It is imperative that any reparations framework recognizes and addresses the specific needs and contributions of Black women to achieve meaningful and lasting economic justice. By prioritizing reparations society can begin to address the systemic inequalities that have marginalized Black women for centuries.

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# Advancement of African American Women to Federal Professional Careers

**Dr. Sheila Toppin** 

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This article examines the lack of diversity in the Senior Executive Service (SES) level of the federal government by providing a brief background of the policy establishing the SES, overview of SES diversity initiatives, and a call for action for advancing African American women to federal professional careers.

### Background

Title IV of the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 established the Senior Executive Service (SES) to "…ensure that the executive management of the Government of the United States is responsive to the needs, policies, and goals of the Nation and otherwise is of the highest quality" (OPM, 2024). The total number of people employed at the SES level increased from 6800 in 1998 to more than 8,000 in 2022 (Partnership for Public Service, 2022). The SES level includes most federal government managerial, supervisory, and policy positions classified above General Schedule (GS) grade 15 or equivalent Members of the SES serve in the key positions just below the top Presidential appointees and are utilized to link the Presidential appointees to the federal workforce. The two types of SES positions (Career Reserved & General) are in approximately 75 federal agencies. There are five SES levels with base pay from \$180,000 to \$246,400 (OPM, 2024).

In 2003, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) analyzed the SES and found high turnover rates, a lack of diversity (except for an increase in the number of white women), and racial disparity due to no increase in racial and ethnic minority rates (GAO, 2003). The Senior Executive Diversity Assurance Act of 2007 established the Senior Executive Service Resource Office within the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and productivity of the Senior Executive Service through policy formulation and oversight; to advance the professionalism of the Senior Executive Service; and to ensure that, in seeking to achieve a Senior Executive Service reflective of the Nation's diversity, recruitment is from qualified individuals from appropriate sources (OPM, 2024).

#### **SES Workforce Trends**

Overall, the representation of women in the SES has increased from 20.1 percent of mem-



bers in 1998 to 37.6 percent in 2022; however, this representation lags the total 44 percent female participation in the federal workforce in 2022 (Partnership for Public Service 2022). While the increase in representation for all women is commendable, historically, the federal government has hired and promoted African Americans into SES positions at much lower rates. African Americans comprise 18.7 percent of the federal workforce, but less than 11 percent of the SES positions. More significantly, African American women represent 11.7 percent of the total federal workforce, 9.6 percent of federal managers and 7.3 percent of federal executive leaders (OPM 2022). Additionally, an earlier study by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (2020) found African American women have greater challenges in the federal workforce which result in higher rates of resignations and involuntary separations from federal positions Furthermore, they earn \$12,597 less than other civilian Federal employees and \$9,206 less than all women.

#### **SES Diversity Initiatives**

All federal agencies have a diversity initiative woven into their strategic plan; however, some are more effective implementing their diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) efforts through recruitment of diverse groups of employees, retention, and professional development. Agencies with proactive DEI initiatives are the Coast Guard, Farm Credit Administration, Government Accountability Office, and Intelligence Community (Partnership for Public Service 2019). However, the Senior Executive Service Candidate Development Program (SESCDP) and the Senior Executive Association (SEA) do not have diversity initiatives. Since 2002, the African American Federal Executive Association (AAFEA) has been a significant conduit for African Americans to enter the SES by delivering professional and leadership development programs for SES members and those aspiring to senior levels of government (AAFEA, 2024).

#### **Call for Action**

Public policy established the Senior Executive Service and Senior Executive Service Resource Office within the Office of Personnel Management. Program implementation has been effective in increasing the growth of SES membership; however, the SES Candidate Development Program and Senior Executive Association do not have diversity initiatives to address the lack of African American representation in the SES. African American serving professional associations such the African American Federal Executive Association (AAFEA) have been conduits for access to SES positions. Therefore, it is recommended that HBCUs/minority serving institutions develop proactive partnerships with AAFEA to provide executivelevel professional development for graduate students seeking federal professional careers. Specifically, one of the goals of AAFEA's mission is to "To establish partnerships and alliances with other senior level associations, public and private sector organizations and academia to leverage resources to develop intellectual capital to effectively execute the business of the federal government" (AAFEA, 2024). The AAFEA Board of Directors and associa-



tion members are current or retired SES members and other high-ranking federal executives. Their investment in aspiring African American graduate students through internships, mentorships and executive-level professional development is needed to prepare and advance African American women for federal professional careers.

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# **Congress Must Prioritize an Affordable and Sustainable Path Toward Digital Equity**

### Joycelyn Tate, JD

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High-speed internet service at home is no longer a luxury—it is a necessity. From remote learning, to working from home, or accessing telehealth services, high-speed internet is a vital service that every household needs. But for low-income households, high-speed home internet service is an elusive commodity.

The COVID-19 pandemic laid bare the disparities in home internet access for low-income and marginalized communities as shelter-in-place mandates forced students to attend classes from home, and families to turn to the internet to seek employment opportunities, healthcare, financial and social services, and stay connected to family members and friends. Recognizing this disparity and the importance of home internet access during the pandemic, Congress implemented the Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) Program, to help families and individuals afford internet service during the pandemic (Consumer and Governmental Affairs, 2023). The EBB provided a discount of \$50 per month for internet bills to families and individuals who could not afford high-speed internet access at home. Realizing the success of the EBB, Congress replaced the EBB with the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP).

When the Bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act became law, Congress provided \$14 billion to fund the ACP (Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, 2021). It was a program administered by the Federal Communications Commission that helped to close the gap to affordable internet service for 23 million low-income households by providing a monthly discount of up to \$30 for high-speed home internet service (Universal Service Administrative Co., n.d.). The ACP also provided a discount of up to \$75 per month to households on Tribal lands. Remarkably, the ACP gave millions of low-income households the transformative power of a high-speed home internet connection that opened doors to opportunities for remote education, starting a business, boosting the economy with telework jobs, and more.

Despite its success, the ACP expired in May of this year due to the inaction of Congress to provide additional funding for the program (Consumer and Governmental Affairs, 2024). This left households that relied on this program with, at best, temporary solutions for their critical internet connectivity needs.



The failure to provide additional funding for the ACP reduces the efficacy of two of Congress' billion-dollar investments in broadband buildout and broadband adoption programs. The Broadband Equity and Deployment (BEAD) Program is a \$42 billion investment to expand access to high-speed internet by funding the buildout of broadband infrastructure throughout the nation (Broadband USA, n.d.). The Digital Equity Act (DEA) programs provide a \$2.75 billion investment to establish grant programs aimed to ensure that all people and communities have the skills and capacity needed to reap the full benefits of the digital economy (Broadband USA, n.d.).

The ACP, BEAD and DEA programs should work in tandem to achieve Congress' bipartisan goal of universal broadband deployment and internet adoption throughout the nation. But Congress' failure to provide additional funding for the ACP drastically diminishes the likelihood of success of its investment in the BEAD and DEA programs and thwarts its bipartisan goal of universal broadband adoption for the nation.

While Congress cannot undo the harm that it has caused to households that relied on the ACP, it can rectify the harm by immediately providing short-term funding for the ACP and working toward a sustainable funding solution, such as a reformed Universal Service Fund (Wireline Competition, n.d.). The Universal Service Fund's Lifeline program currently provides a \$9.25 discount on broadband services for broadband phone bundled services but has fewer participating providers and a lower subsidy amount than the ACP (Consumer and Governmental Affairs, August 2024).

It took a pandemic for Congress to recognize and address the broadband affordability crisis in America. The ACP helped low-income households ease the financial burden of making tough choices between paying for groceries and other household necessities or paying for high-speed home internet service. The ACP also helped to level the playing field for low-income households by providing an opportunity to fully participate and compete in the digital economy and society.

Reverting to the pre-pandemic era of offering low-income households and marginalized communities discounted home internet options with lower speeds and providing subsidies that do not adequately cover the cost of high-speed home internet service is unacceptable. Low-income households deserve equitable access to high-speed home internet service to thrive—not just survive with sub-par internet options.

Equitable access to high-speed internet service for low-income households is imperative for America to close the internet access gap and build a viable workforce, economy, and innovative businesses. To achieve the Bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act's



intent of universal access to the internet, Congress must understand that affordable internet access is an essential part to achieving its bipartisan goal of universal service.

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# A New Generation Takes Up the Fight for the Publication of the Equal Rights Amendment

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### Leadership for the Equal Rights Amendment

This is a historical moment for the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). We have the first woman and person of color to serve as the Vice President of the United States, nominated by a major political party for president. The nominee has been vocal about the importance of the ERA to women and girls. As part of a new generation of ERA leaders in Congress, Vice President Harris co-sponsored legislation to remove the time limit on the ERA while serving as a U.S. Senator (S. Res. No. 6, 2020; S. Res. No 15, 2020).

In 2019, during her first presidential campaign, then - Senator Harris stated that passing the Equal Rights Amendment would be one of the first orders of business in her first 100 days as president. She recognized the ERA as an economic justice issue tied to higher wages for women, declaring "When you lift up the economic status of women, you lift up the economic status of children and of families and of neighborhoods and of communities, and all of society benefits" (Angyal. 2019).

In 2023, Representatives Ayanna Pressley (MA) and Cori Bush (MO) took on the constitutional sex equality mantle, launching the first-ever Congressional Caucus for the Equal Rights Amendment. As co-chairs, along with 17 vice chairs and 69 founding members, the Caucus quickly became one of the largest on Capitol Hill (Congressional Caucus on the Equal Rights Amendment, n.d.). The Congressional ERA Caucus seeks to have the Equal Rights Amendment recognized as the 28th Amendment to the Constitution, raise awareness within Congress of the importance of establishing constitutional gender equality as a national priority, and work with a diverse, "multi-generational, multi-racial and inclusive coalition of ERA advocates" and supporters. All the while centering "the people who will benefit the most from gender equality, including women of color, LGBTQ+ people, people seeking abortion care, and other groups whose needs are most likely to be invisible or marginalized" (Congressional Caucus on the Equal Rights Amendment, n.d.).



Representatives Pressley and Bush introduced legislation that called for Congress to affirm ratification of the ERA, remove the question of the time limit (H. Res. No. 25, 2024), and call for immediate publication of the ERA as the 28th Amendment (H. Res. No. 82, 2024). Senators Ben Cardin (MD) (S. Res. No. 4, 2024) and Kirsten Gillibrand (NY) (S. Res. No. 29, 2024) introduced companion resolutions.

### Black Women Moving the ERA Forward at Pivotal Moments

Black women serving in state legislatures forged the way for reaching the 38-state threshold for ratification. Efforts led by Nevada State Senator Pat Spearman in 2017, Illinois Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton (then State House Representative) in 2019, and Virginia State Senator Jennifer Carroll Foy and U.S. Representative Jennifer McClellan (then State Senator) in 2020 were instrumental.

A new, multi-racial/ethnic, intergenerational, and geographically diverse group of organizations came together under the banner of the ERA Coalition. Composed of over 300 partner organizations representing 80 million people, the Coalition, with its vast majority of women leaders, is working to ensure that constitutional gender equality is realized once and for all.

In the decade since the ERA Coalition launched, we have witnessed not only a new generation of leaders emerge in Congress but also a host of organizations at local, state and national levels, including, women's, civil and human rights organizations, unions, faithbased groups and more. While support in Congress has been crucial to moving the ERA forward, we also need the energetic, vibrant and diverse collection of groups supporting the ERA that operates like a movement of movements.

#### What Sets the Equal Rights Amendment Apart: Overcoming Judicial Setbacks

The ERA declares that "equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex." The ERA truly stands for equality for all and protects women, men, and LGBTQ+ persons from discrimination. Women, especially Black women and other women of color face social policy rollbacks that directly affect their economic well-being and healthcare options. The ERA gives Congress increased power to protect against unequal pay, sexual harassment in the workplace, pregnancy discrimination, and gender-based violence against women, girls, and members of the LGBTQ+ community. The ERA provides a new basis for congressional action to protect reproductive healthcare, pre- and post-natal care, and contraceptives.



# BLACK WOMEN'S ROUNDTABLE

## 2024 Black Women's Roundtable Report

Every day without the ERA puts women, girls, and gender non-conforming persons at risk of losing more of their hard-earned freedoms and human rights. Just look at the attacks on access to abortions, contraceptives, and even IVF since the Dobbs decision, which has had the most profound impact on low-income women and women of color. As of April 2024, less than two years after the Dobbs decision, the impact on the Black community has been enormous, with one-half of states severely limiting or eliminating access to abortion – 14 states completely banning abortion, and 11 states restricting abortions to between 6 and 22 weeks of gestation (Hill, et al., 2024). A recent study found that 57 percent of all Black women ages 15-49 live in the 26 states that ban or are likely to ban abortions (Kidd, et al., 2024). The Dobbs decision did not just limit access to abortions; it negatively impacted overall maternal healthcare and increased racial and ethnic health inequities.

The U.S. Supreme Court decision in the case of Loper Bright Enterprise v. Raimondo, Secretary of Commerce, et al., overturned the 40-year decision-making rule that required federal courts to defer to reasonable agency decisions where federal law fails to address a situation or is not clear. This is the second Supreme Court decision in two years to offer a significant setback to women's equality, undermining "Chevron deference", which supports the importance of technical experts in the decision-making process. This decision can be devastating for women's and girls' equality and lethal to women's education, reproductive health, and more (National Women's Law Center, 2017).

The ERA would provide the safeguards to counter these and future judicial setbacks. A new generation of Black women is leading the charge for the ERA to ensure the freedoms and human rights of women and girls are protected.

### Moving Forward in 2024 - What's Next?

You can help the Equal Rights Amendment cross the finish line by taking these steps:

- Contact your members of Congress and tell them to support ERA legislation.
- During the 2024 elections, ask candidates: Do you support the ERA?

• Before voting, learn what your House of Representatives and Senate candidates' positions are on the ERA at electequality.org.

• Help make the ERA Congressional Caucus the largest in the House - ask your Congressperson to join.

• Join ERA Coalition Forward's Equal Voice | Equal Vote Campaign and share "What equality looks like to you? Or "Why are you voting?" Submit your story here: https://fundforwom-ensequality.org/equalvote/

Become an ERA Coalition Partner Organization - visit https://www.eracoalition.org/ take-action/



• Learn more about the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) and other ways you can get involved, by visiting the ERA Coalition website at www.eracoalition.org or contact: Jennifer Tucker at jtucker@eracoalition.org or Bettina Hager at bhager@eracoalition.org.

#### Case Law

Loper Bright Enterprises v. Raimondo, 143 S. Ct. 2429, 216 L. Ed. 2d 414 (2023).

#### **Congressional Resolutions**

S. Res. No. 15 (2020). https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-joint-resolution/15/ amendments?s=1&r=34

S. Res. No 6 (2020). https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-joint-resolution/6

H. Res. No. 25 (2024). https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-joint-resolution/25

H. Res. 82 (2024). https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-joint-resolution/82

S. Res. 4 (2024). https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/senate-joint-resolution/4

S. Res. 29 (2024). https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/senate-joint-resolution/39

#### References

Angyal, C. (2019, February 28). Kamala Harris says it's time to make women full citizens at last. Marie Claire Magazine. https://www.marieclaire.com/politics/a26551159/kamala-har-ris-equal-rights-amendment/

Congressional Caucus for the Equal Rights Amendment (n.d.) About. Retrieved July 2024 from https://bush.house.gov/era/about

Hill, L., Atriga, S., Ranji, U., Gomez, I. & Ndugga, N. (2024, April 23). What Are The Implications of The Dobbs Ruling for Racial Disparities?. KFF. https://www.kff.org/womens-health-policy/issue-brief/what-are-the-implications-of-the-dobbs-ruling-for-racial-disparities/

Kidd, C., Goodman, S., Robbins, K.G., (2024). State Abortion Bans Threaten Nearly 7 Million Black Women, Exacerbate The Existing Black Maternal Mortality Crisis. National Partnership For Women & Families. https://nationalpartnership.org/report/state-abortion-bans-threaten-black-women/

National Women's Law Center. Gorsuch's Views on Chevron Matter for Women and Girls. (March 28, 2017). National Women's Law Center. https://nwlc.org/gorsuchs-views-on-chev-ron-matter-for-women-and-girls/





**Owning Our Power in 2024:** Now is the Time to Participate, Protect, Preserve, Promote!!